Ethiopian Religious Faith Leaders' Views on the Ethics of Abortion, "Hard Cases" and the 2005 Abortion Law

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Research Article

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Abstract

Background Orthodox Christianity and Islam co-existed in Ethiopia for more than a thousand year. Their coexistence is a symbol of tolerance in a multi-ethnic and language diverse country. These two religions strive for the common good of human life and wellbeing, but differ in some of their ethical views. Even though abortion is condemned generally by these two religions, there is a need to know their views when there are 'hard cases' of abortion. We aim to explore the views and stance of religious faith leaders about the ethics of abortion, views on '*hard cases*' (*specific cases were allowed by the law*) of induced abortion and the 2005 abortion law.

Method In-depth interviews were conducted with a total of 12 religious faith leaders (scholars) of which 7 were Christians and 5 were Muslims. Analysis was made using systematic text condensation.

Results -diverse views on "hard cases" of abortion were expressed by faith leaders from these two monotheistic religions. While in general Christians (Megabie Hadith and/or Megabie Biluy) base their argument on the Holy Scriptures/Image Theology and Tradition, Muslims base their argument on the Holy Quran and Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh). 'Abortion' is a closed agenda for faith leaders in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC). That is, they don't want to discuss or debate publicly about this issue with civil society or health care professionals. Islam however welcome dialogue on these special cases 'hard case' referred to in the 2005 abortion law.

Conclusion while a strong, diversified, yet conservative attitude is observed from the EOTC scholars, a relatively moderate but consistent stance is seen from Islamic side. Leaders of both faith traditions, however claim that protection of the embryo must start from the moment of conception.

Introduction

Ethiopia and the two religions

Ethiopia is a land locked country in the east of Africa. The history of Ethiopia dates back to time immemorial. It is the only African country that has never been colonized by foreign powers. Ethiopia is known as a religious country within and outside of its nations with more than 110,000,000 people, roughly about 98% considering themselves religious. The two prevalent religions are Orthodox *Tewahedo* Christianity and Islam. However, there are traditional faith communities as well, that counts more than 4000 in the country. In Addis Ababa alone, there are more than 170 churches and more than 100 mosques. Christianity was introduced to the country in the 4th century and Islam became indigenous after the advent in the 7th century. The two monotheistic religions are unique in their relatively peaceful co-existence in Ethiopia. These two religions strive for the common good of human life and wellbeing, but differ in some of their ethical views.

Ethiopian Orthodox täwahdo Church (EOTC)

EOTC is one of the five oriental orthodox churches. EOTC Christianity is a continuation of Judaism as witnessed in the Old Testament (OT). In 330 AD, during the reign of King Ezana, EOTC became official religion in Ethiopia, hence the first African country embracing Christianity. The Church receives and believes only the first three ecumenical councils of the Church, (council of Nicaea in 325, council of Constantinople in 281 and council of Ephesus in 431). In 1959, the Church (EOTC) became autonomous.

The traditional school system of the Church has three divisions: 1. Nebab bet (house of reading), 2. Qidasse Bet and 3. Higher schools namely: a) Zema Bet (the music school), b) Qene Bet -about wax and gold and c) Metshaf Bet. i.e school of commentaries composed of Beluy (OT) the 46 books, Haddis (NT- the 35 books), Liqawent (writings of Church Fathers) and Menekosat, on monastic literatures [1].

About 500,000 ordained men/clergy serve the church of Ethiopia. In a research study that constitute among Ethiopian Orthodox Christians and compared to Central and Eastern Europe 83% of replied abortion is morally wrong [2]. To mention one site where the Traditional teaching of the EOTC to embryologic passages,

"O you who let the infant proceed from the loins of man and send it to the womb of woman and wrap it with a very thin covering, and congeal it through your wisdom while it is water, and do breathe up on it the Spirit of life, and on the fortieth day you do predestinate it either for riches or poverty justification or destruction..." Anaphora of St Athanasius pp251[3].

A religion and development theory have been separated for many years. A religion that has suffered a long marginalization from developmental theories, now, Since that fall of 21 century, got started to appear in developmental theory and academic work [4].

The ethics of abortion

EOTC's stance on abortion can be understood from theocentric view, then its stand will be clear. One can hardly find scientific religious articles about abortion done in Ethiopia. Nevertheless, there are commandments that prohibits termination of pregnancy, in the old testament (OT) and new testament (NT) and in the teachings of the Apostles. In 150 AD, Didache mentioned "The second commandment of the teaching: You shall not murder /kill (Exo 20:13). ...You shall not use potions. You shall not procure [an] abortion, nor destroy a newborn child" (Didache 2:1)

From contemporary narratives and discourse, one can find this-"...relating abortion to the economy of God, God's purpose and concept of Genesis- utilizing, promoting, providing, supporting or condoning abortion is against the normative teachings of the Church " [5].

