

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES SERIES 1

ABORTION

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Misinformation and misperceptions create fear and prejudices. There is no bliss in ignorance. It is important for everyone to acquire correct information and develop right perceptions about everything that is part of human pluralism.

Within the American pluralism, Muslims are widely misunderstood and they have yet to have a fair chance to tell the world their side of the story. Muslims need an opportunity to explain their way of life and their ideals in a comprehensive way to other constituents of the American pluralism.

The Minaret Publications is launched with a view to nurturing this particular need of the Muslim community. The idea is to offer a lucid explanation and brief commentary prepared by eminent scholars of Islam on relevant issues pertaining to Muslims, Islam and the society at large.

Introduction

In recent times, abortion has drawn more attention of the nation than any other issue including the Supreme Court nomination, the Iran/Contra hearings, and the savings and loan crisis. Public officials, civil libertarians, political activists, and media are debating the pros and cons of allowing women to abort their unborn babies. There is hardly anyone in the country that doesn't have a definite opinion on the subject.

Pro-choice groups and their supporters assert that under the freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution women are free to choose between abortion and motherhood. They, therefore, demand that state and federal funds should be made available to women to undergo abortions if they decide to do so.

Pro-life activists and their sympathizers, on the other hand, argue that abortion is no different than a murder. They contend that it should be stopped immediately. The least the government can do is to discontinue financing clinics and facilities that offer public-funded abortions.

Religious communities have a pro-life stance and

the position of the Muslim community is not different from many Christian or Jewish groups. Like others, they also believe that abortion is wrong unless it becomes a necessity as determined by medical doctors.

Divine Guidance

The Quran, the divine revelation to Prophet Muhammad that provides the guiding principles for Muslims, is categorical on the issue when it says:

“Whoever kills a human soul, except as a retribution for murder or for sedition on the earth, should be regarded as if she/he has killed all mankind; and that whoever saves a human soul should be regarded as if she/he has saved all mankind.” (5:32)

Muslims in this country look at the issue of abortion in the perspective of existing social realities. In contemporary American society, material needs and desires shape and mold living standards.

There are two primary questions that Muslims put to those who believe that abortion is a fundamental

right of every woman. Why didn't the couple exercise moral responsibility at the time of lovemaking? Why must a woman choose between getting rid of an unborn baby and assuming the pleasure and responsibility of motherhood?

The pro-life activists claim that they care for the unborn babies. But do they also care for the newly born babies? They do not explain how the newly born babies will secure the due care and love if their parents do not want them and the mother is merely forced by law to deliver. How will they survive in a world that is not willing to accept them? What will happen to those babies who may succumb to the future ills of drugs, gangs, and helplessness? Both pro-choice and pro-life activists do not have definite answers to these questions. They don't want to raise the issue in a real perspective. Marriage, family, love and compassion among spouses and children are issues that are never brought to light.

The Family

The divine message that Muslims and other religious communities follow assert that sex is not meant for purely hedonistic purposes. It is an individual and social necessity to maintain the foundations of family as the essential obligation of human existence. Children do not only need to survive, but also to grow under the wings of familial care, love and compassion.

Abortion is the result of a relationship that often begins with illicit sexual relations. Some people want to practice free sex – a mirage of individual freedom – without any consideration to family, love and compassion and above all responsibility. They believe that physical attraction to a member of the opposite sex is a natural instinct that they should be free to use at their discretion and preference without boundaries.

Physical attraction and instant pleasure grow weaker with waning age and vicissitudes of time. One realizes by time that what is essential, true and solid are relationships that are based on and provide real

tranquility, love, affection and compassion, which a family brings with it. A relationship between a couple of human beings cannot be reduced to physical attraction; it is the whole personality in all its dimensions: intellectual, psychological, behavioural. etc. that shapes the relationship. Love, compassion, and care for each other consolidate the relationship between spouses initially and among parents and children afterwards.

“He has created spouses for you among yourselves so that you may find tranquility and harmony with one another, and He engenders love and tenderness between you...” (30:21)

A family means a man for a woman and a woman for a man and the two for children. Together, all contribute to the well being and welfare of each other even in an age when the spouses have lost their physical charm and the children have grown older. Family is the only institution that can build the society on a solid foundation. Without family no one is safe and no one is at peace with oneself. In the

family, every member is trained at micro-level to practice altruism and maintain collective interests and harmony, which are essential for the whole society at a macro-level.

The pro-life and pro-choice groups ought to look at the issue of abortion from the perspective of the family. They must fight against all those institutions and practices that destabilize it. For instance, addiction to pornographic material is on the increase. Those who have become addicted to it see male-female relations in terms of momentary sexual gratification. To them, a family cannot bring all the pleasure they have watched in the movies. For them, a family is a prison rather than an institution of freedom and real pleasure.

Sexual freedom leads to extra-marital sex that is the starting point for multiple problems, such as, abortion, violence and rape. Missing the care and love of the family, and increasing economic pressures lead to attempts of escape, wealth-making and destructive adventures of fantasies through drug addiction or drug trafficking.

It is imperative that the efforts of pro-choice and

pro-life groups be directed to stabilize the institution of family. Marriage is the basic institution for establishing a family. It brings a sexual order in the society and it creates stability in the relations between men and women. However, in our contemporary America, marriage is regarded as an old institution.

Pro-life groups and pro-choice groups will serve their cause better if they give primacy to the institutions of marriage and the family, rather than concentrating on the issue of freedom of choice to abort an unborn baby or to stop public funding of abortion clinics. Muslims will support whole heartedly all genuine efforts to strengthen the family institution.

However, one must realize that it may be necessary for a married woman to have abortion in certain circumstances on medical grounds when her life is at risk. This is allowed exceptionally by divine law. The life of the fetus is sacrificed to save the life of the mother, because without her and a complete family, proper care cannot be rendered unto the newly born. In the divine message, rights of all parties are secured

and protected in a balanced way and in proportion. God is the transcendental and neutral source for values and laws; He does not need to be biased with or against any of His creation.

The family is the only institution which can nourish and nurture human life. This institution holds life sacred in all of its forms and respects the dignity and the right for all to exist.

***"And I (the Lord) have set you on a way with a purpose to be fulfilled, so follow you that way follow not the whims of those who know not."
(45:18)***

"And I (the Lord) have merely sent you as a mercy for (everyone) in the universe." (21:107)

About the Author

*Fathi Osman is a distinguished Islamic scholar who taught in several Muslim and Western universities. he was the editor-in-chief of the London-based international Islamic magazine, **Arabia**, from 1981 to 1987. He has authored several books in Arabic and English on contemporary Islamic issues. Some of his books in English are: **Jihad: A Legitimate Struggle for Human Rights, In Fraternity: A Message to Muslims in America, The Muslim World: Issues and Challenges**. He has been actively involved in interfaith dialogue. He is currently the resident scholar at the Islamic Center of Southern California.*



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