

# RELIGIOUS AMERICANS SPEAK OUT

Pro-choice

## Believe It: Religious Americans Are Pro-Choice

*For years, religious political extremists have claimed religion opposes abortion. They've said it so often that many people assume it to be true. In fact, this assertion is false. Religious Americans actively support a woman's right to choose. They trust women and their families to decide whether and when to have children. They recognize that in a pluralistic society such as ours, the decision regarding abortion must remain with the individual, to be made on the basis of conscience and personal religious principles. They do not want government to impose laws about childbearing based on any one belief about when life begins.*

### Protestants have longstanding pro-choice positions

Most Protestant denominations in the United States have longstanding pro-choice positions. The United Church of Christ has maintained a consistently strong pro-choice stance since 1970. In 1994, the General Convention of the Episcopal Church adopted a resolution expressing "unequivocal opposition to any [legislation] that abridges the right of a woman to reach an informed decision about the termination of pregnancy or that would limit the access of a woman to safe means of acting on her decision." In 1992, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) reaffirmed support for a woman's right to choose; in 1993, the General Assembly voted to affirm the Freedom of Access to Clinics Act (FACE). At the 1992 General Conference of The United Methodist Church, the principles of Roe v. Wade were reaffirmed by an 84 percent majority vote.

### Unitarians support abortion rights

The Unitarian Universalist Association affirmed a woman's right to choose in 1963 and has consistently reaffirmed this right at all General Assemblies since then. In 1993, Unitarian Universalists overwhelmingly adopted a resolution urging members to support federal legislation that would guarantee the basic right to abortion, provide federal funds for abortion to low-income women and military personnel, and protect doctors and clinics providing abortion services from acts of violence and harassment.

### Jewish tradition upholds choice

Jewish tradition has long affirmed and protected the life, well-being, and health of pregnant women and has upheld the basic right to abortion. The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, representing Conservative congregations, in 1993 reaffirmed its resolution opposing any legislative attempts to weaken Roe v. Wade through constitutional amendments. Recent resolutions of the Union for Reform Judaism, representing Reform congregations, uphold an "unwavering commitment to the protection and preservation of the reproductive rights of women" and urge constituents to work toward securing or retaining these rights.

### Most Roman Catholics are pro-choice

On family planning and abortion, the attitudes and behavior of Roman Catholic laity often clash with Roman Catholic Church teaching. In the U.S.,

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59 percent of all Catholic women of childbearing age practice contraception—a rate statistically equivalent to that of the general population (60 percent). Further, 87 percent of Catholics think abortion should be legal, at least in some circumstances; specifically, 33 percent say a woman should be able to get an abortion if she decides she wants one, no matter what the reason (Catholics for a Free Choice Report, 2004). Catholic women have abortions at the same rate as women in the population as a whole.

### **Clergy believe in women’s right to choose**

Clergy had an important role in abolishing anti-abortion laws that hurt women. Today, many religious leaders believe abortion must remain a private, moral decision and trust women and their families to make their own decisions in the light of their faith traditions and moral values. A 1998 national survey of Protestant and Jewish clergy showed widespread support for reproductive choice, including abortion. Ninety-two percent of respondents said that every woman should be able to decide when to have children according to her own conscience and religious beliefs. Eighty percent supported a woman’s right to a safe and legal abortion.

### **A personal, moral, medical decision**

Those who seek to impose their religious views on others threaten not just women’s reproductive freedom but the religious freedom that is America’s founding value. Most religious Americans believe that the decision to have or not have an abortion should be a personal, moral, and medical decision, not a political one. Most religious Americans are prayerfully, faithfully pro-choice.

Sources: We Affirm, published by Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice; clergy survey conducted by Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice; Catholics for a Free Choice

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*The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, founded in 1973, is the national organization of pro-choice people of faith. The Religious Coalition—comprising Protestant, Jewish, and other denominations and faith groups, the Clergy for Choice Network, and state affiliates throughout the country—works to ensure reproductive choice through the moral power of religious communities. All programs seek to give clear voice to the reproductive health issues of people of color, those living in poverty, and other underserved populations.*

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