**Religious Studies: Ethics 1**

Religion and Medical Ethics

Abortion

Important term: Sanctity of Life: - **The sanctity of life means that humanity is more sacred than the rest of creation. Human life is not holy in the same sense that God is holy. Only God is holy in and of Himself. Human life is only holy in the sense of being “set apart” from all other life created by God.**

(In relation to this, we are ‘set apart’ because God supposedly gave us a soul, this provides us with a more personal connection than animals – see later in cloning)

Bible Quotes Against

* “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, before you were born I set you apart” Jeremiah 1:5
* God has a plan for every human being even before they are born
* Once Christians establish that the foetus is a human being, the sanctity of life teachings all apply:
* “God made man in His image" Genesis 1:26
* If we are a creation of God we should not hurt it and thus abortion is wrong and defies God’s will. Life is a sacred gift from God.
* “Do not kill” Exodus 20:13
* Abortion could be considered murder and thus is a sin according to the Ten Commandments.
* ”You yourselves are God's temple” 1 Corinthians 3:16
* Human life is sacred and should be cared for.

Christian teaching on abortion is complex. An early Christian document, the Didache, condemns it:

* “You shall not kill by abortion the fruit of the womb.”

ROMAN CATHOLICS believe in absolute morality (there are fixed standards by which moral questions are judged, regardless of context) in the context of abortion, life begins at conception and the unborn baby has an irrefutable right to life, even if predicted to be handicapped. Some Roman Catholics become pro-choice if the mother’s life is at risk; this argues the Doctrine of Double effect.

Doctrine of Double Effect :- This doctrine says that if doing something morally good has a morally bad side-effect it's ethically OK to do it providing the bad side-effect wasn't intended.

METHODIST church think abortion is always evil but sometimes thinks it can be the ‘lesser of two evils’

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND believes in relative morality and often adapts view according to each case.

Bible Quotes for Abortion

* “But better off are those who have never been born, who have never seen the injustice that goes on in the world.” Ecclesiastes 4:3
* These can be used to show that abortion is better than being born into a life of suffering, e.g. unwanted babies.
* God made Adam, and then “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.” Genesis 2:7
* This suggests that we are not human until we breathe (i.e. we are born)

Contraception

Christian beliefs about contraception

The various Christian churches have different views on contraception:

The Roman Catholic Church says that the use of contraception is against natural law (which means it is not in keeping with human nature). It is natural that conception may happen with intercourse and therefore this should not be prevented. The only form of contraception permitted is the ‘rhythm method’ where intercourse takes place at a time when the woman is least fertile.

* ‘Be Fruitful and increase in number’ – Genesis 1:28
* God intended us to only use sexual intercourse as a form of having children

Most Protestant churches (eg, the Anglican Church and the Methodist Church) now see the use of contraception within marriage as a responsible way of planning a family. It allows sex to be enjoyed without the fear of an unwanted pregnancy.

Fertility treatment

IVF – In Vitro Fertilisation (in glass): Egg and sperm are brought together in a test-tube. Embryo is put back inside the woman’s body.

AI – Artificial Insemination: Sperm is collected and placed in the woman’s uterus artificially.

AIH – Artificial Insemination (Husband): Artificial Insemination using the husband’s healthy sperm.

AID – Artificial Insemination (Donor) Artificial Insemination using an anonymous donor’s sperm, e.g. if the husband’s sperm are not healthy, or a woman has no partner.

Surrogacy – If a woman cannot have children, her husband’s sperm is used to impregnate another woman – a 3rd party. She gives birth and hands the baby back to the couple.

Christian arguments for IVF and AI

* It brings happiness to people who otherwise would not be able to have children.
* If life comes from God, anything that creates new life must be good.
* It can create loving families.
* God told Adam and Eve to “be fruitful and increased in number”. God wants us to have children.
* AGAPE: most loving action is to offer medical help and to use these God-given gifts of healing.
* Golden Rule – “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” If you were desperate for a child, wouldn’t you want someone to help you?

