

Abortion.

What you need to know:

- **Concepts of sanctity** of life and **quality of life**.
 - Reasons used by religious believers for and against abortion.
 - Differing religious responses to situations when abortion is supported.
 - Application of sacred texts, religious principle and statements by religious authorities to abortion.
-

Concepts of sanctity of life and quality of life:

Most religious arguments about abortion centre on these two ideas:

- When believers talk about the **sanctity of life** they mean that life is precious, a gift from God. Therefore it is sacred (holy) and worthy of respect. It is not up to us to take life away from anyone, it is up to God.
- **Quality of life** is about being able to experience life and communicate with others, being fulfilled and content inside yourself. If a person was being kept alive artificially or was in constant pain, some would describe their quality of life as being poor.

Arguments for abortion:	Arguments against abortion:
It is cruel to bring severely handicapped babies into the world.	The foetus is a child with a soul from the moment of conception.
It is the mother's body, therefore her decision.	Life is sacred, given by God and only God can take it away.
The mother's circumstances should be considered.	The unborn baby has the same human rights as anyone else; it should be protected.

The foetus is not really a person, but the woman is a person.	Every baby is unique - no one can know how valuable that child's life might be.
It is a matter for the individual.	Abortion can be used selfishly - as birth control or for social reasons.

Religious responses to situations when abortion is **supported**:

Apart from the Roman Catholic Church, many other Christians will accept abortion if the baby was going to be born seriously deformed, the mother's life was in danger or if the pregnancy was a result of rape. Baptists, Methodists and Evangelists think it is up to the individual (conscience) to decide based on the Christian principle of love. The rights of the unborn child have to be balanced against the mother's rights, depending on the circumstances (relative morality).

Muslims are opposed to abortion in all cases except where the mother's life is in danger. Most would say that even a handicapped child should not be aborted. Allah has a plan for that individual. Abortion for economic reasons is forbidden.

Religious teaching on abortion:

Christianity:

The Commandment: 'Do not commit murder' (Exodus 20:13).

Special creation of human life: 'So God created human beings, making them to be like himself' (Genesis 1:27).

Sanctity of life.

'I chose you before I gave you life, and before you were born' (Jeremiah 1:5). The belief that God is in the foetus from conception and has a plan for each person.

Roman Catholic: The Didache states; 'You shall not kill by abortion the fruits of the womb and you shall not murder the infant already born'. Pope Paul VI in *Humanae Vitae* (1968) said that abortion was always wrong and that human life was sacred. 'Life must be protected with the utmost care from the moment of

conception: abortion and infanticide are abominable crimes' (*Gaudium et Spes* 51, Second Vatican Council).

The *Church of England* (1984) said that every human life is unique and that the foetus should be respected and protected, but its life is not absolutely paramount. Sometimes abortion is the lesser of two evils.

Islam:

'Do not kill your child for fear of poverty. We shall provide for both them and you. Killing them is a sin' (The Qur'an, surah 17:31). Yet the Qur'an says that the mother should not be treated unfairly because of her child. Yet the Hadith says, 'No severer of womb relationship ties will ever enter paradise'. Some say the foetus is 'ensouled' at 120 days so abortion before that time is not killing a living person.

Practice questions:

1. Explain two circumstances when believers in one religion regard abortion as acceptable.
2. Explain two circumstances when believers in a different religious tradition regard abortion as wrong.
3. Give two options other than abortion that are open to a woman who has an unwanted pregnancy.