

FAQs ABOUT FAITH & REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

Do all people of faith believe human personhood begins at conception?

The short answer is “no.” Different faith traditions teach and hold different beliefs about when a fetus becomes a human being, a person independent from the one in whose womb it is developing. For example, Judaism believes it is when birth has occurred and a baby, now outside the womb, takes its first breath. Only 38% of Americans view fertilization as the moment when a person starts to exist as a separate human being. Since there are such religious differences, it is important that no single belief is enshrined in our nation’s laws, because it would infringe on the religious liberty of all others. One person’s religion should not be allowed by law to control someone else’s behavior or bodily autonomy. Those who hold religious beliefs that abortion is never acceptable should not be required by law to have an abortion—neither should they have the power to force someone who doesn’t share their beliefs to remain pregnant.

It's also important to note that medical professionals and bioethicists caution that both the beginning and end of life are complicated biological processes that are not defined by a single identifiable moment and are “ill-suited to the political arena.” Scientists that work in this field point out that the concept of life beginning at fertilization is not evidence-based. The American Society for Reproductive Medicine is clear: life does not begin at fertilization. That is *religious* thinking—not scientific thinking. Fertilization is not instantaneous and embryonic development is not precise. The American Medical Association has testified that there is no scientific consensus that the life of a person begins at conception. Others who have declared their opposition include the National Academy of Sciences and the American Public Health Association.

What does the bible say about abortion?

Christian scripture (sometimes called the “New Testament”) says nothing about abortion. Hebrew scripture (sometimes referred to as the “Old Testament”) says very little but does indicate in Exodus (21) that the fetus in a pregnant woman’s womb is not a person—and rabbinic midrash has expanded on that teaching, declaring that life begins at birth when a baby takes its first breath. Those who try to point to the Ten Commandments saying the commandment, “Thou shalt not kill,” should apply with respect to abortion, misunderstand the original Hebrew—the word translated into English as “kill” is actually better translated as “murder” (רצח or *retzach*) and specifically relates to one person killing another person in a situation other than warfare. Since there is not a single verse in the bible that claims a fetus has the same legal or moral status as a fully-realized human being or “person,” the commandment does not apply to abortion. The bible goes to a lot of trouble to be pretty thorough about a dizzying variety of topics and covers a tremendous amount of fairly niche and unusual scenarios. Because it was practiced during biblical times, biblical writers knew about abortion. If these men—who had strong opinions on the morality of milk, mixed fibers, and owls (among other things!)—wanted to forbid abortion, they would have forbidden abortion.

Why not just place babies from unwanted pregnancies for adoption?

[\(based on the article "Adoptees for Choice" by R. P. Dragon\):](#)

The voices of adoptees are largely missing from the conversation where some in society insist that abortion and adoption intersect, but the organization “Adoptees for Choice” asserts that abortion and adoption are *unrelated*. The former is a medical decision regarding whether or not to continue a pregnancy, they argue. The latter is a social and legal decision made on behalf of an autonomous human being who has been born. And yet adoptees are frequently tokenized for anti-abortion agendas, made poster children, happy and grateful survivors of would-be abortions. The pregnant and vulnerable hear, “Don’t abort; you can just give your baby up for adoption.” That word, “just.” As if the trauma of infant/maternal separation that is part of any adoption is nothing. To say “just” before “adoption” is to minimize this enormous trauma and its lifelong ramifications for both adoptee and birth mother. But our society loves a good savior story. Information about this foundational trauma of separation is silenced in a sea of feel-good adoption stories like Little Orphan Annie and images of “forever families,” as if love makes everything well and perfect. As if babies are just blank slates waiting to be written on, easily redistributed, clay in the hands of the potter. Most adoptees, at some point in their lives, have heard, “At least you weren’t aborted. Aren’t you glad your birth mother chose life?” An adoptee born in the

1960s, Patti, looked her priest square in the eyes after he asked her that question and answered, “No...but I’m glad she chose premarital sex!” The idea that adoption is a remedy for abortion is the ghost of a bygone era, one in which premarital sex was seen as the ultimate sin, and those who dared to act on natural sexual impulse were immediately disqualified from loving and raising their own infants. As society has progressed from this archaic belief, the greatest sin is now poverty. Vulnerable pregnant people who live in poverty or lack resources are preyed upon for the ultimate resource: a brand-new baby that the more privileged can call their own. Just give your baby to someone who can give them more things; just give them more opportunities with people who can provide them, and all will be well. Adoption is not a reproductive choice, and adoptees should not be used as living, breathing propaganda in the fight to restrict the bodily autonomy of pregnant people.