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THE MORALITY OF ABORTION AND THE HUMAN CONSCIENCE

1 GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Abortion is commonly practiced throughout most of the world over and has been practiced since long before the beginning of recorded history. “Greek and Roman cultures practiced abortion and eugenics. The weakest members of these societies were left on exposure walls to the wolves or worse.”¹The history of Abortion spread through a long spell of time beginning from the pagan world. With this history, it is easy to realize that even with its occurrence it was not actually acceptable amongst the people. One of the greatest sign demonstrating the unacceptability of Abortion among the Greeks was the emergency of the Hippocratic Oath which was composed between the years 460-357 B.C. This Oath included a definite promise not to perform abortion. The Oath states:

“I swear by Apollo Physician, by Asclepius, by Health, by Panacea, and by all the gods and goddesses, making them my witnesses, that I will carry out, according to my ability and judgment, this oath and this indenture— I will use treatment to help the sick according to my ability and judgment, but never with a view to injury and wrong-doing. Neither will I administer a poison to anybody when asked to do so, nor will I suggest such a course. Similarly, I will not give to a woman a pessary to cause abortion.”²

This Oath which was developed from the Greek society continues to be applied even today. In this Oath, every Medical practitioner promises to protect life both in the world and in the womb. Although nobody knows whether all practitioners subscribe to it, but the fact is that this Oath is still taught and taken by medical doctors before they enter into praxis.

From the subject of abortion arises passion and controversy in the contemporary society. Abortion raises fundamental questions about human existence, such as when life begins and what it is that makes us human.

¹Thomas Nelson. 2007. Ten Truths about Abortion. Pg.7, Florida: Coral Ridge Ministries. (In my work, I have used A.P.A. Quotation Style).

²Michael J. Gorman. 1982. Abortion and the Early Church: Christian, Jewish & Pagan Attitudes in the Greco-Roman World. Pg. 20, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers.

Abortion therefore has become a source of many contentious issues such as the right of women to control their own bodies, the nature of the State's duty to protect the unborn, the tension between secular and religious views of human life and the individual and society, the rights of spouses and parents to be involved in the abortion decision, and the conflicting rights of the mother and the fetus. Central to the subject of abortion is one of the most highly controversial social issues of all namely sexuality. Any discussion of abortion almost leads to a consideration of how pregnancy came about and ways that the pregnancy could have been prevented by avoiding irresponsible sexual behavior. As the twenty first century continues to unfold, these questions and issues continue to occupy a significant place in public discourse around the world. In the developed countries, it is already determined. But in the developing world it is still a taboo. This does not mean that abortion doesn't take place, but rather it has remained a subject of murmuring. This means that abortion takes place under the cover of darkness or in private clinics which are illegal.

Beginning of Human life: From time immemorial, various disciplines have attempted to define the beginning of Human life. Such disciplines include: Philosophy, Theology, Science etc. As a result therefore, human life has been defined appropriately as "self-directed, integrated organism that possesses the genetic endowment of the species Homo sapiens who has the inherent active biological disposition (active capacity and potency) for ordered growth and development in a continuous and seamless maturation, communication and relationship with God, other human beings and the environment."³ Looked at critically, the definition stated above is all inclusive. It carries elements from different disciplines. Henceforth, human being despite the expression of different and more mature secondary characteristics has genetic and ontological identity and continuity throughout all stages of development from conception to death. Therefore, one can argue that "Human embryo is not a potential human being, but rather a human being with potential."⁴ This means that human embryo has human genetic composition with the capability of becoming a mature human being given the opportunity.

³C.M.D. A. House of Representative. 2006 "Beginning of Human Life Ethics Statements" Irvine; California: Retrieved on 20th October 2015 from: www.cmda.org/resources/publication/beginning-of-human-life-ethics-statement.

⁴Ibid.

From biological position, the life of human being begins at the moment of fertilization. Conception is a term used for the beginning of biological human life and has been variously defined in the medical and scientific literature as the moment of fertilization. Scientifically and biblically, “conception is appropriately defined as fertilization. This means the activation of an egg by the penetration of a sperm triggering the transition to active organismal existence.”⁵

From the theological perspective, human life originates from God. Therefore, procreation is a gift of God. God’s mandate to Adam and Eve to multiply and fill the Earth as stated in Genesis 1:27-28 signifies that God ordained means of filling the earth with human beings made in his image and likeness. From fertilization on, God relates to the unborn in a personal manner. Between fertilization and birth which are linked in biblical language, God continues his activity in the unfolding and continuous development of the fetus.