The scripture is about preserving life from or before conception (eg. Jer 1:5 ,when God chooses), during conception or gestational life (eg. Isa. 49:5, God's separation) and after delivery (after birth): (eg. The separation or numbering of Matthias with the eleven Apostles). The Church fathers thought in different time periods about the sinful nature of practicing abortion. "Abortion is killing human life that is under God's care, design, and providence." Clement (St.) and also penance practiced upon the transgression of

either or one or more of the ten commandments. Eg., besides in EOTC, the *The Fiteha Negest (Law of Kings)* binding book that is used only by Orthodox Christians states-*"If a woman conceives and wants to abort the unborn child in her womb, she shall be beaten and exiled."* - Chapter XLVIII, Corporal and Spiritual Punishment for Fornication; VII- 72. Therefore ,protecting life from the beginning of conception is a norm in EOTC.

Islam

Islam is also unique in Ethiopia since its advent in the country in the 7th century. Islam considers the Holy Quran the authentic and all-inclusive word of God. Muslims are subject to observe and fulfil the five pillars of Islam. These are- Profession of Faith (shahada), Prayer (salat), Alms (zakat), Fasting (sawm) and Pilgrimage (hajj.) Islamic precepts are based on four basic sources in descending order: The Qur'an, the "Sunna," consensus of the scholars "Jima" and argument by analogy "Giyas" and concerning abortion, their reason is mostly comprised of three major ethical concepts: the legal status of the fetus, respect for life ,and the right not to be born [6]. They also have to abide by Sharia and Islamic Jurisprudence.

Ethiopia is also the ancient country that welcomed the first Muslim migrants who were ordered and sent by the Prophet Mohammed from Mecca, where he ascertaining or re assuring them, a '... righteous king would give them protection' (in Ethiopia)[7].

The first Mosque in Ethiopia, the Al-Nejashi mosque, is known to be the first mosque in African. Shiite and the Sunni Muslims are the two sects of Islam. Roughly 68% of Ethiopian Muslims are Sunni.

Islam in general strives to comply with five guiding principles: (1.) Protect faith i.e. religious existence

(2.) Protect mental health /mind (intellect) (3.) Protect human life i.e the soul, (4.)Protect human dignity, protect human reproduction or genealogy and (5.)Protect or maintain the economy or property of the believers.

In the hadith one reads," the prophet of God told us- and he is the one who speaks the truth and evokes belief.-"each of you is gathered in his mother's womb for forty days, then (he is) a clot of blood for the same period ,then he is a clump of flesh for the same period...then the spirit is breathed in to it...and also to the sanctity and judgment of human life one reads" whosoever has spared the life of a soul, it is as though he has spared the life of all people. Whosoever has killed a soul, it is as though he has murdered all mankind." Qur'an 5:32. A number of passages in the Holy Quran justified protecting life in general principle. Look at the following ;"..... And do not kill the soul which God has forbidden except for the requirements of justice....." [Glorious Qur'an, Al- An'am 8: 151].

"... do not Kill your children for fear of want: We shall provide sustenance for them as well as for you. Verily the killing of them is a great sin." [Glorious Qur'an, Al- Esraa' 15: 31].

“No soul should be compelled beyond capacity, neither the mother made to suffer for the child nor the father for his offspring...” [Glorious Qur’an, Al-Baqara 2:233]

“God does not burden a soul beyond capacity”. [Glorious Qur’an, Al-Baqara 3:286].

In a study, conducted by Wada, the tendency of the religious sects or groups to oppose and mitigate the practice of abortion and the secular liberalization of the law and its necessity was addressed.[8]

Normative teaching of EOTC on life and abortion

Christianity asks in the beginning, what is man (what is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him? Ps. 8:4). Every embryo has his own God. Embryos /fetuses are recognized by Holy Bible eg. Gen 25:22 and Luk. 1:41. ie they respond to internal and external stimuli. what look like the theology of body? What is his nature? What is his relation or union with God? What is his ultimate purpose of existence in this world? Christianity entertains human being as whole, not only as a corporeal being but also as a spiritual being, because, God is a Spirit. Man is spirit, soul and body, tripartite perfectly united with Him. 1Thess 5:23 reads “May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Beside man is the image of God. One can read in Genesis “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him.” (Gen 1:26,27). As a corporeal mortal being he will die and as a spiritual creation he will raise again as an immortal being, because he has become a spirit like Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:27). So, Orthodox Christianity is not anthropocentric in its view, rather it is Theocentric.

Bioethical issues are mainly addressed by inter disciplinary approaches of theology, science, philosophy (ethics) and health policy (politics).

