

## **THE SPATE OF ABORTION AND THE CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS RESPONSE IN THE NIGERIAN SOCIETY**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper focuses on the Christian response to abortion in the Nigerian society. The rate at which abortion is being procured in the Nigerian society is worrisome. This is caused by the moral degeneration and ethical misconduct in our contemporary Nigerian society. The researchers made use of secondary sources of data collection as their methodology. This work found out that our society does not live up to their expectations, the influence of social media among our youths, lack of family planning by married couples, the youths quest to satisfied their sexual urge early in life are all predisposition factors that cause abortion in our society. The work recommended family planning among the married couples, teaching of sex education to our youths early in life. Teaching the right moral values to our teenage boys and girls and strict adherence to the Bible teachings on sex will no doubt eradicate abortion in the Nigerian society.*

**Keywords: Spate, Abortion, Christian Religion, Response, Nigeria.**

### **Introduction**

From time immemorial, abortion was seen as an evil, as life was very much valued and indispensable in African society. This was why abortion was prevalent in Nigeria some years ago. People saw life as something that belonged to God and that God is the only being that is qualified to take life, and so classified abortion as an abomination as a sacrilege. They frown at the mention of the word. One cannot but be astonished to see a geometrical increase in the support for the legalization of abortion in the Western World. This as we can witness is influencing the Nigerian society. Some people now take abortion as part of life and consider it no problem engaging in it. Nigeria society has degenerated to a morally decadent society as the spate of abortion is on the increase on daily basis.

There is no protection for an innocent and unborn human life. Scientific researches to some extent contributed immensely to the negligence of human life. Some discoveries had made us accept without questioning some of the things that were previously condemned. There is no gain saying that almost all private hospitals and clinics in Nigeria are havens for the procurement of abortion. This is because it gives quick money at little or no cost. Some who indulge in the practice mainly do so for pecuniary reasons which a few procure abortion in

sympathy with a teenager whose career in life might be checkmated if she should have the foetus develop into a full baby.

Despite all these, there are some people that are morally sound and cannot support such act. They see it as a problem because it involves life and death of an unborn baby. They believe that man has no right to take life which he does not give. They saw it as usurping God's right which has grave consequences on the society. They do not know what God has destined for such children they are aborting. God's destiny for such children may be to cause change by they are aborted, their missions are obstructed.

Ekwutosi (2008:12) believes that the legal aspects of abortion are subject of intense debate in many parts of the world. Sacred congregation for the doctrine of faith (1974:1) also supported this by saying that 'in many countries the public authorities which resist the liberalization of abortion laws are the objects of powerful pressure aiming at achieving the set goal. In some of these western countries, like United state and Canada their authorities have been influence to the extent that they have decided to legalize abortion. They have it that each individual is entitled to his opinion and that they cannot impose abortion on anybody.

### **Definition of terms**

It was the Poet Cicero who wrote that the beginning of any intelligible debate starts with the definition of terms. In line with this thought, therefore, some terminologies will be clarified through definitions. These terms are spate, abortion society, religion and approach. To this we now turn:

#### **Spate**

According to BBC English dictionary, (1992) a spate of thing means a lot of them happening or appearing within a short period of time. In its own definition the Oxford Mini-Reference Dictionary (1995) refers to spate as sudden flood. This then means that spate is the appearing or something happening severally in a short period of time. It can also be referred to as that which occurs very frequently within a short period of time.

#### **Society**

Society is a group of persons living in a geographical area sharing certain things in common through religion, language, etc. This then means that every society must have something in common. Those things they have in common now bind them together. The interest they have in such things must supersede any other thing in such society. Supporting this view, the BBC English Dictionary (1992) defines society as an organization of people who have the same interest or aim. Society can be defined as a large group of persons with a particular organization and shared rules and values that determine behavior (Chuta: 2006:15). This then means that we can have Igbo society, Hausa society, Ikem society, Nigeria society etc.