Closely related to the theological approach of the meaning of human life is the philosophical approach. Philosophy and theology are two disciplines that are closely intertwined. Aristotle representing the philosophers was of the opinion that, “the rational soul is infused into the body only after the fetus has reached a certain stage of development. Until then, the embryo is solely animated by a life of vegetative and animal nature. The time of animation by spiritual soul was generally set at approximately six weeks after conception (40 days for boys and 80 days for girls).”⁶ Guided by medical insights, “the Theologians have come up with theory of immediate animation at the moment of conception.”⁷ The verification of which position is true between philosophical approach and theological approach does not serve any purpose. What is important is to understand that in either case, we are dealing with a greater good in this context which is human life. Therefore, we must learn to treat a fertilized ovum as a human person in all stages of development. From conception to birth, there are different levels of life in the human being. In some of these levels, it has been argued by both philosophers and theologians that life is lost naturally. While this is possible, it does not permit the notion that at this level, life is less important.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Karl Heinz Peschke. 1996. *Christian Ethics: Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican II*. Vol. II. Special Moral Theology- Newly revised Edition. Pg. 335, Bangalore: Theological Publications.

⁷Ibid. Pg. 335.

St. Augustine of Hippo and St. Thomas Aquinas held the view that fetuses were animated thus promoting the view held before by Aristotle that ensoulment took place on the fortieth day after conception. However, they both held that abortion was gravely wrong.

Looking entirely the process of development from fertilization to birth of a child, we can hardly identify a certain point which we can call a non-human and the other human. The fact is that at the initial stage the fertilized egg or zygote so to speak contains human cells and given the chance it will develop to its full potential- namely full human person.

Bearing in mind that life is a subject of interest from different discipline, the act of destruction of life has therefore attracted scientists, philosophers and theologians. The scientists base themselves on laboratory verification and research. The philosophers base themselves on ideas and arguments. While the Theologians base themselves on beliefs and faith on the teaching of the word of God.

To the level at which abortion has been handled by the religion many people have been tempted to think that abortion is purely a religious issue. But that is not the case. "It is a scientific issue, and specifically a biological issue. The real authorities on life are biologists."⁸ These therefore are the proper people to be consulted on when life begins. When life begins should not be a matter of speculation. It is provable in the scientific laboratory. John Ankerberg and John Weldon in their book entitled 'When does life begin' argues that, "This is a matter of scientific fact, not a matter of philosophy or speculation, opinion, conjecture or theory. It is a matter of simple truth determined by scientific observation and analysis. Today, the evidence that human life begins at conception is a scientific fact so well documented that no intellectually honest and informed scientist or physician can dare to deny it."⁹ In a book entitled 'The Ten Truths About Abortion' it is written, "The developing fetus is not sub-human species with different genetic composition.....The embryo is alive, human and unique in the special environmental support required for that stage of human development."¹⁰ Therefore, Birth is not the start of a new human life, but just a change of baby's environment. A new life actually begins in the womb, when a single sperm

⁸John Ankerberg & John Weldon.1989. When does Life begin? Pg. 5, Tennessee: Wolgemuth& Hyatt Publishers.

⁹Ibid. Pg. 5.

¹⁰Thomas Nelson. 2007. Ten Truths about Abortion. Pg. 13, Florida: Coral Ridge Ministries.

cell from the father fertilizes an egg from the mother. At fertilization, a new, unique, living human individual comes into existence. He or she is neither part of the mother any more than he or she is part of the father. At conception, all the hereditary characteristics of the new human being are established including color of eyes, gender and built. Nothing more is needed to determine the development of the embryo. All the information about how the baby is to grow and develop is contained in the original single cell at conception. Nothing is added after conception except oxygen and nutrients, the same essentials that are needed to sustain human life after birth. The subject of abortion continues to embattle and confuse the 'liberals' and the 'conservatives' alike. Many 'liberal' argue that it is not rational to expect a woman to die so that her unborn child may live. Consequently, abortion should be permitted basically on demand. The 'liberals' group fights for the freedom of the women. They argue that women have the freedom and the right to do what they want with their own bodies and nobody should dictate to them.

In contradistinction, the 'conservative' group argues that abortion can never be rationalized or permitted, as it is fundamentally immoral to kill an unborn child who is an innocent human being, no matter what the circumstances or the law – regardless of the woman's health, life, incest or rape.

The both positions held by the conservatives and the liberals are important in the formation of human conscience. Every person must learn to form his conscience in matters of life. Different situation dictates on how one should act. I would personally disagree with the liberal position which calls for abortion on demand. Life is precious and must be handled with a certain amount of dignity. If people should be allowed to do whatever they so wish with their lives, then the sanctity of life would not be achieved. However, there are some particular situations that call for leniency and understanding.

When talking of sanctity of life, I mean life as sacred. Life is seen to be sacred in reference to its origin. Life originates from God and therefore it is sacred. The bible talks of human being as having been created in the image and likeness of God. The phrase is a recent development in the moral and political debates concerning a wide range of issues in bioethical field such as: abortion, euthanasia, cloning, genetic engineering and etc. For us as Christians, this phrase has been used to refer not only

those bioethical issues, but all those moral problems that confront human beings, from abortion to poverty, from war to death penalty, from child abuse to destruction of environment. In other words, all these practices violate the intrinsic value of human life either directly or indirectly.