While the Image and likeness doctrine or called Image Theology signifies the origin and nature of human being. The concept of Theosis or Divinization principle signifies the ultimate destiny of a baptized faithful Christian. The science of embryology and fetology will concern and study the scientific, experimental and molecular level of its entity. While philosophy will integrate and give textual meanings, social interaction etc to its entity. Finally health policy will document and guide the general frameworks that has to be addressed.

While the Roman Catholic Church has formed their own bioethical agenda and willingly faced bioethical challenges with its documents inspiring by the Gospel, the Orthodox Churches seem in the way of preparation, mostly silenced in academic world, slowly developing about life and death (euthanasia), genetic engineering, stem cell research, cloning etc. for example the Greek Orthodox has its own Bioethical Commission within its Holy Synod and bioethical issues have been discussed several times by Christodoulos, the archbishop of Athens. Bioethical writings were also present in Orthodox churches under Communism... the Russian Orthodox Church made a regulation titled The Basic Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church [9].

The 2005 abortion law

The Ethiopian abortion law was liberalized in 2005. Now abortion is legally allowed when the fetus has deformity, when she is mentally ill, when the life of the woman is endangered, after rape or incest and when she is underage. These criteria are termed "hard cases" in this article for simplicity.

Secular Constitution

Post modernism denies the existence of God, absolute truth, absolute moral standards and universal ethics. The enlightenment idea of Theology shifted in a way that "in matters of intellectual inquiry, and believed that truth could be attained only through reason, observation, and experiment and theology began to be treated as an academic science. The trend was therefore to divorce ethics from Theology. This was a result of modern western concept of Theology and spirituality. This again resulted that everyone does what is right in his own eyes (cf. Judg 21:25). And the responsibility for educating Theologians or Pastors became the responsibility of the college rather than the church." [10]

The secular world is far from the truth of the Word of God. It is alienated from systematic theology of Orthodoxy among others that one could grasp foundations of Christian Ethics, for his moral standard, decision making process and manner of living. [10]

When we come to Ethiopia, in 1974 the military regime known as the Derge, overthrown the imperial rule for the last time and established a communist regime, communism. The country becomes secular in principle. Church and state are separated. This was a time where no recognition of religion was observed, due to the ideology of communism. The Church was considered backward and uncivilized. Though known legally on paper, both Orthodox Christianity and Islam was marginalized. This military dictator regime ruled the country for 17 years and was overthrown by Ethiopian people revolutionary democratic Front or Tigrean People Liberation Front (EPRDF/TPLF) in 1991. EPRDF explicitly stated in the constitution article 11, that state and church are separated, a state doesn't interfere in religious matter and vice versa. One can say religious freedom has been established again. The models and ideals of searching for common ground and, in the sense of ethnic federalism, patterns of trans-regional, trans-ethnic and trans-religious co-operation are de-emphasized. [7]

Currently Ethiopia is a secular state that follows ethnic federalism. Secularists identify 'religion' and separate it from the domains of the state, the economy and science. There are two types of secularism- passive and assertive.

Both the committee regime known as *Derg* and the current EPRDF came to power by armed forces. Even though, there are more than 135 political parties in the country, most of them are unknown to the general public .

The Church of Ethiopia oppose the liberalization of abortion law officially from the outset.

The main premises made by the EOTC in opposition to the liberalization of abortion was:

1. In our country [Ethiopia], about [claim on] termination of pregnancy didn't found from [since] the time of *Glory of Kings*,
2. The non- exercised or dropped one [cancelled out,] and on the [later] ratified penal code of the 1949EC-1957GC., it is stated, conception cleansing [termination of pregnancy] is forbidden. on this law, same article 528-536, the whole list found,
3. In the aforementioned penal code, the law proclaimed had confirmed, on No. 529, that conception cleansing had been prohibited.

The study presented by [Church] scholars council :

As [subject] of conception, [because] God wills His human race to multiply [perpetuate] on earth,[so that], It is a [good] *blessing* found on the foundation of the Word[Scripture] where He[God] said "be multiply, and blessed them".

Hence, a conception [conceived human being] though, not yet become visible [of necked eye] and be born, he is a [live] creation, given life by God [Holy Spirit]. "from my mother's womb, you are my God" Ps 20:10. As it is said, " from the [beginning of] womb I relied up on you, from the belly [lion] of my mother you are my refugee(God?)' 'Ps (70):61,71:5. So, a conceived [human] being has [endowed] protection [sustenance] and providence from God. According to God's timely will, he[the unborn child] is [someone], subjected [endowed] for future worldly or spiritual ministry [destiny, fortune] that is fore seen, granted [identity] recognition by [Omniscient] God and [authoritatively] the[inalienable] right to life. Jer 1:5, Prov. 13:7

Accordingly, the study of EOTC church scholar indicated that taking of one life to save the other one,[on other expense], *won't get* [be] supported from the canon of the [Ethiopian] Church.

