



Position Paper #93

Religion and Abortion

Introduction – Religions in Canada

Canada is a secular country but has a vast diversity of religious belief.¹ The three largest religious groups in Canada are Christians (over 22 million; when broken into smaller denominations the most numerous is Catholic at 12 million), No Religious Affiliation (almost 8 million) and Muslim (over 1 million).

Religion and Abortion

When it comes to religion, the approach to abortion varies from vehemently opposed (calling the procedure a “sin” or the equivalent term) to simply suggesting the woman (or transgender person) is “selfish” to have an abortion).

The groups most staunchly opposed to abortion are the Catholic Church, evangelical Protestants, the Eastern Orthodox Church, Oriental Orthodoxy, and Classical Hinduism.

Other religions believe in “personhood” at a specific stage of gestation, or are not strict regarding whether abortion is an “evil” or not:

- Buddhism has no official or preferred argument regarding abortion.
- In Islamic thought, abortion is generally perceived to be permissible before 120 days.
- Orthodox Judaism believes abortion is only necessary to save a woman’s life, but the Jewish Reform, Reconstructionist, and Conservative movements advocate for the right to safe and accessible abortions.
- In other denominations of Christianity, support for abortion varies. The Methodist Church, United Church, and Evangelical Lutherans are more permissive than most.
- Unitarian Universalism strongly supports abortion rights.

¹ Statistics Canada. *2011 National Household Survey: Data tables – Table Directory*.

<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/dp-pd/dt-td/Dir-eng.cfm> Data Table: 99-010-X2011-32.

Of the 32,852,320 who answered, 22,102,745 were Christians (the largest group). The second largest group was No Religious Affiliation at 7,850,605.

Religion and Anti-Choice Movements

The violence of the anti-choice movement in Canada and (especially) the United States always has a religious bent to it, with most terrorists being Catholic. Also, most people in these two countries have experienced one or more of the following: driving by a protest or anti-choice billboard, viewing an anti-choice ad, and/or being exposed to anti-choice rhetoric on their social media or in newspaper articles.

While the American anti-choice movement is much stronger, Canada has its fair share of anti-choice groups. In contrast, other nations do not show the same fervent anger towards abortion, even in countries that do not have the same extent of rights for women and transgender people as Canada does.² There are several ideas for why this is the case³:

- The Catholic Church intervenes and provides support to anti-choice groups in North America because it lost the battle against legal abortion in Europe and hopes that the power of the United States will help keep the battle going in their favour.
- Canada and the US have pockets of less cosmopolitan, highly-religious communities that, due to their insular nature, lash out at those processes they deem to be immoral and threatening to their lifestyle.
- Patriarchy. Katha Pollitt's book *Pro: Reclaiming Abortion Rights*⁴, as well as other feminist texts, argues that the anti-choice movement is less about "protecting babies" than it is about restricting women's agency and maintaining "traditional values" (especially considering the lack of support women who "keep" their babies receive from the government when anti-choice politicians are in control).

For information about Catholicism, see Position Paper #92, [The Catholic Church and Abortion](#).

Conclusion

Even within the same denomination, views on abortion are nuanced and varied, with some followers believing that abortion is a choice, while for others it is morally wrong. Because religion is a belief system that is highly individualized, and is something intangible and subjective, it is inappropriate as a reference when creating or maintaining government policy. Since there are so many religious perspectives on abortion, and Canada is a secular country, we do not incorporate a religious perspective when determining abortion rights in a regulatory sense.

² In **Japan**, abortion is legal but is not covered by medical insurance:

<http://japanhealthinfo.com/abortiontermination-of-pregnancy/>

In **China**, abortion is legal and provided at no cost: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abortion_in_China

In **Germany**, abortion is legal up to 12 weeks: <https://www.angloinfo.com/how-to/germany/healthcare/pregnancy-birth/termination-abortion>

In **France**, abortion is legal up to 12 weeks: <https://www.angloinfo.com/how-to/france/healthcare/pregnancy-birth/termination-abortion>

In **India**, abortion is legal up to 20 weeks: <https://www.angloinfo.com/how-to/india/healthcare/pregnancy-birth/termination-abortion>

³ For a more in-depth look at religion and abortion, see: <http://www.prochoiceactionnetwork-canada.org/prochoicepress/01autumn.shtml#intro>

⁴ Pollitt, Katha. *Pro: Reclaiming Abortion Rights*. New York: Picador. 2014.