Writing to 'The Center of Bioethics & Human Dignity' an unknown author attempts to define the sanctity of life as follows: "The concept of the sanctity of life is the belief that all human beings, at any and every stage of life, in any and every state of consciousness or self-awareness, of any and every race, color, ethnicity, level of intelligence, religion, language, gender, character, behavior, physical ability/disability, potential, class, social Status, etc., of any and every particular quality of relationship to the viewing subject, are to be perceived as persons of equal and immeasurable worth and of inviolable dignity and therefore must be treated in a manner commensurate with this moral status."¹¹

From above definition, one realizes that sanctity of life is a moral conviction on how human beings are perceived and treated. The element of universality is also clearly visible. This means that all human beings are the same and there is a moral obligation to be treated as human beings. All human beings are included in a vision of their immeasurable worth and inviolable dignity.

This definition is in line with the conservatives whose main mission is the preservation of human life both for the mother and the child. The reason as to why conservatives defend life with all that it takes is because of the conviction that life is sacred and it originates from God. It is true to argue that life is sacred and its author is God.

However, there are some particular cases that are complex to deal with. The church which is the greatest representative of the conservative is of the opinion that the intention of the act must never be primarily to destroy the life in the womb of the mother. The death of the baby is permitted to occur on the process of treatment of the mother, but is not intended.

The phrase sanctity of life is used in both religious and non-religious circles. In religion, "this essentially religious concept has its basis in the notion that life is a gift from God. An additional factor from Christianity is the belief that humans are created in the

¹¹David Gushee P. 15th-June-2006. "The Sanctity of Life" The Center for Bioethics & Human Dignity. Pg. 1-2, Deerfield: Trinity International University. Retrieved on 19th-July-2015 from: www.cbhd.org/print/content/sanctity-life.

image of God. In non-religious circles, the term is used to indicate the utmost respect with which human life should be treated.”¹²

In the introductory part of my work, I will attempt to lay down the background information of my study by giving the statement of the problem and stating the research question. In addition, I will point out the purpose of my study. Finally, I will conclude this chapter by seeking to state clearly the objective of my research as the driving force.

In the second chapter of my work, in the first part I will strive to define the term abortion. This will be followed by the different types of abortion, the reasons that leads to making this very difficult decision. Thereafter I will account for both the short term effects of abortion and long term effects of abortion.

In the second part of the second chapter, I will endeavor to give an analysis of the church’s teaching on abortion; the historical development; the church tradition; the latest church teachings on the subject such us *Gaudium et Spes*, *Evangelium Vitae*, and the Catechism of the Catholic Church. In addition, I intend to look at the difficult situations that may create the permissibility of abortion which so to speak must be regulated by the principle of Double-effect.

In the third chapter of my work, I shall investigate on human conscience as a determining factor that enables man to make a judgment upon his own action. Human conscience helps every individual person to be able to distinguish between good and bad and make a choice. In this area, I will focus on St. Augustine as a representative of early Christian Theologians, St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure as representatives of the great medieval scholastic thinkers and their approach to conscience. In this section, I will conclude by paying a glimpse at Pope Benedict XVI as one of the greatest thinker of the twentieth and twenty first centuries whose approach to conscience borrows greatly from the medieval account of conscience.

In my fourth chapter, I will focus on the relationship between abortion and human conscience. To understand the relationship between abortion and conscience, one needs to look at different positions taken by different groups in so far as abortion is concerned. First, the conservatives position on abortion and liberals position on

¹²Heike Baranzke. 2012. “Sanctity of Life- A Bioethical Principle for a Right to life?” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, Vol. 15. No. 3; Pg. 297: Retrieved on 22nd-Sept-2015 from: www.moraltheologie.uni-wuppertal.de/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/ETMP-15-2012-sanctity-of-life-Baranke-pdf.

abortion. I will also interrogate on abortion and seek to establish whether abortion is a human act or act of man. How does conscience guide the human action? Finally, I will seek to prove that abortion as a human act is a violation of human conscience.

The fifth chapter attempts to look at whether abortion is justifiable in relationship to human conscience. Here, I will compare the justifying factors put forward by the liberals as opposed to the conservatives who seek at all time to counteract this position taken by the liberals. Under the conservatives who fight for the preservation of pro-life position, I will look at the principle of double effects which is accepted by the Catholic Church. The principle of double effect is basically used as a tool within ethical decision-making.

Abortion is a reality which we have to do with. Although we take different positions and have different opinions, whether as the liberals or as the conservatives, abortion continues to blossom. It takes place not only in those countries where abortion is legalized, but also where abortion is considered to be a criminal offence. Taking an example of my own country Kenya where abortion is not allowed, it is known all over the country that abortion continues to prosper like any other business.

As a reaction to this practice, the next chapter intends to explore on the practice of forgiveness. Traditionally, abortion has been there for quite a long time. How are those who committed abortion accepted in the church in the early days? Do we still need to continue with such practice today? What does the church say about abortion today? What are the criteria of penance for those who have committed abortion in the church at this particular time?