Christian views against IVF and AI:

Many Christians believe IVF and AI and other forms of fertility treatment are wrong because:

* God chooses whether people have babies or not; if a couple is childless, it may be God’s will.
* God may have chosen these people to devote their lives to other kinds of Christian work.
* It goes against “natural law” to create a child in any way other than through sex.

Roman Catholic Church

IVF and AI - acceptable, only if:

* NO “spare embryos” are created. (Spare Embryos would be destroyed and because they believe there is life from the moment of conception, this would be a sin.)
* NO 3rd parties are used. (ROMAN CATHOLICS believe bringing in a third party is a form of adultery)
* They do not replace sex within a marriage.

AI - acceptable, only if the husband’s sperm is used.

AID - not acceptable. AI using a donor is wrong! It brings a 3rd party (another man) into the marriage.

In an address to Catholic doctors, Pope Pius XII condemned AID because a third person becoming involved in a marriage is like "mechanical adultery": the donor fathers a child (with his sperm) yet he has no responsibility to the child; and a process that isolates the sacred act of creating life from the marriage union is a violation of the marriage union (which alone is the way to create life). However, if the marriage act is preserved, then various clinical techniques designed to help create new life are not to be condemned."

Roman Catholic 1987 Report: “Respect for Human Life and the Dignity of Procreation”

This report gives guidelines for infertility treatment. Main points:

* Loving sexual relationships between husband and wife is the proper place for conceiving children.
* Children are a gift and a blessing from God. Although science makes some things possible, it does not make them right. Research must continue into the causes of infertility, but the morality of these should be carefully considered.
* All humans have the right to life from of conception. Infertility treatments must respect that.

Methodist Church

* Believes it is right for scientists to try to learn more about causes and cures of infertility.
* Accepts using “spare” embryos in medical research, but only up to 14 days after fertilisation.

Church of England

* IVF is acceptable in all its forms, including the donation of eggs and sperm by third parties
* Experimenting on “spare” human embryos is acceptable up to 14 days after fertilisation, because up to 14 days a foetus can split into 2 and form twins. Therefore, it is not really a human life until 14 days.

Euthanasia

The bible also teaches that life is sacred:

* ‘Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.’ - 1 Corinthians 6:19

For this reason Christians believe that it would be wrong to take life:

* ‘you shall not murder.’ - Exodus 20:13

Elsewhere in the Bible it's clear that human beings are not meant to choose when they die:

* For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted. - Ecclesiastes 3:1-4

Responding to suffering

The Roman Catholic Church is opposed to euthanasia as murder. In Evangelium Vitae, Pope John Paul II said that to cause death in this way was 'a grave violation of the law of God'.

However, if large doses of painkillers are used to help ease a person’s suffering, and as a result of these the person ultimately dies, this is understood as ‘double effect’. The intention was not to kill the person, but to alleviate suffering. In the same way the Church does not believe that doctors should use any ‘extraordinary treatment’ to keep people alive against the odds.

The Church of England holds similar views saying that "there are very strong arguments that people should not be kept alive at all costs when they are suffering intolerable pain".

One response from Christianity to the question of euthanasia has been the creation of hospices. These are special places where terminally ill people are cared for and allowed to die with dignity without resorting to euthanasia.

**Non- religious arguments in favour**

* Suicide is legal, so why not help someone who cannot commit suicide themselves,
* If an animal were suffering, we have it put down as it’s the most humane thing to do.
* It is their life they have should have the right to end it if they want to.
* It’s not fair for the relatives to have to watch their loved one dying painfully.

**Non- religious arguments against**

* Drugs can be used for pain control.
* Euthanasia is just a fancy word for murder.
* Doctor’s take an oath to save life, it is wrong to ask them to kill people.
* People can better or medical science might find a cure for them.

Suicide

Christian attitudes to suicide: In the past, the Church taught that suicide was a serious sin; suicides were not allowed a Christian funeral, or buried in holy ground. Survivors were severely punished. They believed it showed a deliberate rejection of God’s gift of life.