Based on the aforementioned Word of God and proclaimed canon of the Church, terminating of the conceived being of a pregnant mother's conception [induced abortion] and taking of the life of a living creature, and [secularly] granting legal permission to [respective] health professionals to practice a criminal act - '*legally*', is not appropriate according to [our] religion and [Orthodox Tewahedo] Christian ethics. Therefore, the Church's quorum council decided that the Church does not agree up on it, [rather] she opposes.

The revised abortion law was set in an anti-abortion sentiment and opposition from prolife, and religious sects was vigorous. In contrary the secular approach in practicing induce abortion was rather made in silence in Ethiopia. However the silence strategy might have prevented and believed the law being disseminated to larger population. And that might lead to confusion about eligibility to legal and safe abortion service.[11]

Orthodox Tewahido Reasoning - Image Theology

"Then God said, «Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness;... So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1.26-27).

According to the bible, man was created in the image of God. The term “the image” is strictly and solely confined to the Son of God. And it points to the ontological abilities to accomplish the communion with God, whom man received at creation. This condition sets him apart from the rest of creation. (Gen1.26) God’s image is an ontological gift, -an ontological reality permanently inscribed in man’s very nature,- an inalienable attribute and everlasting characteristic of human nature. By the 40th day of post-conception the image of person will be imprinted on the embryo, like a photo process (the image and creation came into being at the same moment) .

“It is not only the soul that possesses the image, but also the body. The human being cannot exist outside the image of God. Man sees in himself God’s “fingerprints” and feels the warmth of God’s “mouth”. The image is the theological principle that keeps alive in man his longing after God. There is no distinction between the image and the person, because the person is the image”.[12]

, Orthodox Christians defend the embryo by putting the argument follows

1. Man (person) is created in the *image and likeness* of God
2. Human life begins from conception *biologically and spiritually*
3. No one has an *authority* to take the live of the innocent (God’s creature)
4. Killing *God’s gift* that is innocent is morally wrong,

Therefore, abortion is wrong and condemned because it is grave sin.

The Orthodox Christian faith leaders follow a closed door policy on the matter of induced abortion. To the search of our findings, there is no open discussion, seminars, reflection and guidance with secular health care workers or in civic society at large.

The early Christian tradition reject abortion without distinction as to stage of development of the embryo. And treated abortion as homicide. it is “not... possible to style the unformed embryo a human being, but only a potential one” he also addressed that...the unborn child possesses a spiritual soul from conception.” Gregory of Nyssa

For biologists, scientific discoveries in the 17th century conception marked the beginning of a new living being.

In the thirteenth century, the doctrine of “delayed ensoulment” became prevalent among Western Christians not only because of the Septuagint but also through the direct influence of the biological works of Aristotle...Since the seventeenth century Catholic theologians have increasingly come to think that the soul is present from the beginning of development. In this paper we aim to explore the perception and views of religious faith leaders, on the ethics of abortion, “hard cases” and the 2005 abortion law.

Methods

Design, study area and recruitment

Because the aim was to explore in depth the viewpoints and moral reasoning of religious faith leaders who could have a better knowledge of abortion practice in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, a qualitative study design was chosen. The intention was to recruit religious faith leaders from a range of scholastic backgrounds involved in teaching in either churches or mosques in Addis Ababa. The first contact was through the first author's visitation on site (church parishes and mosques) and subsequent phone calls to the respective persons. Almost all participants were unwilling to receive the allotted amount for general participants, an amount of 200 Ethiopian Birr (approx. 6 Euro) for transport and compensation of time. Most of the 12 participants deliver sermons, directly teach, while no female participants were interviewed, because there is none.

Interviews

Participants were interviewed at their workplace by the first author. Interviews were conducted between February and July 2017, and lasted on average 40 minutes. An interview guide was used, with open-ended questions on views on abortion (law), period of ensoulment, the view of religion on the practice of abortion, and "hard cases" of abortion, in abortion provision. All interviews were conducted in the Amharic language. Upon obtaining informed consent, interviews were recorded digitally. Then they were transcribed. The first author took field notes. An independent researcher translated the Amharic transcripts into English.