#### **Religion**

According to Anyacho (2005:28) religion has many definitions. He opined that all that attempted the definition of religion tended to be so much influenced by their resistive socio-cultural backgrounds. For clarity the researcher decided to take the definition given by Iwe (1977:64) as a spiritual pilgrimage characterized by the quest for and recognition of some superhuman power; the acknowledgement of man's limitations and self insufficiency and the

adoption and formation of a path doctrinal and practical moral in life in explanation and answer to the fundamental issues and problems of human existence. Okweueze (2003:3) defines religion as "a regulated pattern of life of a people in which experiences; beliefs and knowledge are reflected in man's conception of himself in others, his social world, the physical as well as the metaphysical world". In his own definition Ugwu (2002:2) says that religion is "faith and practices involving the relationship between mankind and what is regarded as sacred". In his explanation he said that religion generally involves the belief in the supernatural and a code of ethical behaviour.

Arinze (1970:8) quoted in Ugwu and Ugwueye (2004:2) says that religion could be defined subjectively and objectively thus, "subjectively, religion is the very consciousness of dependence on a Transcendent Being and the very propensity or inclination to worship, objectively, religion is a complex of truths, laws and rites by which man is subordinated to the Transcendent Being".

### **Abortion**

According to Umeasor (2006:12) abortion has its etymological origin in a Latin word "aborior; meaning to disappear or perish. Similarly Ekwutosi (2008:43) also supported this view when he wrote that abortion is derived from a Latin word "aborior", "to miscarry". He also said that abortion could simply be taken to be the termination of pregnancy or "the expulsion of the foetus before it is viable, that is before it can live outside the mother". In his explanation of abortion he believes that foetus dies while yet with the generative organs of the mother, or it is ejected or extracted from them before it is viable, that is before it is sufficiently developed to continue its life independently.

Robert (1988:6) also gave two sided definitions of abortion as "birth that occurs before the embryo has developed enough to live, usually during first twelve weeks of pregnancy, miscarriage, the inducing of premature delivery in order to destroy offspring". Hornby (1995:3) state categorically that "abortion is an act of causing a pregnancy (pregnant) to end in order to prevent the baby from developing and being born alive." From this definition, it can be deduced that abortion can mean premature, untimely or early expulsion or elimination of an immature foetus from the mother's womb.

Nancy (1987:5) described abortion in a medical term as, "the expulsion from a uterus of the product of conception before it is viable". He went further to stress that in the English law, viability is pegged at twenty eight weeks and achievement recorded in pediatrics care makes it possible for babies who are born before this period of survival. Umeasor (2006:14) defined abortion as the bringing of pregnancy to an end by deliberately (or otherwise) and prematurely detaching the foetus from its natural habits. In his explanation he believes that every intervention, surgical or pharmaceutical, induced or otherwise, which interrupts pregnancy, constitutes abortion.

### **Types of Abortion**

There are a number of medical and legal turns for the different types of abortion, both intentional and unintentional. Some of these types of abortion are listed below: complete abortion, criminal or illegal abortion, early abortion, habitual abortion, incomplete abortion,

induced abortion, inevitable abortion, infected abortion, missed abortion, septic abortion, spontaneous abortion, therapeutic abortion and threatened abortion (Brain 2001:3). Some of these types of abortion are going to be given brief explanation for clarity.

1. Complete Abortion: This is done when all the contents of the uterus (i.e the pre-born child and the placenta) have been expelled from uterus.
2. Criminal Abortion: Another name for this type of abortion is called illegal abortion. It is called illegal abortion because it is an abortion that is committed outside the parameters set by law. For example an abortionist commits a criminal abortion if he aborts a minor without her parent's permission in a state with parental consent laws or if he commits a D & C abortion on a woman at 28 weeks gestation for convenience purpose in a state where abortion are banned except in the case of severe fetal anomalies.
3. Abortion: This is the type of abortion committed within . Early the first twelve weeks of pregnancy.
4. Habitual Abortion: This can also be called miscarriage. This can occur in three or more consecutive pregnancies. Majority of the miscarriages are caused by women who suffer habitual abortion.
5. Incomplete Abortion: This is a situation in which parts of the pre-born child or the placenta remains within the uterus of the mother.
6. induced Abortion: This is where the foetus is removed from the womb before it becomes viable. It can also be said to be the termination of unwanted pregnancy through human intervention. It is an intentional act. It could be through the use of mechanical or chemical substance.
7. Inevitable Abortion: It is caused by vaginal bleeding and cervical dilation that indicates an impending miscarriage that cannot be prevented and follows a condition threatened by abortion.
8. Infected Abortion: This is an abortion caused by an infection of the uterus or the genital tract, such as that caused by ' venereal diseases.
9. Spontaneous Abortion: This occurs when the embryo or foetus is lost due to natural cause before the 20<sup>th</sup> week of gestation. It can also be called miscarriage.
10. Therapeutic Abortion: This can be called legal abortion. This type of abortion is done through human intervention for the purpose of curing the mother. A pregnant woman who has cancer of the womb can be cured but abortion should be carried out before the treatment.
11. Threatened Abortion: this is a condition that includes vaginal bleeding but not cervical dilation and may or may not lead to a condition of inevitable abortion. (Brain: 2001:13-14).