Finally in the seventh chapter, I will conclude my work with giving proposal action plan for the possible help for the mothers who are already involved in abortion. Christ says in his Gospel, "I came for the sinner and not for the righteous." This means that even those who have committed abortion, they should be rehabilitated in the society. They need re-assurance that God is love and he loves them regardless of their actions.

None of us is righteous and therefore nobody should be the first one to throw a stone. We all depend on the mercy of God for salvation.

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

It has been my desire to undertake a study on abortion, bearing in mind that abortion as such is like a taboo. No one in the society discusses this subject freely and openly.

By merely mentioning the word abortion to a group of people, one notices a change in tone and an expression of fear in the faces of the people who are there. The big question is whether all of us have become guilty either by commission or by omission? This attitude in my view is the driving force behind this work and hope that by the end of the day, I will be able to arrive at a theoretical insight if not a practical solution.

Abortion is a poorly understood, easily mixed up and abused subject matter, yet it is one of the subject that has attracted a great deal of public debate, both in political, social and religious circles.

Researching on the Morality of Abortion and Human Conscience on my part has been necessitated, partly due to the incidences of induced abortion and complications from unsafe abortion around the world and in particular my personal encounter with the victims of abortion as a pastor of the soul in my pastoral life in Kenya.

In my own country Kenya, abortion is illegal unless with a recommendation of a medical practitioner in a situation where the life of the mother is at stake. The Kenyan constitution states, “The life of a person begins at conception. A person shall not be deprived of life intentionally, except to the extent authorized by this constitution or other written law and finally, abortion is not permitted unless, in the opinion of trained health profession, there is need for emergency treatment, or the life or health of the mother is in danger, or if permitted by any other written law.”¹³The constitution of Kenya recognizes the very fact that life begins at conception. As a result of this belief, life must be protected from the very beginning. Although there are some situations that can lead to deprivation of life at an early stage, this is only permissible under the instructions of a health professional when a need for emergency treatment dictates. This is only possible in a situation which endangers the life of the mother. However, legalized or not legalized abortion continues to gain momentum in every culture. Sometime back, it was unheard of to hear that so and so had committed abortion. But today, it is happening all over. The culture of preservation of life seems to be replaced by the culture of death at a very high speed. It is important to know that abortion is evil. This is because through abortion, life is destroyed and this is against the will of God from whom all life finds its origin and sustenance. So making

¹³The Constitution of the Republic of Kenya: Revised Edition 2010; Chapter 4: The Bill of Rights: Part 2. “Rights and Fundamental Freedoms- Right to Life” Retrieved on 18th-August-2015 from: www.kenyalaw.org:8181/exist/kenyalex/actview.xql?actid=const2010.

abortion legal does not mean that it becomes good. The reason for my argument is that abortion is inherently an evil act because it is opposed to the concept of life and as it will be pointed out later, life begins from the very moment a female seed and a male seed meet and a new being comes to existence which is neither the mother's seed alone nor the father's seed alone. This is when personal individual life of a human being begins.

1.2 STATEMENTS OF THE PROBLEM AND RESEARCH QUESTION

With the evolving moral standards of the society, abortion seems to be getting more and more justified. But considering the modern societal ethics and values, killing that occur in abortion is morally wrong. This should not be construed to mean that every killing is wrong because morally, there are some killings that are morally justified. For example in the case of self-defense or in case of death penalty of a notorious criminal or killing that happens in a situation of war. In this case, I am referring to the killing of the unborn Fetuses. Henceforth, abortion as a practice of terminating unborn fetuses should be completely outlawed for the reason that it contradicts the concept of life. God is the origin of life. Anything that contradicts the concept of life is therefore in opposition to God from whom life finds its origin and sustenance

According to Christian belief, human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. They are able to ask for the last reasons for the existence of the world and of life as such. Human beings are inquisitive in nature and always desire to find explanation to each and every reality. This search for answers in all the lingering questions about human life is the driving force that tempts man to put to risk even his own life.

It is worthy pointing out that man, in all his actions is geared towards his creator whether consciously or sub-consciously. In the heart of every human being, there lies a faculty that enables him/her not only to understand his or her action, but also to distinguish between his action as either good or bad. God created man with full knowledge to be able to distinguish between good and bad and the freedom to be able to make choice. That is why in the debate about abortion, we encounter the conservatives and the liberals. Recent development has come to refer the conservatives as the Pro-life and the liberals as the pro-choice. However, the pro-life

proponents and pro-choice proponents are later developments. But the message and the spirit is the same.

Following the above assertions, I have attempted to come up with two Research Questions. These research questions are basically meant to act as guiding principles and on the course of writing they should be responded to along the way. The research questions include the following:

- 1) What is the moral evaluation of abortion in relation to the understanding of when life begins? The implication in this context is the relationship between ‘the status of life questions and moral questions.’
- 2) What role does human conscience play in understanding the moral weight of abortion as a human act? This implies judgment in individual morality in relation to objective reasoning.

