

WOMEN AND ABORTION: THE RELIGIOUS CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

Abortion is a passionate issue within the society. This paper discussed different perceptions about abortion, and since it is a medical issue there is discussion on abortion from the health angle, this work also consists of ethical arguments from different scholars., there is evaluation of issues such as the relation of the foetus and the mother, examination of problems of ethical line so as to allow readers to be critically involved. The religious perspectives of this issue is also discussed likewise health implications are well analysed. Conclusions were made and recommendations were suggested.

INTRODUCTION

Abortion comes from the Latin word *aboriri* or *abortus* which means to perish something or to suppress the fruit of the body¹. The term is also defined as the termination of pregnancy by the removal or expulsion from the uterus of a foetus or embryo to viability, abortion also applied to cases in which the child becomes viable but does not pass through delivery. The issue of abortion is a very sensitive one that is discussed at all levels. It has a long and complex history, the issue of abortion is a very sensitive one that is discussed at all levels, it has a long and complex history although in the Bible there is no direct reference of it but despite the quietness on abortion in the Bible religious people always believe that indirectly the procedure is condemn at every point and thus it is always considered a great sin.

Abortion happens in all background and in all races, it cuts across both young and middle age but most cases on decision to have an abortion is almost personal except in few cases which will be mentioned in this work.

According to Callahan who discussed that

women Liberation Movement sees abortion as the most significant liberation of all from the body and from male domination². He opined further that these women though not all believe that the best solution to unwanted pregnancy is abortion. Contrast to this view is that it a disrespect to most defendless Being and that the right to life is subverted. While abortion is frequently rejected for religious and other reasons one of such argument is that medical experts may loose their traditional attitude towards life if request for abortion are always granted³

ABORTION AND ETHICS

Ethics as science of morals is concerned with the development of human beings. To accept or not to accept abortion in the society is a controversial phenomenon, debate on this issue focus on politics and law but behind the debate are more fundamental ethical discussions, there are questions if it is morally right or wrong to terminate a pregnancy before normal childbirth, the right of the mother, legal status of the foetus

and many more. There are pro-abortionist who do not see anything wrong in carrying out the procedure, there are also anti-abortionist who will never see anything good in abortion, while some have chosen to admit a middle stance on the issue, to this group of people there could be range of circumstances in which abortion may be morally right or wrong, but all the same Biblical teachings stand against destruction of lives.

Callahan, a pro-abortionist positioned that should be legally available on request at least to a certain level of pregnancy, to him abortion should be justified under a variety of circumstances, he argued further that the life of the foetus is not sufficient in all cases to override the right of women to choose to have an abortion but that on the contrary the woman should be able to control her procreation as an ingredient to dignity of life⁴.

James Hastings believed that the sole reason for abortion is poverty and that in few cases it is to prevent illicit intercourse but Tertullian is quick to assert that prevention of birth is a step to murder and that it does not matter whether one takes away a life when formed or while forming, to him every fruit exists in its seed⁵.

Sissela Bok an anti-abortionist sees abortion as an extreme interference into the life process and that parents do not have the right or responsibility to interrupt a pregnancy with a clinical intervention or any other means but that it is the responsibility of parents to decide the number of children and the type of life these children will live⁶ To him abortion involves more than one life and that though the woman has the right to control her fate but not a clear cut right to her fate where others share it because the consent of the foetus cannot be obtained so there is conflict in the right of the mother and the

foetus.

Religious leaders fighting against abortion often adopt a style of argument that promotes the view that sexuality is primarily and essentially procreative, in addition to their opposing abortion they wish to achieve two distinct goals as in that God gave life and nobody has the right to take it under the pretence of unwanted pregnancy and that there should be values to lives of individual⁷. However abortion is faced with some ethical problems and according to Judith who asks that what happens to a woman who finds herself pregnant as a result of rape?⁸ She believes that abortion should not be seen as unjust killing but as cessation of continue support or how does one explain the method that prevents implantation of the fertilized egg. She tries to weight these factors on the issue of abortion:

- ❖ The time of the pregnancy.
- ❖ Whether or not the pregnancy was voluntarily undertaken.
- ❖ Health risks
- ❖ Other alternatives to be considered such as the role of the father,
- ❖ Her religious views.

To Judith if these questions are answered, then abortion is the last resort and must remain so as it is the only way out of great dilemma, in as much as abortion is a medical issue it is then appropriate to discuss it from the health angle

AN APPRAISAL FROM HEALTH PERSPECTIVE

Abortion is a medical issue and at the same time psychological, there are clinical procedures as well as problems which may be associated with it. It is one of the most common procedures which are performed yearly, statistics have it that in United State 40% of women end a pregnancy

by abortion due to many reasons, statistics also show that 20-30 million abortions are performed worldwide each year and deaths are recorded due to complications from few procedures⁹. It is at the highest level between ladies within the range of 15-24 years of age. Medically two concepts are very important i.e. viability and quickening, viability varies from one foetus to another.

