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This paper seeks to understand a few of the varied opinions and perspectives on the topic of abortion. Through this summarized analysis of Jewish and Christian views on the topic, I also provide an ethical response to these authors and my subjective views on the issue of abortion.

I first engage the writings of Daniel Schiff's book *Abortion in Judaism*. As Schiff explains, God is the ultimate source of instruction. Legality and ethics are never separated for Jewish people, and it is the responsibility of Jews to ensure that their law remains highly ethical. Thus, it's not just about the law itself but about the greatest good that law demands.

Schiff writes, "Abortion *halakhah*, it will be recalled, was born in the midst of dispute... Awed by the miracle of existence, the Jewish tradition continues to seek a *halakhic* response that balances, with humility and sensitivity, the needs of present life with the call of life in potential" (269). Jewish response to abortion seems to be one of patient logic. While there are differences of opinion and divergent arguments for different groups of Jews regarding abortion, Schiff reminds his reader that a "ruling" regarding whether an individual abortion should take place must be backed by clear *halakhic* arguments grounded in the texts. Therefore, it's not about a blanket moral commandment regarding abortion but about sound ethical inquiry and textual interpretation to make individual decisions regarding existence and life.

Second, David Kraemer and his article on *Jewish Ethics and Abortion* seem to conclude where Schiff also ends: with caution and patience. Kraemer writes, "the advice of Jewish tradition, as I read it, is to maintain both opposing opinions in tension, allowing the other always to serve as critique of the opinion one holds at the moment" (4). Regarding abortion, the Jewish perspective appears to rely on a responsibility to the individual case and

a respect for textual interpretation and halakhic guidance, even if that guidance is at some point separated from modern ethical inquiry.

Turning to Christian views on abortion, I start with Gilbert Meilaender and his book, *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*. Meilaender believes that personhood begins at fertilization or conception, and he connects this belief to the person of Jesus and the Christian theology to care for the “least among us.” Meilaender worries about the slippery slope of personhood if we believe that fetuses are not persons. As Christians, Meilaender writes, it is important to protect and honor the weakest among us, recognizing that we all begin from the same point. Meilaender ends with a confirmation of a Christian’s responsibility to reject abortion. The fetus is God’s creation and must be protected.

Beverly Wildung Harrison offers a different Christian perspective. Her article is titled *Theology and the Morality of Procreative Choice*. Harrison believes that much of the abortion debate is steeped in misogyny and a hatred of women that is embedded in patriarchal culture. Harrison argues that most women in the world today do not enjoy equal rights and full equality. Harrison wants the pregnant woman’s life to hold as much value as the prenatal life. And this is not about rights or liberties for Harrison but about bodily integrity. Harrison believes that safe and legal elective abortions promote the well-being of all women, especially those who are socially vulnerable in society.

Stanley Hauerwas’ article entitled, *Abortion, Theologically Understood* seeks to separate the political conversation in America from the Christian theological conversation. Hauerwas is not pro-choice, but he is also not interested in engaging in a larger political argument regarding abortion. He writes that the Church has work to do in its responsibility to create the kind of community that is a strong and faithful witness to the world at large. Hauerwas believes that instead of lobbying against abortion, the Church should build a community that welcomes the child “that the wider society does not want” (952). Hauerwas

seeks to work from within the Christian church regarding eliminating the need for abortion and supporting laws and practices that support women to seek out abortion less.

To say that we fully understand what makes a person, when a person becomes a person and when or if they develop a soul is often based on religious or philosophical belief. The Jewish perspective looks at these questions from an appreciation for God's law and the ways we can interpret that law to navigate difficult and complex realities. But within Judaism, there are differences of opinion and perspective. An Orthodox Jewish perspective may hold the narrowest view on when a person gains a soul or on when abortion is appropriate. A Reform Jewish perspective may hold the broadest view on these issues.

We see in the Christian writers addressed earlier that Meilaender and Wildung Harrison find themselves on very opposite sides of Christianity in their pro-life and pro-choice beliefs. What do we do within a faith tradition that looks at the same sacred text, seeks to understand the assumed same history and current ethical realities and yet comes out with opposing views?