1.3 THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:

- 1) To attempt an in-depth clarity of what abortion entails in the life of contemporary men and women.
- 2) To establish the morality of abortion as a human act and the role of conscience in providing guidance to humanity.
- 3) To reaffirm the traditional unchanging position of ecclesial community about the subject matter.
- 4) To advance the theory of mercy for the victims. Seeking to integrate the concept of truth in a society that has been indoctrinated by falsehood in order to help it out of extinction.

1.4 OBJECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH:

When a man sets on a journey, he sets out determined to achieve a particular result. Nobody does something for the sake of doing it. If I set out to travel to Nairobi, I will do that knowing what I am going there for. May be to visit my parents, my brothers and sister and also to visit my friends. So, my journey will be geared towards my objective. And I will only feel contented when my objective has been achieved. In the same way, when someone sits down to write a book, he does so with an objective. For example to pass a particular message or even to educate a certain group

of people that is in need of help. The objective of my research is therefore geared towards an aim. In clear terms, the objective of a particular research attempt to define the finality or the final purpose of the whole work. What one wishes to achieve at the end of the tedious work. Without having an objective, there is no reason for writing because it will be like wasting time.

In this research, the following are my objectives:

- 1) Seeking to shed more light to the meaning of abortion as a contradiction to the concept of human life.
- 2) Attempting to disclose both the traditional and contemporary teachings of the church on the reality of abortion.
- 3) Defining what the meaning of human conscience as differentiating faculty between man as a higher animal and other animals. It is through the faculty of conscience that we are able to distinguish between the good and the bad. Then the conscience helps us to make a choice of that which is good and leave that which is evil.
- 4) The role of conscience is pivotal to taking good decisions. I therefore intend to demonstrate how with the help of conscience man can be guided to make the right choices which will lead to showing respect to the gift of life.
- 5) Finally, I will try to come out with recommendations based on the findings on the best way forward:
 - a) How can we be able to minimize the rate at which abortion is being carried out in the contemporary society
 - b) How can we be able to rehabilitate those who have gone through abortion?
 - c) I will conclude by showing that the love of God surpasses everything. It does not matter what one has done. Love means being able to forgive the unforgivable. God does not look at the sin committed, but rather he looks at the sinner who is ready to convert.

2 CONCEPT ANALYSIS AND DELINIATION

2.1. THE MEANING OF ABORTION

Generally, “the word abortion comes from Latin word ‘Aboriri’ which means ‘to perish’ and may be defined as ‘the loss of fetal life.’ In it, the fetus dies while yet within the generative organs of the mother, or it is ejected or extracted from them before it is viable, that means before it is sufficiently developed to continue its life by itself. The term Abortion is also applied, though less properly to cases in which the child becomes viable, but does not survive the delivery.”¹⁴ In my work, I do not intend to move in this direction, but rather to look at abortion in its widest meaning and treat of abortion as occurring at any time between conception and safe delivery.

In distinction from abortion is “miscarriage” which means an end to life of the fetus either dead or alive before the normal gestation period. In most cases, miscarriage comes as a result of particular causes such as illness, infections, accident etc. The difference between abortion and miscarriage is that abortion is a deliberate act while miscarriage is an act of man. Morally speaking, an act of man is like a reflex action because man has no control over it. It is never premeditated or intended. It comes on its own. In other words, man has got no control over it.

Looked at from conservative viewpoint, abortion can be described as an intentional interruption of the developmental process at any time from conception to birth. In this description the emphasis lies in the word “intentional.” The act is premeditated and actualized in accordance to the wish of the doer with full knowledge and freedom of choice. From this perspective therefore, the conservatives considers abortion as sinful act and must never be acceptable in the society.

2.2 THE TYPES OF ABORTION:

The definition of abortion depends on the personal views of the individual persons or groups offering an explanation on this controversial subject. For those who feel that abortion should be a matter of personal choice, abortion is nothing more than the elimination of an unwanted pregnancy. To those who believe that legalized

¹⁴C. Coppen. 1907. “Abortion” The Catholic Encyclopedia- New Advent. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved on 17th-October-2015 From: www.newadvent.org/cathen/01046b.htm.

termination of a pregnancy should be banned, abortion is seen as deliberate murder of precious human life.

With this understanding of abortion in mind, it is therefore necessary to give a deeper analysis of the concept by studying the types of abortion, the reasons that lead to abortion and the side effects of abortion.

The following are the types of abortion:

Spontaneous Abortion: Spontaneous abortion refers to naturally occurring termination of a pregnancy. In another language it is called Miscarriage. Spontaneous abortion refers to a pregnancy that ends spontaneously before the fetus has reached a viable gestation age. What makes spontaneous abortion very unique and different is that it is unintended. It is beyond human control.

