

### **A Presbyterian Perspective:**

The Presbyterian Church (USA) is part of the larger Reformed Tradition (80 million worldwide) which was birthed in Europe as part of the Protestant movement initiated in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. We are guided by the Bible (our canon includes both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament writings), our Confessions (statements of faith adopted by the Christian church over the last 2,000 years), a Book of Order (basic delineation of our church polity) and the General Assembly (elected body which meets every two years). We cannot speak for all Christians, of course, but represent a solidly traditional or “mainline” American witness.

### **Separation of Church and State:**

- Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God.  
Romans 13:1
- But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than any human authority.”  
Acts 5:29
- ...we consider the rights of private judgment, in all matters that respect religion, as universal and unalienable: We do not even wish to see any religious constitution aided by the civil power, further than may be necessary for protection and security, and at the same time, be equal and common to all others.  
Book of Order, F-3.0101
- ...we also believe that there are truths and forms with respect to which men of good characters and principles may differ. And in all these we think it the duty both of private Christians and societies to exercise mutual forbearance toward each other.  
Book of Order, F-3.0105
- The members of the church are emissaries of peace and seek the good of all in cooperation with powers and authorities in politics, culture, and economics. But they have to fight against pretensions and injustices when these same powers endanger human welfare.  
Confession of 1967

### **Abortion and Reproductive Rights**

- The PC(USA) has wisely recognized that people of good faith can differ in their interpretation of Scripture, their understanding of when human life begins, and their decision about the morality of abortion...To restrict access to reproductive health care for individuals and families, especially to target the most vulnerable women and families, is an unjust exercise of governmental coercion.  
*On Providing Just Access to Reproductive Health Care*  
Approved by the 220<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2012)
- When people who are fighting injure a pregnant woman so that there is a miscarriage, and yet no further harm follows, the one responsible shall be fined.  
Exodus 21:22
- For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.  
Psalm 139:13

- For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. Galatians 5:13-15

### **Prayer and the Public Schools**

- Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.  
Matthew 6:1
- The public education system is challenged to be more sensitive to the notion that just as we have many languages, we also have many religious points of view. Respect for the richness of these traditions requires a review and reordering of teaching practices, historical points of view, and curricula to broaden the worldview of students to match the growing complexity of U.S. and global populations.

*Loving Our Neighbors*

Approved by the 219<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2010)

- Government should be absolutely neutral in matters of religion, and the religion clauses commit the nation to that posture...The establishment clause prohibits government preference for one religion over others or of religion over nonreligion. This does not mean that the clause prefers nonreligion; indeed, it prevents governmental indoctrination against religion.

Statutes permitting “moments of silence” in public schools are not inherently unconstitutional but should not be enacted because they are subject to misuse through pressures to allow state-sponsored prayer or endorse religion.

*God Alone Is Lord Of Conscience*

Approved by the 200<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (1988)

## **Islam and the Abortion Debate**

1) “Say: ‘Come, I will rehearse what Allah has (really) prohibited you from’: Join not anything as equal with Him; be good to your parents; kill not your children on a plea of want—We provide sustenance for you and for them—come not near to shameful deeds, whether open or secret; take not life, which Allah hath made sacred, except by way of justice and law: thus does He command you, that you may learn wisdom.” [6:151]

2) Then We made the sperm-drop into a clinging clot, and We made the clot into a lump [of flesh], and We made [from] the lump, bones, and We covered the bones with flesh; then We developed him into another creation. So blessed is Allah, the Best of Creators.”  
[23: 12-14]

Similar to all of the divinely revealed books, the Qur’an unequivocally sanctifies human life. Killing any innocent person—irrespective of age or religious orientation—is condemned in the firmest language: “And do not kill the soul which Allah has forbidden to be killed except in the course of justice.” [al-An‘âm (6): 151]

In one famous tradition, the Prophet ﷺ said, “The very first matter to be decided between people on the Day of Judgment will be the cases of bloodshed.”<sup>1</sup>

Having children and praying for their righteousness is viewed as an act of worship in Islam. This is expressed in numerous Qur’anic supplications

Although it established the sanctity of life, abolished infanticide, and encouraged people to embrace the mission of producing righteous offspring, Islam recognizes that obliging everyone to bear children while disregarding their respective circumstances is impractical. In other words, Islam teaches Muslims that childbearing for those who are capable of it is a blessing, but also recognizes that circumstances may not always allow for it. In classical books of Islamic jurisprudence, circumstances such as the capability of a woman’s health to sustain a pregnancy, or a man living away from his wife for an undetermined period of time, are discussed thoroughly in the framing of this discussion.

The vast majority of fuqahâ’ (jurists)—past and present—hold that temporarily putting off childbearing is permissible on an individual basis, but not as a societal ideal which overrides the default encouragement to have children discussed above. This permissibility stems from the fact

that the Prophet ﷺ approved of 'azl (coitus interruptus), or withdrawing before ejaculation, on numerous occasions that are traceable to over ten of his Companions.

