

How Much Do You Know About THAT 1973 Decision?

Ten years ago, the U.S. Supreme Court legalized abortion. Since then the controversy about the issue has increased. But the debate often generates more heat than light.

How much do you know about the issue. Check your knowledge below. The answers are drawn from the Supreme Court decision, congressional hearings, and other authoritative sources.

1. The Supreme Court made abortion legal:

a. only during the first three months of pregnancy.

b. only during the first six months of pregnancy.

c. any time until the moment of birth.

The correct answer is c. Abortion is legal at any time during pregnancy until the moment of birth. Although most abortions are performed during the first three months of pregnancy, about 10 percent are performed later. Every year late-term abortions result in the births of several hundred babies who die minutes, hours or even days later.

2. The Supreme Court made abortion legal:

a. only to save the life of the mother.

b. only when the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest.

c. for any reason at all.

The correct answer is c. Abortion is legal for any reason.

3. The 1973 Supreme Court decision permitting abortions was based on:

a. a finding that the fetus was not a living being.

b. danger to the mother's life.

c. the mother's right to privacy.

The correct answer is c. The court argued that the right to privacy gives a woman a right to insist on an abortion for any reason at all. The court never denied that life begins at conception, simply avoiding that issue. The laws overturned by the court already contained an exception to save the mother's life; thus no court decision was needed to accomplish that.

4. Today, most people:

a. support the legal status of unrestricted abortion on demand.

b. are opposed to abortion under any and all circumstances.

c. are somewhere in the middle.

The correct answer is c. Slightly fewer than one fourth of Americans support unrestricted abortion on demand. Slightly fewer than one fourth are opposed to abortion under all circumstances. The rest, or slightly more than one half, support abortion only for reasons such as danger to the life of the mother or for pregnancies caused by rape or incest, and only during the first three months of pregnancy.

5. Most Americans support abortions only under very restricted conditions and for very specific reasons. They include when there is a severe threat to the mother's life or health, when the pregnancy was caused by rape or incest or when a child would be born with severe handicaps. The number of abortions performed for one of these reasons is:

a. between 25 and 50 percent.

b. between 5 and 25 percent.

c. fewer than 5 percent.

The correct answer is c. Fewer than 5 percent of all abortions are performed for

reasons that most Americans support. More than 95 percent of abortions are performed for reasons that most Americans believe should be illegal.

6. The most frequently performed surgical procedure in the U.S. today is:

a. tonsillectomy.

b. appendectomy.

c. abortion.

The correct answer is c. More than 1.55 million abortions are performed every year. No other surgical procedure is performed more frequently.

7. True or false? Legalized abortion has been shown to reduce abortion-related maternal deaths.

False.

Although maternal deaths from abortion have dropped since abortion became legal, there is no evidence that this drop was caused by legalizing abortions. Abortion-related deaths began declining in the 1940s at the time of the introduction of penicillin and other medical advances. Maternal deaths have continued to decline since abortion was legalized but the rate of decline has been no greater than before. And abortion-related deaths actually increased in 1977 and again in 1979.

8. True or false? The beginning of life has never been medically determined.

False.

As early as the mid-19th century, when the process of fertilization was first understood, the American Medical Association declared that "no other doctrine appears to be consonant with reason or physiology but that which admits the embryo to possess vitality from the very moment of conception." This is confirmed by modern medical textbooks such as Arey's "Developmental Anatomy," which states that the newly conceived embryo "definitely marks the beginning of a new individual." In 1970, a pro-abortion editorial in the journal "California Medicine" acknowledged "the scientific fact, which everyone really knows, that human life begins at conception and is continuous whether intra- or extra-uterine until death." Even a 1963 Planned Parenthood pamphlet declared that abortion "kills the life of a baby after it has begun."

9. An amendment to the Constitution, which would make it possible to restrict or prohibit abortion, has been proposed by Sen. Orrin Hatch of Utah. True or

False? If adopted, this would be the first time an amendment has overturned a Supreme Court decision.

False.

At least four times in the past, constitutional amendments have overturned Supreme Court rulings. The 11th (law suits against a state by citizens of another state), the 13th and 14th (slavery and the rights of former slaves), the 16th (federal income tax), the 26th (giving 18-year-olds the right to vote), all were proposed in response to controversial Supreme Court rulings. The process for enacting such amendments is spelled out in the Constitution itself.

10. The Hatch Amendment would:

a. forbid abortions.

b. forbid abortion except to save the life of the mother.

c. restore to legislators the power to regulate on abortion.

The correct answer is c. The Hatch Amendment would overturn the Supreme Court abortion decision and give our elected representatives the power to seek an acceptable policy on abortion.

Can One Serve Church and State?

First in a three-part series

By Liz Schevtchuk
NC News Service

They serve in state legislatures, on city councils, on advisory panels, in state office or Parliament. Some are elected, some appointed. Some campaign as members of national political parties, some don't. Some elicit controversy, most do not.