Induced Abortion: Induced abortion is an abortion that is brought about intentionally. It is also called artificial or therapeutic abortion. The induced abortion is divided into two categories namely medical abortion and surgical abortion:

1) Medical Abortion:

Medical abortion is a term applied to an abortion brought about by medication taken to induce it. "A medicine is used to cause abortion."¹⁵ Medical abortion is normally used within the first trimester of gestation period. Although there is no abortion that is good, medical abortion can provide some measure of safety in that they eliminate the risk of injury to women's cervix or uterus from surgical instruments.

Medical abortion falls into the following types:

i) **RU-486 (Mifepristone):**

This is also called the Abortion Pills. This drug interferes with levels of progesterone, a hormone that is produced by a pregnant mothers and it keeps the uterus lining thick to enable the implantation of the fetus in the walls of the uterus. "RU486 blocks progesterone."¹⁶ As a result, the uterus lining becomes thin and therefore the pregnancy detaches itself. The woman use prescribed progesterone and then returns to the clinic two days later to receive a Prostaglandin drug that induces labor and expels the dead fetus. The drug is unsafe for women.

¹⁵Tyne Traverson. 2015. Exploring Your Unplanned Pregnancy: Single motherhood, Adoption and Abortion. Pg. 30, Atlanta: Cairde, karuna & Hedd Publishing.

¹⁶Ibid. Pg. 30.

ii) Methotrexate and Misoprostol:

Methotrexate is used for Cancer treatment. In chemical abortion these two drugs are used in combination. Methotrexate causes cells in the placenta to die. Misoprostol empties the fetus from the uterus to contract and push the fetus out. Methotrexate is a drug used in chemotherapy and has the Potential for serious liver toxicity. "After taking methotrexate for several days, the pregnant woman takes misoprostol to cause the uterus to contract with the same results as with mifepristone."¹⁷

iii) Morning after Pill:

Up to seventy two hours after intercourse, a woman is administered large doses of birth control pill to postpone ovulation and therefore preventing an embryo from coming into existence. If the embryo is already in existence, then the drug prevents it from attaching in the uterus wall. The process of medical abortion involves bleeding, often like a heavy menstrual period which must be differentiated from hemorrhage. Regardless of amount of tissues passed, the woman must see a doctor for evaluation to make sure the process is complete.

Medical abortion procedures are most effective only in the first seven weeks of pregnancy. Thereafter, it becomes suicidal to use medical abortion as a method of carrying out abortion. It doesn't really work as we are told that, "about one in twenty women who have medical abortion find that it is not effective in terminating pregnancy, and then go on to have a surgical abortion."¹⁸ Some begin with medical abortion and end with surgical abortion. This is because the medical abortion could not be able to achieve the intended goal.

2) Surgical Abortion:

Surgical abortion is a medical procedure that involves minor outpatient surgery. Surgical abortion takes place only after seven weeks after conception. Before then, the embryo is too small to be found. As a result, "the surgical tool would miss the embryo and the pregnancy would continue unaffected."¹⁹ One is not 'put under' for this procedure. So, the risks often associated with anesthesia are not associated with this procedure. One is not sedated and given painkillers during the procedure, but the

¹⁷Ibid. Pg. 30.

¹⁸Ibid. Pg. 30.

¹⁹Ibid. Pg. 30.

woman remains awake and conscious during the abortion. The following are methods used under surgical abortion:

- i. "Manual Vacuum Aspiration"²⁰ (Within seven weeks after last Menstrual period):

Dilators are used to stretch the cervical muscle until the opening is wide enough for abortion instruments to pass through the Uterus. A hand-held syringe is attached to tubing which is inserted into the uterus. The embryo is suctioned out.

- ii. Suction Curettage (After fourteen weeks from the last Menstrual Period):

The abortionist uses a dilator or laminaria to open the cervix. Laminaria are thin sticks from Kelp species that are inserted hours before the procedure and allowed to slowly absorb water and expand, thereby dilating the cervix. In a layman's language, "Laminaria is seaweed which is inserted dry and which then expands as it is exposed to body moisture causing the cervix to expand."²¹ Once the cervix is dilated, the abortionist inserts tubing into the uterus and attaches the tubing to a suction machine. Suction pulls apart the fetus' body and pulls it out of the uterus. After the suction, the doctor and the nurses must reassemble the fetus dismembered parts to ensure they have all the pieces.

- iii. Dilation and curettage (Within first twelve weeks):

The cervix is dilated. A suction device is placed in the uterine cavity to remove the fetus and placenta. Then, the abortionist inserts the curette to scrap any remaining fetal parts and the placenta out of the uterus.

- iv. Dilation and evacuation (Within thirteen to twenty four weeks after last menstrual period):

Between the eleventh and the twelfth weeks of pregnancy the fetus literally doubles in size. Soft cartilage hardens into bones at sixteen weeks, making fetus too large and strong to pass through a suction tube. Dilation and evacuation procedure begins by inserting laminaria a day or two before the abortion, opening the cervix wide to accommodate the larger fetal size. The abortion then both tears and cuts the fetus and uses the vacuum machine to extract its remains. Because the skull is too large to be suctioned through the tube, it must be crushed by forceps for removal. Pieces must be

²⁰Ibid. Pg. 31.