By 120 days from conception the scholars of all schools unanimously agree that ensoulment has taken place. This is based on a tradition in which the Prophet ﷺ mentions that the angel breathes the soul into the fetus by 120 days. However, Muslim scholars do not necessarily equate ensoulment with the completion of embryogenesis

Between 40 and 120 days from conception, the four madhabs disagreed, even within their own ranks, and so we will state the dominant position of each school. The Mâlikis traditionally were the strictest in this regard; they opposed any medical technique as a means of birth control (such as drinking medicine), with some even opposed to seeking to expel the semen after intercourse. The dominant Ḥanafī position was far more lenient in permitting abortion up until 120 days from conception, with some even allowing it without the husband's permission.<sup>11</sup> Nowadays, many contemporary juristic assemblies prescribe the position held by the Ḥanbalis; permitting abortion up until 40 days, and only up until 120 days when a pressing need is present (such as rape, or an extreme fetal deformity incompatible with life).

- Approved by Yaqeen Institute

*An Islamic research institution dedicated to dismantling doubts and nurturing conviction by addressing relevant topics affecting today's society.*

## **Prayer in School**

Verse for Prayer in schools

"There is no compulsion in religion. Verily, the Right Path has become distinct from the wrong path" [2:256]

" I worship not that which you worship,  
Nor will you worship that which I worship.  
To you be your way, and to me mine." [109:4-6]

Properly understood, this Kennedy case is not about the limits on an individual's ability to engage in private prayer at work. The District allowed private prayers by public officials to be conducted on school grounds which is very similar to an individual praying salat privately or a group of Muslims praying salat together privately and not as part of a school event. This case went further than that, however, with the Supreme Court ruling in favor of a Coach who engaged in a public, communicative display of his personal religious beliefs. That display is recognizable

as part of a longstanding practice of the employee ministering religion to students as the public watched.

The Kennedy decision continues to erase church-state separation, the principle that ensures that the government does not tell us how to practice our religion. Without church-state separation, religious freedom decreases for people of minority religions.

- from [MuslimAdvocates.org](http://MuslimAdvocates.org)

## **Reform Judaism Perspective**

### **Abortion and Reproductive Rights**

#### **Exodus 21:22-25**

When [two or more] parties fight, and one of them pushes a pregnant woman and a miscarriage results, but no other damage ensues, the one responsible shall be fined according as the woman's husband may exact, the payment to be based on reckoning. But if other damage ensues, the penalty shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.

#### **Mishnah Oholot 7:6**

If a woman is having trouble giving birth, they cut up the child in her womb and brings it forth limb by limb, because her life comes before the life of [the child]. But if the greater part has come out, one may not touch it, for one may not set aside one person's life for that of another.

#### **Responsa Mishpatei Uziel 4:46 (Ben-Zion Meir Hai Uziel, first Sephardi chief rabbi of Israel, early 20<sup>th</sup> century)**

It is clear that killing a fetus is not permitted without a reason, but for a reason, even if a weak reason, such as to prevent the mother from public shame [it may be permitted] (based on Arakhin 7a: It [the fetus] is part of her body.)

#### **Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner (Director of the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism) in reaction to the Supreme Court's decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization***

"We vehemently condemn the Supreme Court decision in *Dobbs*, which overturns *Roe v. Wade* and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*. This decision is wrong, full stop. It gives the green light to abortion bans that will eliminate or severely restrict access in nearly half of U.S. states and threatens other fundamental rights, including access to contraception and the LGBTQ+ rights affirmed by *Lawrence v. Texas* and *Obergefell v. Hodges*. Efforts to restrict abortion access also undermine the religious freedom of people who, as in the Jewish tradition, uphold abortion care as a medically necessary and righteous procedure. We are a Movement that includes people who have received abortion care, abortion providers, people who love someone who has had an abortion, and people who will one day need an abortion-- all of whom are deeply impacted by this decision. I take to heart the words of our Movement's clergy and lay leaders in communities nationwide who have shared how devastating this decision will be including congregant and abortion provider Dr. Sara Imershein, MD, MPH, who said:

'As a healer and an abortion provider I am deeply disappointed in the Supreme Court's decision – but not at all surprised. Sadly, the poor and marginalized will suffer most from abortion restrictions – with greater poverty, forced childbirth and higher maternal mortality.'

And Rabbi Rachael Pass, who has spoken and written about her own abortion, who said:

‘It is imperative that Jews, and all people, have access to abortion in all places where we live. I know this professionally as a rabbi, and personally as a cis-woman who has received an abortion. Judaism permits and sometimes requires abortion in the case that the life and wellbeing of the pregnant person is endangered. Depriving trans and nonbinary individuals and women with uteruses in our country of access to abortion undermines the freedom of minority religions - like Judaism - upon which our country was built.’

I stand with Dr. Imershein, Rabbi Pass, and all who will be profoundly impacted by this decision.”

### **Separation of Church and State and Freedom of Religion**

#### **From the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism:**

Neither Biblical texts nor Talmudic rulings completely explain the Jewish community’s strong commitment to the separation of church and state. Rather, the Jewish historical experience as “strangers in a strange land,” often suffering from persecution as a religious minority, informs our support for a separation of religion and state in the United States. The First Amendment made the United States the refuge of choice for Jews and others throughout the world when faced with persecution and oppression in countries without equivalent guarantees. American Jews have enjoyed the constitutionally-protected freedom to exercise religion and to organize communal lives under equal protection of the law. As members of a religious minority whose history is so dominated by oppression, we are especially sensitive to any effort to weaken the safeguards of pluralism and minority expression.