Analysis

Analysis was performed within the systematic text condensation (STC) framework, a qualitative analysis framework developed by Malterud which builds on DiGiorgi's method[13]. The method involves four steps:

1. From chaos to themes: the transcripts and field notes were read several times to create an overall impression and identify candidates for main themes.
2. From themes to codes: each unit of meaning was identified and coded according to topic using the nVivo 11 software package. Codes and sub-codes were created.
3. From code to condensation: all units of meaning coded with the same sub-code were then read in order with a view to identifying their meaning and content. This was done by creating so-called 'artificial quotations', which are condensed summaries of salient points formulated as if phrased by the participants. All sub-codes were condensed in this way.
4. From condensation to analytic text: the artificial quotations then provided the basis for the final analytic text which was then incorporated into the findings section of the paper. In the analytic text, genuine (not artificial) quotations from the transcripts were used to illustrate and confirm the findings.

Results (Findings)

Meaning of termination of pregnancy (TOP)

When we come to the termination scenario some of Orthodox Christian as well as Islamic Ullamnas held different understanding of their own reasoning. As the interview revealed the phrase "*termination of pregnancy*" created two understanding and perceptions, the first is – 'making unable to become pregnant,' hence they perceived this is so by using of different contraceptives or using natural methods. The second one is 'termination of pregnancy before ensoulment period.' In this case while Islamic Scholars believe permissibility of abortion before the 120th day and few Orthodox Christians before the 40th day of post conception, in certain specific cases. As one informant told " *they[practitioners] can do whatever they want before the fortieth day[but not after that, -angrily responded]*" The following statements give a brief understanding from the two representative groups.

Abortion is an attack on life .life has to be defined again. I'm completely against it. I can't differentiate homicide with abortion. Abortion should be treated equal to murder.

Christian Respondent1, Yohannes

All right. Human life begins according to Islam when first a female and male seed merge, it does not have life. It has not come to a stage called a human being. According to Islamic doctrine, it has to pass three forties [120 days]. The first forty is *Nutfah* (watery) it kind of like sperm. From 40 to 80 *Aleqa (alagah)*. From 80 to 120 days *Mudra* which looks like just a piece of flesh(meat). Exactly from the 121st day it starts to take a human form. It receives a human soul (infused) it starts to move that means that it has become a human being... However, the fetus has its own honor even before 120 days.

Islam Respondent1, Ustaz Ismael

Islam is against terminating. By terminating this pregnancy, you are putting your own life in danger. Not only that when you guys terminate a pregnancy, you are putting the nation in danger. A country prospers by the citizens. The primary source of economy finance is the people. Therefore, it means to kill the system of the economy and head to poverty... The population in Ethiopia is increasing and our economy is also increasing correspondingly... To cut reproduction is to hand over a country!.

Ustaz Ismael

When we talk about religion, the correct solution for human need is religious. Because the founder of the religion is the Creator himself. Who should produce a manual for a certain product, it should be the manufacturer. The same company, Sony for Sony, LG (for LG). Therefore, God (the Quran) gives the manual for human beings and not human beings. If we mix it, then life is messed up with. A proven resolve (solution) and law for human beings is religion.

On abortion law

Participants had two different approaches as to the abortion law is considered, one either they don't believe its existence or they stick the abortion debate in their respective congregations-before the period of ensoulment. Generally Ethiopian religious faith leaders have limited knowledge about the existing abortion law.

For example an Orthodox Christian responded whether he knows about the law, whether it is appropriate and any if whether any change to be done in the law ,he responded ;

" there is no any law about abortion!, it couldn't exist (in the Church), if it exists, it is immoral!, if they (seculars) approve lawful what we taught sinful, it is transgressing God's law. I couldn't forward a specific answer for this." Megabe Hadith-Abba Libanos

An Islamic scholar also responded in the same but different way as follows:-

"there is no law as such abortion is considered. However I heard while people talk. If it exists, its application is to the fetuses before ensoulment. We cant talk abortion after ensoulment. Applicability of abortions has to be seen case by case" Ustaz- Haji Sultan

Ensoulment and right to life of unborn children

When the respondent were asked about the human embryo and attaining the right to life and when will the period of ensoulment their exist a clear distinction from both religions. Orthodox Christian scholars held conservative yet diverse view in this regards. Some told the period of conception [also secularly educated] while others the fortieth (40th) day[mostly the clergy] and the rest who base their view based on Gubae Bet (traditional school system) thought it is about the end of the third month (1st trimester) that the ensoulment occurs, and they believed the corresponding right to life same.

Islamic scholars mostly the Ustazs told the period of ensoulment in the Islamic thought is the 120th day of post conception. Islamic Ustazs have held strict and consistent perception regarding this view.

Now let's look at a view on a woman's own decision on the fetus by a Christian theology instructor,

I don't think anyone has the right to terminate the fetus. In terms of the reproductive right, when a new life originates a new life, I don't think their reproductive right is workable. The third party is start existing I don't think they have a right to kill this third party. Do I have a right to kill my child?