²¹Joy Gardner. 1986. A difficult Decision: A Compassionate Book about Abortion. Pg. 64, New York: The Crossing Press Trumansburg.

extracted very carefully because the jagged, sharp pieces of the broken skull could easily cut the cervix.

v. Saline (After fifteen weeks of pregnancy):

“Saline is water that has a specific amount of salt in it.”²²This procedure is conducted in the same manner as amniocentesis. A long needle is inserted into the woman’s abdomen, directly into amniotic sack. In a saline abortion, amniotic fluid is removed from the woman and replaced by a strong saline solution. This solution suffocates the fetus. It may struggle and it may even have convulsions. The saline also burns off the fetus’ outer layer of the skin. Saline abortion can take one to six hours before the fetus is no longer viable. The woman begins labor after twelve hours and may take up to twenty four hours to deliver.

vi. Prostaglandin (After fifteen weeks of pregnancy):

This procedure is conducted in the same manner as saline abortion, except Prostaglandin replaces saline. Prostaglandin activates contractions and leads to labor. “Prostaglandin is a hormone which appears naturally in a woman’s body at the time of full term labor and delivery. It works more quickly and is not as dangerous as saline, but there are more side effects such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhea and slightly high rate of excessive bleeding and retained placenta.”²³

vii. Hysterectomy (After fourteen weeks):

“This is the term for an incision into the uterus.”²⁴The procedure is the same as caesarean section, except that in a hysterectomy, no medical attention is given to the baby upon delivery to help it survive.

viii. Dilation and extraction (From twenty weeks after last menstrual period to full term, also called ‘partial birth abortion’):

The procedure takes three days. During the first two days the woman cervix is dilated. She is given medication for cramping. On the third day, she receives medication to induce labor. As the woman labors, the abortionist uses an extra-sound to locate the baby’s legs. The abortionist then grasps a leg with forceps and delivers the baby up to its head. Next, using a scissors, the abortionist creates an opening in the base of the

²²Tyne Traverson. 2015. Exploring Your Unplanned Pregnancy: Single Motherhood, Adoption, and Abortion. Pg. 32, Atlanta: Cairde, karuna & Hedd Publishing.

²³Joy Gardner. 1986. A Difficult Decision: A Compassionate Book about Abortion. Pg. 74, New York: The Crossing Press Trumansburg.

²⁴Ibid. Pg.75

baby's skull. A suction catheter is inserted in to the skull opening and the baby's brain is suctioned out. The skull collapses and the rest of the baby's body is delivered through the birth canal.

Reading through these types of abortion, one cannot help getting scared. The procedures are so scaring and very dehumanizing. The scaring part of abortion is when one thinks of what happens within the womb of a human person. It is difficult to contemplate the hand gadgets that are inserted inside the birth canal of a woman. Her dignity is washed away and her fears become real. I am convinced that even those who are strong, at a certain point along the process become worried and at a certain point wish if they knew what it was all about. Abortion is dehumanizing because it denies the honor that is supposed to be accorded to human life. Dehumanizing life means taking away the honor and dignity due to life. So abortion takes away that life which the woman carries in her womb. Abortion destroys that life and therefore demeaning the life. To doubt the sinfulness and the evilness of abortion is tantamount to doubting the importance of your own existence. We can doubt many things. But when we doubt our own existence, then we cease from being truly human. Our existence is equivalent to the meaning of our own life.

In the recent years, Francis Kissling who was the head of the unfortunately named Catholics for choice pointed out that abortion is the reality that brings about death. He argued that, "we can no longer pretend that the fetus is invisible. We can no longer seek to banish the state for our lives, but rather need to engage its power to improve women's lives. We must end the fiction that an abortion at twenty six weeks is no different from one at six weeks... The fetus is more visible than ever before, and the abortion-rights movement needs to accept its existence and its value. It may not have a right to life, and its value may not be equal to that of the pregnant woman, but ending the life of a fetus is not a morally insignificant event."²⁵ While Kissling argues in favor of the pregnant mothers, but he seems to acknowledge the very fact that regardless of how old the child is in the womb of the mother, that life inside the mother, even at the very initial stage is very significant.

²⁵Rev. Robert Fleischmann .2011. "A child dies- A Look at the Dehumanization of life in Abortion" Christian Life Resource home Edition 1st Quarter 2011, Vol. 31, No. 1. Retrieved on 7th- July 2015 from: www.christianliferesources.com .

2.3 CAUSES/REASONS OF ABORTION:

As I pointed out earlier, abortion is as old as mankind. The trace of abortion has been located from the earliest days of Ancient Greece and Rome as Michael J. Gorman articulates, “surprisingly abortion was not at all uncommon two thousand years ago.”²⁶ The assertion makes it clear that this practice didn’t begin yesterday and that is the reason as to why it is very difficult to eradicate it. The reasons that motivated the practice of abortion in earlier times may or may not be the same at this time that we are living.