We have created a barrier between the two arguments and the two sides of abortion that there seems to be no way to find each other in the middle. From my own Christian perspective, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells his listeners that he did not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfil it and that the Law will remain until everything is accomplished (Matthew 5:17-20). It's within the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus' teachings that I find a path forward for dialog and engagement across political lines. In telling us that the 'Law will remain', Jesus is pointing Christians back to our Jewish heritage. The Jewish thinkers discussed in this paper show us that with humility, we can debate and argue well about issues such as abortion. Jesus goes on in the Sermon on the Mount to explain that we must reconcile with one another before placing our gifts on the altar of God and settle disputes with our adversaries before we take an issue to court. Otherwise, we must accept a judge's ruling, even

if that ruling means we pay a penalty (Matthew 5:21-26). Jesus has nothing to say about whether our adversary is wrong, or we are right, only that we should navigate our disagreements long before we hand those problems to a court or to the altar of God.

Our Jewish writers told us that no matter where you fall on the topic of abortion, do so with humility and a responsibility to each individual case. Each woman who faces the choice of abortion has a unique story and history. Should abortion be denied all women because of the woman who appears to be capable of birthing and raising a human being? This is a discussion of elective abortions but not all abortions feel elective to the individual woman.

If Jesus tells us that the Law will remain until everything is accomplished, it's appropriate to look at difficult issues such as abortion and see how Jewish scholars often take individual stories into account and that often they recognize a fetus as related to the mother and father, as their responsibility, their property in terms of law. Then, as Jesus tells us to face our adversaries, I start by analyzing a view that feels opposite to mine, such as Meilaender. Even with different theologies, he calls himself a Christian and I call myself a Christian. I can see him as a colleague in this theological work even if I see his views as adversarial. I'm told by Jesus to settle matters quickly with my adversary. To settle those matters within myself, I can acknowledge the best of his argument which to me is the protection of the fetus, the weakest and most vulnerable among us. I want that protection for the weakest among us. I then turn to Hauerwas' argument as a Christian path I believe works for that protection - the building up of the Church as a place that is safe, welcoming, and protecting of all the most vulnerable people, not necessarily a banning of abortion for those who don't agree or believe as I do about what that protection could look like.

Returning to the sermon on the mount, Jesus says, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. So in

everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 7:7-8, 12). My feminist understanding of Jesus’ words here are that the women caught in the middle of the political debate on abortion are not forgotten by God, even when they feel forgotten by many on this earth.

My chief concern in the political argument for abortion is for those women who are seeking abortion due to all kinds of complex issues, for the women who feel there is no place to turn in their current circumstance, for the women who see the work of abortion as their motherly act. It is a lazy argument to choose one side and not consider the voices on the other side - especially for Christians. We have two responsibilities at the same time, to the people who birth babies and to the babies that may be birthed. Do those responsibilities contradict each other? Yes, at times they do and yet, we still must hold them both. It’s pro-choice and it’s pro-life at the same time. It’s feminist, anti-patriarchal and protective of life.

There are many kinds of Christians in the world today. We are not each other’s adversary and if we feel that we are adversaries, we should settle our concerns quickly as scripture tells us to. When we fight over two sides of the argument, we lose sight of the people who the issue of abortion truly concerns.

The push to promote the issue of abortion to the forefront of the political stage was related to embedded racism, a discussion too rich for this moment, true even without a lengthy argument. It is an argument that supports the rhetoric of “religious freedom.” Yet there is no religious freedom in forcing a pluralist society like the United States to submit to a law that does not acknowledge different religious views. Abortion as a legal and safe option for women is not what we should be fighting. There will always be women who need that safe option, and it comes down to individual issues and experiences.

Examining the writings of two Jewish authors and three Christian authors in this paper, we find helpful examples of the large collection of those who write on this issue. Their

views are different, oftentimes conflicting and at their best seeking answers to a complex topic. The Jewish perspectives rest on the Law and the interpretation of the Law. The Christian perspectives examine biblical scripture, seeking answers for a pro-life argument, a pro-choice argument and an argument that seeks to better establish the Christian church as a place that is theologically sound and safe. I argue for a Christian view that holds in tension both a woman's life and a fetus' life and I believe the Sermon on the Mount is a beautiful starting point for shared dialog within the Christian community. We begin by reminding ourselves that the structures and political lines that bind us today will continue to cause damage to our communities, forcing women to make reactive decisions, instead of supported, proactive choices.