Then-Sister Agnes Mary Mansour might have been the most visible Religious in public office when she got embroiled in a dispute over her job in Michigan's state government, but she was not the only one.

The case of Ms. Mansour — who resigned from the Sisters of Mercy of the Union in order to save her post as director of Michigan's Department of Social Services after clashing with Church authorities — once again raised the question of clerical and Religious involvement in politics. It followed by only a few months the promulgation of a new Code of Canon Law, scheduled to take effect later this year, which states the official Church's strong reservations about mingling religious vocations with politics.

Affected are Religious nuns and brothers — who are not ordained but take vows as members of religious communities or orders and are recognized as having a special religious commitment and ministry in the Church; and priests — who are ordained and may be either diocesan clergy under the direct supervision of their bishop or members of religious communities or orders.

Canon law aside, some Religious and clergy see merit in political involvement.

"I just concluded...that the way you're going to bring about social justice and respect for human rights ultimately has to be through the legislative process. I don't see any reason why clergy shouldn't serve in Congress," said one former priest-politician, Norbertine Father Robert Cornell, who quit running for Congress when he thought the Vatican didn't want him there.

Priests, nuns and brothers are currently serving at various levels of government in the United States, Canada and Nicaragua — and probably elsewhere as well. They include:

— Father Bob Ogle of Saskatoon, Sask., a member of the Canadian

Parliament.

— Sister Elizabeth Morancy, a member of the Rhode Island state legislature, and member of the Sisters of Mercy of the Union.

— Father John Beno, a member of the Colorado state legislature.

— Sister Jackie Slater, an alderman (city council member) in Minneapolis, member of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet.

— Sister Barbara Sullivan, a member of the Belmont, N.C., city council and member of the Sisters of Mercy of Belmont.

— Divine Word Father Joseph Simon, a member of the city council in Epworth, Iowa.

— Sister Ardeth Platte, a city council member in Saginaw, Mich., and member of the Grand Rapids Dominicans.

— Sister Mary Madonna Ashton, Minnesota state commissioner of health, member of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet.

— Brother Felician Fourrier, a Brother of the Sacred Heart, New Orleans Province, a member of the Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

— Christian Brother Richard Emenecker, superintendent of the Bureau of Cable Communications, city of Pittsburgh.

— Father James Pindar, an aide to the governor of New Jersey.

— Msgr. John P. Foley, vice chairman of the Pennsylvania State Ethics Commission, editor of The Catholic Standard and Times, Philadelphia.

— Maryknoll Father Miguel D'Escoto, foreign minister; Father Ernesto Cardenal, minister of culture; Father Edgar Parrales, ambassador to the Organization of American States; Jesuit Father Fernando Cardenal, vice coordinator of the Sandinista youth movement; and Jesuit Father Alvaro Arguello, representative to the council of state, all in the government of Nicaragua.

Another parish priest, Father Imre Biro of Budapest, reportedly is a member of the parliament in Hungary.

There are others — less well-known — who have served or are still serving in some capacity on various levels.

Some political activists not now in office but still interested in politics include Jesuit Father Robert Drinan,



Jesuit Father Robert Drinan walks past a supporter after leaving a 1980 press conference where he announced he would obey a Vatican order and not run for re-election to Congress. Norbertine Father Robert Cornell, top right, 1975 photo, who served two terms in Congress and was campaigning for a return to Washington, dropped out of the race shortly after hearing the Drinan ruling. Father Bob Ogle, bottom right, a member of the Canadian parliament, is awaiting Vatican word on whether he can seek re-election. (NC Photos)



who quit his re-election campaign for Congress at the Vatican's direction and now is president of Americans for Democratic Action, a national public affairs organization; Father Cornell, who quit campaigning for election in 1980 because of the order to Father Drinan; and Father Donald Fraser of Hailey, Idaho, who also quit campaigning (for election to the state legislature) because of the Drinan directive.

Both the old and the new codes of canon law take a dim (but perhaps ambiguous view) of Religious and priests in political office.

Canon 285 of the revised code states that "clerics are forbidden to assume public offices which carry with them a sharing in the exercise of civil power." The canon also seems to limit their holding secular administrative jobs: "Without permission of their own Ordinary, they are not to enter into the management of goods belonging to lay persons or into secular offices which involve the task of rendering an account."

However, Canon 287 in the revised code seems to open the door slightly to some form of political activity — provided Church authorities agree. "Clerics are always to foster as much as possible, peace and the concord based on justice that is to be preserved among men," it states. "They are not to take an active role in political factions or in governing labor unions, unless in the judgment of the competent ecclesiastical authority the protection of the Church's rights or the promotion of the common good require it."

Moreover, in 1980, the Congregation for Religious stated that Religious should engage in direct political activity only in "extraordinary circumstances" and only with the approval of the religious superior and bishop.

The old and new codes are "not essentially different" in their treatment of the issue, said Father Donald Heintschel, a canon law expert and associate general secretary of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

NEXT: Campaigns and canons.