Today, the Church has changed. Much more is known about depression, stress, grief and other causes of suicide. Instead of condemning victims, the Church tries to understand, and support the relatives. Most Christians believe it is wrong to commit suicide, but understand why people try it. The right response to suicide is to be loving and forgiving. People should be helped, not condemned.

Christian arguments against suicide

* God chooses when we are born and when we die, not us.
* Pain, loneliness or depression might be for a reason: Christians believe that by suffering they become closer to God, and share in the suffering of Christ. They believe God sometimes allows suffering so we can learn. Suicide is a refusal to learn the things that God is trying to teach.
* Suicide is selfish: it causes much pain to those left behind. They may blame themselves. It is harder to get over the death of a suicide, than someone killed in an accident.
* “You shall not kill”. Suicide is murder of yourself.
* “Don’t you know that you are the temple of God?” 1 Corinthians 3:16. Christians have a responsibility to look after and respect their bodies, because God lives in them.

**The Samaritans**

Christians might support the Samaritans. Started by Christians but open to anyone. Provides confidential emotional support to anyone who needs it, in the hope of preventing suicide. Increases public awareness of suicide and depression, so that people will be more understanding and better able to help others.

The use of animals In medical research

Arguments for animal research

Animal research works because:

* Animal testing has helped to develop vaccines against diseases like rabies, polio, measles, mumps, rubella and TB
* Antibiotics, HIV drugs, insulin and cancer treatments rely on animal tests. Other testing methods aren't advanced enough
* Scientists claim there are no differences in lab animals and humans that cannot be factored into tests
* Operations on animals helped to develop organ transplant and open-heart surgery techniques

**Animal testing is morally right because:**

* Human life has greater intrinsic value than animal life
* Legislation protects all lab animals from cruelty or mistreatment
* Millions of animals are killed for food every year - if anything, medical research is a more worthy death
* Few animals feel any pain as they are killed before they have the chance to suffer

Arguments against animal research

Animal research doesn't work because:

* Animal experiments can be misleading. An animal's response to a drug can be different to a human's
* Successful alternatives include test tube studies on human tissue cultures, statistics and computer models
* The stress that animals endure in labs can affect experiments, making the results meaningless
* Animals are still used to test items like cleaning products, which benefit mankind less than medicines or surgery

Animal testing is morally wrong because:

* Animals have as much right to life as human beings
* Strict controls have not prevented researchers from abusing animals
* Deaths through research are absolutely unnecessary and are morally no different from murder
* When locked up they suffer tremendous stress. Can we know they don't feel pain?
* Christian responses to animal research

Some Christians support animal research because:

* Humans have a unique status because of their relationship with God
* Mankind was "made in God's image" unlike other animal species
* God put mankind in charge of animals to "rule over them"
* Humans have souls, non-human animals don't

Some Christians oppose animal research because:

* All animals are made by God and are intrinsically valuable
* Many experiments are performed for curiosity's sake, or cosmetic purposes
* Not all Christians agree that animals lack a soul
* “A man is worth many sparrows, but not one sparrow can die unnoticed in God's World” Matthew 10:29-31

The Baptist Church

“Most Baptists would be sympathetic to the use of animals in medical research, but less enthusiastic about their use in cosmetic products.” - Rev. Anne Wilkinson-Hayes, 1992

The Methodist Church

“It should be horrifying that millions of animals are killed every year in laboratory experiments, but most of them have been bred for the purpose and the outcome of the experimentation is valuable advance in both human and veterinary medicine."

“Unnecessary or unjustifiable experimentation, as on the effect of cosmetics; the use of numbers of animals in an experiment far in excess of a reasonable control and check number; excessive duplication of experiments in different laboratories; the use of animals when valid results could be secured from tissue cultures; are all to be condemned."

- A Methodist Statement on the Treatment of Animals, 1980

The Society of Friends

“The most controversial area of animal exploitation for Quakers is that of medical experimentation. There are many Quaker doctors and some medical researchers who hold Home Office licences to experiment on live animals the latter would justify their actions by citing the beneficial results which they feel can be achieved for humans and animals through the knowledge gained."