To determine what type of abortion a woman should have, there must be access to and availability of abortion services and according to Dr Wilke who discussed that the doctor will have to take the medical history of the woman so as to know the type of procedure that is suitable¹⁰. About 70% of abortion takes place before the first 8 weeks while on the average 88% occurring the first trimester i.e. before the 13th week.

TYPES AND METHOD OF ABORTION

Two types of abortion are always available, medical abortion and surgical abortion. Medical abortion which involves taking of drug which is otherwise called abortion pill, in a normal situation it is provided by healthcare professional and consultation will have to be made before arriving at such. The second type of abortion is surgical abortion which is a medical procedure that is always done in the clinic, in this case the level of the pregnancy matters and the following methods are available under surgical abortion. (a) Dilation which involves the insertion of a tube through the cervix into the uterus and gently remove the foetal tissue and empty the uterus. (b) Dilation and Curettage (D&C), this is a procedure that involves a spoon shaped instrument to scrape the uterus lining to remove any tissue. Dilation and Evacuation (D&E) This is very similar to

D&C which involves instrument such as forceps with suction and inserted into the womb¹¹, One clear thing is that complications are associated with abortion if not well managed, approximately 10% of women undergoing abortion suffer immediate complications and the most common complications are, excessive bleeding, infection, cervical injury, perforation of the uterus and retained tissue¹², despite the complications it is believed that surgical abortion is the safest procedure.

RELIGIOUS CHALLENGES

To Christians life is an immediate gift from God which is inherited by nature by everybody, as soon as an embryo is formed and confirmed in the mother's womb then there is life. Christians believe that God gives commands and expect such to be obeyed, in the book of Exodus there is priority for human life (Exodus :20: 13) It is true that God gave man the freewill to do what he wants to do but at the end man will be accountable for every action. In the Bible there is dignity for life, Psalm 127:3 declares that children are gifts from God and such should be protected, the Bible also emphasises that the child in the womb is truly a human child who has a relationship with God (psalm 22:10) Early Christians condemned abortion without distinction because it is seen as gravious sin¹³ and that in the bible the killing of children or child sacrifice is highly condemned through the prophets (2kings 17:17-18).

Evangelical Protestants on their own oppose intentional abortion as immoral while accepting an indirect abortion in which case medical reports show that it is harmful to the woman, though the intention is not to harm the foetus but that as a necessity abortion has to happen. A sizable number of Christians disagree with these

on the level of faith believing that with faith abnormalities can be corrected but how far this can go is unknown because there are lots of children with abnormalities who are now seen as problems to contend with in the society.

To Christians who are really opposed to abortion the foetus is not only a part of the woman but a unique Being and so if significance of life is denied it is a sin, though religious bodies are showing a variety of responses to this issue and according to Gardner if abortion is a human tragedy then should it be seen as a necessary evil? He therefore admits that abortion as a religious issue is better left to private conscience. Orthodox Churches especially Catholic have always maintain strong opposition to legalisation of abortion to them once conceived, the being is recognised as a human because he had human's potentials but few individuals may have entirely different positions. Before 1960 virtually all religious denominations in America opposed the legalization of abortion but later became liberal that abortion can only take place except to save the life of the mother.

According to Sissela religion should try to answer some questions such as what happens if parents find out that the baby they are expecting has a genetic disease or that the baby will be permanently malformed or retarded. What happens in a situation of ectopic pregnancy? Religious groups have taken religious stands on many social issues including war, poverty, abortion, racism etc, sociologically, religion plays a large role in what people feel and think about abortion but the question is that what happens to someone who is not from a religious background, will such a person be guided by the same religious principles?, it now comes to mean that abortion

is not only a religious issue but more of philosophical issue because all social issues are philosophical because the question of reasoning, justice and freedom will always arise.

CONCLUSION

This paper has worked through a sizable number of arguments and has come to the conclusions that medically if the reasons for abortion persist then there would always be abortion especially to save the life of the mother and save the family from embarrassment which may likely be in case a foetus is malformed. Academically the issue of abortion involves a balance argument of what is right or wrong. Religion will always believe that abortion is wrong because it is a failure to love and appreciate innocent being and that arguments should always be evaluated in the light of the fact that an unborn baby is also human but in a situation where a woman aborted and realises it as a sin there is always a source of true forgiveness.

Ethically, there should be compassion for the woman and her unique circumstances irrespective of whatever decision is made, while there is a responsibility to help people to think through what abortion is and the results may be, Gardner opined that individual must have the freedom to make their own decisions. The society must listen to what pro-abortionist debate, may be there could be moral grounds to justify abortion. There must be commitment to offer alternatives to and support for those who decide for or against abortion.

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