

"Abortion and the Sacredness of Life"

An Open Letter To Those Who Would Ban Abortion

AMERICAN JEWISH CONGRESS



Dear Friends,

Did you know that abortion can be a religious requirement? Not just permitted, but *required*?

In some religious traditions, if the fetus endangers the life of the mother, abortion is not a matter of choice; it is mandatory!

The conflict over abortion is not between "secularists" and "religionists," between "moral" people who value life and "immoral" people who do not, but between different moral traditions, different understandings of the sacredness of life.

According to some religious traditions, the **sacredness** of life can be diminished far more by callousness to those already born than to the unborn, however precious their promise.

These religious **traditions** believe that the **sacredness** of life requires in some circumstances that the woman's well-being takes precedence over **that** of the fetus.

Legislation that denies a woman's choice is objectionable not because it limits some abstract notion of unrestrained freedom, but because it may inflict irreparable damage to the human dignity of the woman who is carrying the fetus.

Judaism affirms that nascent life has great value.

But it is not the only value.

In the face of the kind of desperation that drives women to risk their lives and mutilate their bodies rather than carry the fetus to term, no one has the right to say that other conflicting values do not exist.

When faced with such conflicting values, individuals should be able to turn to their own moral traditions or religious faith for guidance.

Government has no business preempting that very personal process, leaving women trapped without a choice.

We do not propose that a particular **religious** view of abortion find expression in legislation. That would be violating someone else's religious freedom. And many people's moral choices regarding abortion are deeply personal, and not determined by any particular religious tradition.

In the face of such great moral and religious diversity, the proper role of government in a free society is to allow different traditions to advocate their respective views, and to leave the decision to the woman, answering to God and to her conscience.

This Open Letter has been drawn from testimony presented by Henry Siegmán, Executive Director of the American Jewish Congress, before the Senate Judiciary Committee on November 5, 1981. A copy of the full text is available upon request.

Contributions to help us publish and distribute this message widely are welcome.

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