Danger to mother's life and rape

When they discuss termination of pregnancy when the mother's life is at stake, their comes different attitude from the respective or both religious respondents. While most Orthodox Christian reserve themselves from commenting and some of them inclined in this scenario the stance of modern secular medical ethics perspective, Islamic Scholars tend to incline in the way of permissibility when facing two problems or some point a possibility in any case to save both the mother and the unborn child and express with little or no clue or choice of such scenario.

In both of the respondents, abortion after rape is condemned, rather they commented on the bringing of the conceived child to term and delivery. They perceive this in its evil sinful nature and attach mainly criminality of the case. There should be societal care for these children and adoption has to be encouraged among the community. Strong counselling approached has to be conducted to encouraged physically and Psychologically to the pregnant women. And the rapist (perpetrator) has to pass a legal court process. Respondents didn't comment on the rape scenario in incest condition and they don't have any clue about any consequence on the impregnated child. Some responses are below,

I cant give a specific answer. It is opting one human life against the other. The fetus/mother has to get a chance to survive that is a social norm.it is difficult situation for me to say yes or no. I can't take a decision theoretically. I'm not seeing any evil in it. This thing, we can't oppose that principle very strongly. There may not be consensus among theologians in this regard... I would say that pregnant woman is a human person where another human being is within her.

Christian Respondent1 John

Islam allows it. (Arabic) There is a law if you are faced with two dangers, we take the easier one. In this case, because we are a hundred percent certain about the mother, the one you do not have a hundred percent control over, you terminate the pregnancy.

Ustaz Ismael

Easier to take a decision (case of rape). I will sympathise. I don't accept it. After the man who rape a woman punished or we have to give chances for the originating individual.

Christian Respondent1 Yohannes

Muslim scholars, it is made that the one committed the rape must marry. If refused, He is penalized according to the law... This is because it comes in connection to feelings. Regardless, we facilitate it for him... But if she says she does not want it, it cannot be done. The child is called illegitimate. The first choice is for it to live. If the mother presents the question within the 120 days, it is acceptable[to terminate].

Ustaz Mohammed

Deformity and underage

In such scenario again different perspectives were found between the two respondents. Orthodox Christians see TOP of deformed infant as a transgression of God's commandment, "you shall not kill". They perceive this might constitute as a miracle of God may be seen by the deformed infant. There may be a possibility of healing of such unborn children. Still some others comment only the devout and high rank religious scholars would comment on it. But in Islamic perspectives this is permissible if it is detected and known before the period of ensoulment ie the 120 day. The same view is held if she is underaged ie below 18.

Most Orthodox Christians believe the point of physical maturity for females to be 15year. This is based on the religious way of understanding and teaching. According to the Tradition of EOTC the Blessed Virgin Mary conceived Christ at the age of 15("mature minor"). Eve was created from the left rib bone of Adam becoming the age of 15.. So 15 year is a medium range a very decisive and crucial age by Christians. Some Muslim scholars also admit the age of 15 at an average year. Therefore, they argue if she is capable of becoming pregnant, how is one called underage? But if she is under 15, that could be a point of argument and room for flexibility of permissibility of abortion. As a solution they recommend teaching on sexuality and Christian living. There is family, society, organizations to help people. They say that it is better to turn into preventing the problem from happening, for example, by teaching, raising awareness than judging.... They advise that it is better to work together with religious institutions (domains).

Can you completely trust the radiologist who is making this judgment? is there an infallible radiologist, I don't think!. What will you avoid by terminating the deformed fetus, the labour pain? you understand my perspective .i cant deviate from the very principle that abortion is an attack against life. Any unnessesary suffering on human being Im against. it is unethical. I personally believe. Science has to invest sufficiently to reduce suffering every individual born or unborn.

I don't believe in male shiwanizm [provide explanation] has divine origin. Mainly the eastern societies used to be male shiwanistic. Majority of the world society even nowadays are male shewanistic. men and women are equal right without any discrimination.im not supporting again the radical feminists who introduce a kind of hostility/enemizm between male and female i don't understand the reason behind.

Christian Respondent1,

Mental Illness

Here informants mentioned and want to be clear with the degree of mental illness. Is it mild, moderate or severe? How did she come up to impregnation? Did this happen with consent or without consent? Is it the illness the cause of intercourse or is it the intercourse that leads to illness or insanity? Is it curable or incurable? etc.lets see one respondent point in this regard:

'how did she get impregnated if she is mentally ill? What sort of mental illness does she have? There is no judgment on her (if she is insane_?)

Megabe hadith – Abba Gebre Kiros

Orthodox Christian stemmed their main argument from the Scripture that depicts the image and likeness. Even though they refer to a Holy Bible, they don't want to dialogue any longer about abortion since it is a closed agenda. Besides they don't engaged with civil society or healthcare professionals to conduct a seminar or have critical reflection on bioethical issues including Euthanasia and invitro fertilization (IVF).

