

Circumcision a Human Rights, Not Religious, Issue

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Regarding the religious issue raised by Jerold Jacobs '68 in his letter (Bulletin, Spring 2003), at Attorneys for the Rights of the Child, we focus primarily on working to halt the uniquely American practice of medicalized circumcision; we largely refrain from addressing the Jewish or Islamic procedures. Medicalized circumcision is a Victorian relic from the days when circumcision was thought to stop masturbation and help prevent disease. Worldwide, lawyers, physicians, bioethicists and scholars oppose circumcision because they understand the foreskin's important immunological, protective and erogenous functions. The United Nations has repeatedly stated that genital cutting can constitute a human rights violation.

A growing number of Jews, including rabbis, question circumcision, and many conscientious, well-informed individuals have concluded that this particular practice is neither appropriate nor necessary for Jewish continuity and expression in modern society. Some Jews in the United States, South America, Europe and Israel do not circumcise. We expect that the more people learn about circumcision, the more they will question it.