### **The Spate of Abortion in the Nigerian Society**

According to Udo (1993:148) the satisfaction' of sexual desire, which seems so urgent and pressing a need, and often leaves in its wake an undesirable offspring may lead to abortion. He continued by expressing that the rate of abortion procured in our society today bears eloquent testimony, both to the ease with which human beings reproduce, and society's readiness to help them effect and perfect this nefarious act. The rate at which abortion is being procured in Nigeria is very alarming. This is caused by the moral degeneration and ethical misconduct in our society today. The involvement of our youths in some foreign ways of life that have grave moral consequences has in an immense manner caused more harm than good

to the society. People go about to live their life the way they want it without considering the moral implications of it to the society.

The parents on their own side had refused to train their children by not teaching them the right things early enough. Children go ahead to engage in illicit relationship that may probably lead to an unwanted pregnancy. As a matter of fact and urgency they engage in abortion as the fastest and simplest way to get them out of this shameful act. In some families where a young girl has an unwanted pregnancy, the parents instead of allowing them to give birth to such innocent children, personally take them to clinics where these children will be aborted. Their reason is that they want to protect the future of the young lady thereby terminating the life of another.

### **Christian religious attitude towards abortion**

The, tradition of the church has always held that human Life must be protected and favoured from the beginning, just as at the various stages of its development. The Bible made it categorically clear in (Ex. 20:13) that we should not kill. Human life is very precious. It is infused by God and life can only be taken by Him. The life of a man remains under God's protection and it tampered with, the blood will forever cry out to Him. This is because man was made in the image of God and He will demand an account of man's stewardship on earth.

Christians consider those women who take medicine to procure abortion as murderers. They condemn in totality the killers of children including those living in their mother's womb, ere they are already in the care of divine providence. Christianity believes that any means or method used to prevent birth is murder whether it is the one already born or the one at the early stage (Sacred Congregation one for the Doctrine of Faith: 1974:2).

Furthermore, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith emphasized that "the fathers of the church, her pastors and her doctors who taught the same doctrine-the various opinions on the infusion of spiritual soul did not introduce any doubt about the illegality of abortions". In their explanation, they believed that procured abortion, even during the first days, was objectively a grave fault. The condemnation was unanimous by the church. Abortion is a grave sin in the church and anybody who causes abortion is a murderer. Udo (1993:148) posits that "abortion is unjust and unspeakably cruel. It is a challenge to both the sovereignty of God life".

With these scriptural references concerning abortion below, we can easily know the stand of the church on and sanctity of human life.

- i. Human life begins in the womb (Genesis 16:11). Here is it the contention of some people that the foetus in the womb of a woman has human life which is an independent life altogether. The church's position here is very glaring due to the fact that they have respect for life, which is at the same time human and Christian.
- ii. Human life begins at fertilization (Psalms 51:5, Luke 1:34-35 and Mathew 1:18-20). Some scholars according to Ekwutosi (2008:47), are inclined to the opinion that at the very moment of conception the fertilized ovum is animated by human soul and therefore, it is a human being.
- iii. God knows us even before we were conceived (Judges 13:3-7, Jeremiah 1:4-5 and Ephesians 1:4. In Jeremiah 1:4, God say, I chose you before I gave you life and before I