In addition, participants didn't mention explicitly the works and teachings of ancient or early fathers towards abortion. However they believed that 'abortion' had never been a topic in early church fathers.

However, some of them were curious they exist some writing that condemn abortion in a general term. The book of *Genesis* and the *Didache* (The Apostles teaching) are the two books that are mentioned explicitly in condemning abortion.

Lastly, on question about the reconciliation of the secular vs the religious approach on matters of sexual and reproductive health and right (SRHR), abortion practices, respondents replied as follows:

"Yes. they can be reconciled, how? The main objective of religion is also to defend human dignity. The purpose of law and science is also to provide things that make life for human beings convenient. If they are finished science. If the science is fully developed it does not contradict collide with the Quran the Hadis. Secular laws have also come into existence based on religion, therefore, they do not negate with religious laws." 47Yr, Ustaz Abubeker

"It is possible to reconcile it. (However) In the current situation if they approve what we teach to be a sin is very contradictory. " 45 Yr, Abba Gebre Kiros

'A reconciliation point is prevention. How can we reconcile them? (for example), We say that Trinity is three in one, if it is argued that why cannot they be four, how can theology be able to reconcile them? Science opposes the process of creation. To be reconciled it does not have to negate with the basic principles of theology. These principles are not ideas. '

50 Yr, Abba Fikre Selassie

We have indirectly found that while some (28.5%) of EOTC and most (60%) of Islam religious faith leaders respectively implicitly support in at least one of the "hard cases" mentioned in the secular approach of SRHR of pregnant women.

Discussion

The aim of the study was to see the ethics of abortion, hard cases and views on the 2005 abortion law. Induced abortion is not fully known in the religious realm. They believe that it doesn't exist (in explicit legal form). Every response from the participants are perspectives from their respective sacred books, and not asked based on scientific knowledge. They were invited for a set of questions about abortion and responded the morality and ethicality of abortion for secularly oriented questions. Both religions while EOTC perceive and believe that human life from the beginning is sacred, Islam prescribes it with full dignity and respected honor.

Researches in the area of early human life (congenital) and its nature was narrated from other studies. The nature of the embryo and the right to life of a conceived human being from a certain point onwards was tried to be addressed. No complete and clearly demarcated line in the embryonic period, about the right to life, is illustrated from other researches. The hard cases present in the article has different understandings from other literatures. Societal norms and way of living or lifestyle also has an influence to whether accept or deny a given criteria of "hard Cases" mentioned. Eg. mostly, 'hard case ' # 1 (abortion

when the mothers' life is endangered), has got multifaceted perceptions across countries and societies and it holds a *double effect principle* by most Catholic academic scholars understanding.

Christian Ethics and Christian living

Human beings pass through three laws:- law of conscience, written law (mosaic law) and law of Gospel. We are now in time of law of Gospel- hence, our values and judgments are measured in spiritual parameters, ie it should be in spirit. Sanctity of human being, ensoulment and image of God constitute the basic Christian ethics. The basic argument these religious respondents base was the practice of religion in proper Christian ethics and Christian living was a solution. The fundamental principle that Christians defined concerning ethics and morality are based on the Word of God. Premarital sex is strictly forbidden in the Church. The works and lives of the saints are delivered to the pulpit by clergy, hence everyone is expected to follow the saintly living to refrain from sinful activities. The sanctity of the embryo (unborn child) was given much weight in the respondent's sight. One can refer this based on reading passage from Scripture:

"You created every part of me; you put me together in my mother's womb...when my bones were being formed ,carefully put together in my mother's womb, when I was growing there in secret, you knew that I was there- you saw me before I was born."(Ps. 139:13-16), and eg. Isa 44:2 also clearly indicate the creative nature and the protection of God. Because,

the issue of abortion is one of the basic and founding concern of Christian bioethics. Both Christian moralists ,Catholics and protestants have developed philosophical and theological arguments against abortion and there is a tendency in some of the Philosophers, like late Engelhardt in believing that Christian bioethics should be approached based on the theological arguments [14].

The Scripture and Traditions

Christian participants tried to justify their reasoning based on Scripture, Tradition and Islamic respondents based on The Glorious Quran and Islamic juris prudence. Respondents answered posed questions based on their belief after authoritative Scripture and Traditions. Christians based their argument after the Scripture, writings of Church fathers and Tradition of the Church. Our finding in the perception and stance on matters of abortion by Orthodox Christians has in part opposite with the findings discussed from Bosnia which says they were hesitant and least consider themselves as believer [15].

