**No Medical Association in the World Recommends Newborn Circumcision.** The sensitive foreskin (which circumcision removes) contains tens of thousands of nerve endings and provides protective and sensory functions throughout life.

## What About…

**Cleanliness?** – The American Academy of Pediatrics advises that the intact penis requires no special care and is easy to keep clean. The boy should simply clean his penis, as he would any other body part.

**Protection from Diseases?**– After exhaustive review of research on HIV/AIDS and STDs, all medical association reviews have concluded that behavioral factors (such as risky sex practices, etc.) are by far the key determinant in contracting HIV or other STDs. Some studies suggest a slight decrease in UTIs in the first year of life. However, this *potential* benefit does not outweigh the risks and possible complications of the circumcision surgery, including infection, hemorrhage, buried penis, penile damage, and surgical mishap.

**Looking Like Peers/Dad? -** Males rarely care about what their father's penis looks like. Should the boy ask, a simple explanation is all that is needed, "We now know circumcision is unnecessary." With nearly half of American parents now choosing to keep their sons intact, boys will have plenty of intact peers. Having surgery performed on your son just because "others do it" is *never* a good reason.

## For More Information Contact:

***Catholics Against Circumcision***
*www.CatholicsAgainstCircumcision.org*

***Christians for Wholeness***
*www.Acts15.org*

***National Organization of Circumcision Information Resource Centers***
PO Box 2512
San Anselmo,CA 94979-2512
1-415-488-9883
*www.nocirc.org*

***Circumcision Information and Resource Pages***
*www.cirp.org*

***Circumcision Resource Center***
PO Box 232
Boston, MA 02133
*www.circumcision.org*

***International Coalition for Genital Integrity***
*www.icgi.org*

*The information in this pamphlet is not meant to replace the care and advice of your pediatrician.*

*12/04*

# Catholic Teachings On Circumcision

*Respecting the Bodily Integrity of All God's Children*

Prepared by
Catholics Against Circumcision
www.CatholicsAgainstCircumcision.org

## What Scripture Says:

Christians have no religious requirement for circumcision. St. Peter declared in Acts 15:10, "And now are you going to correct God by burdening the Gentiles with a yoke that neither we nor our fathers were able to bear?" St. Paul also spoke out against circumcision of the flesh in the following passages:

**Galatians 5:2-6:** "Pay close attention to me, Paul, when I tell you that if you have yourselves circumcised, Christ will be of no use to you. I point out once more to all who receive circumcision that they are bound to the law in its entirety. Any of you who seek your justification in the law have severed yourselves from Christ and fallen from God's favor! It is in the spirit that we eagerly await the justification we hope for, and only faith can yield it. In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor the lack of it counts for anything; only faith, which expresses itself through love."

**Philippians 3:2-3:** "Beware of unbelieving dogs. Watch out for workers of evil. Be on guard against those who mutilate. It is we who are the circumcision, who worship in the spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus rather than putting our trust in the flesh."

**1 Corinthians 7:18-19:** "Was someone called after he had been circumcised? He should not hide his circumcision. Did the call come to another who had never been circumcised? He is not to be circumcised. Circumcision counts for nothing, and its lack makes no difference either. What matters is keeping God's commandments."

*See also Galatians 6:12-13, Romans 2:25-28, Romans 4: 9-12, Philippians 3:1-11, and Titus 1:10-16*

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**1 Corinthians 12: 18: "As it is, God has set each member of the body in the place he wanted it to be."**

# The Morality of Circumcision

**BY FATHER JOHN DIETZEN**

I'm not sure why not, but the fact is male circumcision generally just doesn't appear very much on the "radar screen" of Catholic moral teaching. Many major moral theology texts don't mention it. A notable exception is "Medical Ethics," by Father Edwin Healy SJ (Loyola University Press), who holds that since routine circumcisions are not medically defensible they are morally objectionable.

A few observations may help explain. The practice of circumcision arose thousands of years ago and is prevalent in many cultures around the world. Nearly always it has religious or social significance, signifying full membership in the group and establishing one's social position in the society. The first divine command to the Jews, for example, was that every male child be circumcised, symbolizing the covenant between God and Abraham (Genesis 17).

**The Catholic Church Catechism clearly teaches that amputations and mutilations performed on innocent persons without strictly therapeutic reasons are against the moral law.**

***Infant Circumcision is non-therapeutic amputation.***

After the famous confrontation between Paul and other leaders of the early church (Acts 15 and Galatians 2), Christians pretty much rejected the necessity of circumcision for becoming a believer in Christ.

The idea didn't entirely die, however. The theory that circumcision held some spiritual benefits even for Christians, prompted some condemnations. The Council of Vienna (1311) for example, decreed that Christians should not be lured into Judaism or be circumcised for any reason.

The following century, the Council of Florence (1438-1435) ordered "all who glory in the name of Christian not to practice circumcision either before or after baptism, since whether or not they place their hope in it, it cannot possibly be observed without loss of eternal salvation."

Today, while non-therapeutic male circumcision remains common in some places, as a general practice it is forbidden in Catholic teaching for more basic reasons of respect for bodily integrity. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states, "Except when performed for strictly therapeutic medical reasons, directly intended amputations, mutilations and sterilizations performed on innocent persons are against moral law" (No. 2297).

Elective circumcision clearly violates that standard. It is an amputation and mutilation, and, to my knowledge,... no significant medical group in the world defends it as having any therapeutic value. In 1999 the Council on Scientific Affairs of the American Medical Association stated that neonatal circumcision is non-therapeutic because no disease is present and no therapeutic treatment is required.

Modern Catholic Church documents do not deal explicitly with the morality of elective circumcision. The above basic principles, however, clearly render it immoral. It violates the bodily integrity of infant male children and unnecessarily deprives them of a part of their body that can protect the glans of the penis during infancy and serve at least a sexual function for adults.

My understanding from physicians is that circumcision rarely if ever arises as an ethical consideration. Usually it is requested by the parents for more social reasons such as, it's always been done in our family. In that case, the procedure may be carried out routinely in some places, even if it is not what the child needs and no curative or remedial reason renders it ethical.

*Excerpted from syndicated column, distributed by the Catholic News Service, October, 2004. Reprinted with permission of the author.*