- gave you life and before you were born I selected you to be prophet of the nation. This is to say that God knows us even before we were born and has plans for us.
- iv. Punishment for causing a spontaneous abortion (Exodus 21:22-25 and Numbers 35:22-34). The Bible is against any type of abortion for any reason. The punishment for causing spontaneous abortion is the attraction of God's wrath.
  - v. The slaying of the innocent is a Heinous crime (Deuteronomy 27:25, Luke 17:2, Jeremiah 7:6). Killing of an innocent person is a sin and the church frowns at it.
  - vi. Abortion for rape and incest is never allowed — (Genesis 19:36- 38 and 50:20, Romans 8:28, Gen 38, Ruth 4:18-22). Human life is sacred and should not be tampered with for any reason. Whether life comes through rape or not, it came from God and should be allowed to live.
  - vii. . Abortion for birth defects is never allowed (John 9:1-3, Acts 17:25-29). Life of anybody should be protected whether the person is normal or has a defect. This is because God created all of them and knows his reasons for allowing such.
  - viii. Abortion to conceal fornication or adultery is never allowed: (Genesis 28, Genesis 16:2-4). Fornication sometimes leads to pregnancy, so anybody fornicating should expect a child and be ready to nurture him when he comes.
  - ix. Children must not be sacrificed for any reason (Ezekiel 16:20- 21, Jeremiah 32:35, Exodus 1:15-17). If adultery is committed and it results to pregnancy, abortion should not be an love. The pre-born child should not be sacrificed to avoid shame.
  - x. Children are gifts from God Genesis\_ 30.1 and psalms 127:3- 9), children are blessings from God and we should not prevent God's blessing from reaching us.

The Catholic Church, which commands the largest single followership, maintains a high public profile on the issue of abortion, through many of their co-coordinated activities against it. It has urged its members, in public and private actions to defend what is morally right by defending the innocent life of the baby inside the mother's womb. The church teaches that it is highly unethical to deny, and not to defend the right to life of helpless foetus. Christians believe that abortion is not only the expulsion of the immature foetus, but is also the killing of the same foetus in any way and at any time from the moment of conception.

The Church should help in constructing motherless baby home. They should also provide for such children by visiting and supporting them whenever the need arises. They should also enjoin their votaries to desist from abortion and take any unwanted baby to motherless baby home where they will be cared for. The church should also support the use of contraceptives, which is not abortifacient in nature to reduce the risk of having an unwanted pregnancy. This will to some extent reduce the urge for abortion and also reduce the problem of an unwanted pregnancy, which is the reason for abortion.

### **The way forward**

In this work we can see that abortion is bad and should be discouraged. Nobody has the right to take away life of a human being, created in the image and likeness of God. Instead of procuring abortion, we should try to avoid fornication or adultery, which is the cause of abortion. We should try to abstain from sex until we marry. For couples that want to engage in family planning, any action that will lead to abortion must be deliberately avoided. If it

happens that pregnancy occurs, they should try and give birth to such child and give him to motherless baby home if they can't nurture him.

We should adhere to our religious teaching which abhors anything that will lead to pregnancy let alone abortion. in that President, Governor, Bishop, scientist or Administrator. Such act may lead to a set back to the dynamic and progressive nature of society. Therefore, moralist priests, theologians, physician as well as the average individual should fight against abortion to reduce its procurement drastically. This is nobody can create human being expect God, even the hair on the human head cannot be created by man. People should be advised and encouraged to give birth to any pregnancy conceived.

### **Conclusion**

Abortion is murder and any authentic Christian must both avoid and condemn it. Divine law and natural reason, therefore, exclude all right to the direct killing of an innocent man. However, if the reasons given to justify an abortion were always manifestly evil and valueless the problem would be so dramatic.

This great difficulty if not the problem of health, sometimes it may be the problem of the life and death of the mother while sometimes it may be the problem of the child being abnormal or retarded. This stand is that none of these reasons can ever objectively confer the right to dispose of another's life, even when that life is only beginning. A child's life cannot be substituted by another life whether the person is his father or mother. This is because God has His purpose for our life. He knows when a life should begin and when another should end. So we have no right to usurp God's right of taking another person's life because we cannot afford to give anybody life. Nobody has the right to take the life of another because life is sacred. God gives life and only he can take life.

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