Both the Christians and Islam attitude share some insights from the Jewish texts that asserts for example in cases of Christians that tend to believe the fortieth day had been mentioned in the Jewish text. And it was an idea first expressed by Aristotle and later by Augustine (St.)-And in Islamic cases the Babylonian Talmud states the embryo in it's the until first forty 40 days is, in somewhat its nature is water [16].

Early church fathers teaching on abortion

As it is seen earlier in the introduction section the Church is abiding by the early church father witnesses on induced abortion, St Basil, Irenaeus and Tertullian are among the early fathers who condemned abortion explicitly [17]. They defend the embryo from the perspective of personhood, ensoulment and moral wrongness of abortion. And Augustine who is considered a saint in Roman Catholic teaching believed ensoulment will occur by the 40th day post conception for male and 80/90th day post conception(?) for female. However, he resisted killing of unformed fetuses and his thinking was believed to be shaped by Aristotelian understanding. Tertullian believed and stated “to kill a child before it is born is to commit murder by way of advance.” All condemned the practice of abortion both feticide and infanticide. Their word is deemed equal with the scripture. The Church is therefore mention in advance and always is the case to refute secular approaches that seems undergo eugenic policy. Hence the sanctity of the embryo, the dignity of human support that the human being created in the image and likeness of God has been protected from the moment of conception.

Islamic ethics

In Islamic understanding the conceived being before 120th day is a pre human, ie biological life and a human being after 120th day, when the soul is breathed in to it. Honor to the embryo/fetus, ensoulment and choice by pregnant women (if before 120th GA) constitute the basis of Islamic ethics. The exception of abortion in some circumstance has been a choice of many ecofeminists. in certain critical situations abortion would be permissible as a last resort has got support from religious as well as secular approach [18]. In the opposite scenario, pregnancy due to rape or incest, due to mothers health and due to the handicap of the fetus do not furnish suffice grounds to terminate the pregnancy [19].

The earliest Christian witnesses and the churches of the east generally regarded the destruction (killing) of the human embryo as homicide.

Belief in “delayed ensoulment” is a feature among mediaeval Western Christians and it was founded on a mistranslation of scripture. and modern embryology has impacted the Traditional thinking of Orthodox and Islam about period of ensoulment. This article may represent, religious views and argumentations in website (social media), the so called – sacralising cyber space[20] .

In general, even when the doctrine of delayed ensoulment was believed, Christians continued to extend moral and legal protection to the human embryo from the beginning [21].

Conclusion

Ethiopian religious faith leaders have their own reasoning concerning the issue of induced abortion referred above as “hard cases”. They base their main argument from authoritative revealed religious texts Holy Scripture and Holy Quran. While Islamic faith leaders argue based on two circumstances -before and after the 120th GA, Orthodox Christians highlighted various perspectives as to mixed type of period of ensoulment is believed and corresponding a right to life. Abortion can be argued based on scripture, natural law and contextual ethics.

There was a clear remark that abortion is condemned and never comes to confrontation it is a closed agenda. Hence, the ethics of abortion is negative attitude, yet unsettled by Orthodox Christian faith leaders. Informants were hesitant to talk and discuss the bioethical issues publicly with civic society or health care workers. In terms of putting their reasoning Orthodox Christians stuck to the Image Theology. While Islamic Ustazes tend to mention Islamic jurisprudence or Fiqh. Both religious groups, but especially EOTC faith leaders, have very far view from modern secular bioethics or medical embryology.

On matters of SRHR and religious teachings on Orthodox Christians are almost irreconcilable but, there is a great potentials with Islamic teachings. While there is a conservative yet divergent views are obtained from Orthodox Christian teachers, less liberal yet consistent view in TOP is observed from Islamic scholars side.

Strength and Limitation

This is the first snap shoot article in the area that entertains the perspectives of religious faith leaders on abortion in Addis Ababa. We are able to explore the in-depth perception of the individuals using pre-prepared interview guideline. However, we have conducted the interview with few informants and all were from Addis Ababa, hence perspectives maybe limited (not as diversified) is impossible because of this. In addition, our topic of research didn't include multiple pregnancy reduction and in vitro fertilization (IVF).

Declarations

Authors' contributions

All authors contributed to the design of the study. DBE performed and analysed the interviews and wrote the first draft. VCT and JHS contributed to analysis and revised the article. All authors read and approved of the final version.

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Research ethics

Ethical approval was obtained. Informed consent was obtained from all participants after providing detailed information on the study both orally and in writing. The project was evaluated and approved by the institutional review board of St Paul's Hospital Millennium Medical College, Addis Ababa, and the Data Protection Official at the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (ref. 53104). Participants were informed orally and in writing and signed a written consent form. As the interviews concerned sensitive topics, we limit demographic and other information about individual informants in order to protect their anonymity.

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