Gorman points out that the practice was common among the wealthy than among the poor. However, the poor also practiced abortion. Some of the reasons as outlined by Gorman included the following:

To conceal illicit sexual activity was the most common reason for procuring an abortion. This was common practice amongst the people who were lovers and wanted to keep it private. In such circumstances, when the woman became pregnant from lower class men, she opted for abortion because of the fear of sharing her wealth with lower-class children fathered illegitimately. Another reason was, “to preserve ‘sex appeal’ for many women especially the rich, did not enjoy the effects of pregnancy on their figures, preferring not to get big and trouble the womb with bouncing babes.”²⁷ This meant that for a woman to be appealing and attractive to men, she would not carry pregnancy to full term because that would make her loose her beauty and attractiveness. Those women who were practicing prostitution would also lose money within that time they were pregnant. Therefore Chrysostom argues that, “Prostitutes had a view of drawing more money by being agreeable and an object of longing to their lovers.”²⁸ If therefore they consented to giving birth, it meant losing their income. In the Roman Empire, abortion was used as a way of population control. Growth in population meant that there would be too many people who were poor. For that matter, population had to be controlled. This can be attested historically during the time of Augustus Caesar when it was witnessed a decline in population of the Roman Empire.

²⁶Michael J. Gorman. 1982. *Abortion & the Early Church- Christian, Jewish & Pagan Attitudes in the Greco-Roman World*. Pg. 14, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers.

²⁷Ibid. Pg. 15.

²⁸Ibid. Pg. 15.

These reasons stipulated above were actually the motivating factors that encouraged the practice of abortion. With passage of time, there have been changes in the society and therefore some of the above reasons have been dropped while others have been retained. In addition, new reasons have come up.

Without ignoring the stipulated traditional reasons that motivated women to do abortion, I want to clearly attempt to outline some of the motivating factors that make people to turn to abortion within the modern times. Some of the traditional reasons pointed above are still applicable even today. However, some of the traditional reasons are no longer applicable at this time.

For some people, abortion is an inconceivable act, while for others abortion seems to be the only way out of unplanned pregnancy and an impossible-to-negotiate future. This has greatly contributed to the birth of the two new movements namely: the Pro-life and the pro-choice. The pro-life can also be termed as the conservatives and the pro-choice can be termed as the liberals. The pro-life group is a group of people who propagate the doctrine of life both for the mother and for the child. Neither life should be sacrificed unless under special circumstances. On the other hand, the pro-choice are a group of people who propagate the doctrine of freedom. The group argues that every woman has the freedom to do what she wants with her body.

Although there are many and different reasons why people choose to do abortion, certainly everyone seem to experience some ambivalence when considering an abortion. Even those with strong will and determination to acting in this way unanimously concur that abortion is an act that sends shivers down the spine. "Many couples underestimate the profound repercussions that an abortion will have on their relationship."²⁹ Therefore they choose on abortion hurriedly without serious contemplation on what the aftermath of this act would have on their later lives and relationship. However, before I turn to this direction, I would want to focus my attention on the reasons that make people to decide on having an abortion.

1) Negative impact on mother's life:

Viewed externally, the reason may sound selfish. "The universality of the phenomenon of unintended pregnancy illustrates that, worldwide, women and couples have great

²⁹Joy Gardner. 1986. A Difficult Decision: A compassionate Book about Abortion. Pg. 11, New York: The Crossing Press Trumansburg.

difficulty in successfully planning births.”³⁰ Hence, women argue against pregnancy that occurs in the wrong place and at the wrong time. Such kind of pregnancy may have a long-life impact on women’s ability to raise a family and earn a living. A number of teenage girls who become mothers before the rightful age do not graduate from high school. For this reason, their parents find it difficult to allow them to carry pregnancy to the full term because giving-birth means discontinuity from schooling and taking a new responsibility of mothering the baby which they are actually not well prepared to undertake. The college students who become pregnant and give birth are much less likely to complete their education than their peers. Employed single mothers who become pregnant face interruption of their jobs and careers. These affect their earning ability and make them unable to raise children on their own. For women with other children to care for or aging parents, the reduction in income resulting from pregnancy and eventual birth of a new child may bring them below the poverty level thus requiring them to seek public assistance.

II) Financial instability:

Whether a high school or college student or a single woman earning just enough to live independently, many expectant mothers lack the resources to cover the high cost associated with pregnancy, birth and child bearing. “The importance of women’s economic situation as the main reason for their seeking an abortion is evident in developed as well as developing countries.”³¹

Saving for a baby is one thing, but an unplanned pregnancy places an enormous financial burden on a woman who cannot afford to care for an infant. Lack of adequate medical care during pregnancy places the new born at a high risk for complications during birth and in early infancy. The high cost of raising a child makes giving birth a terrifying experience for someone still in school, or lacks a steady income or simply does not have the financial resources to continue pregnancy with adequate medical care and give birth to a healthy baby. Therefore due to financial constraint, many women have opted for abortion to avoid difficult situation ahead.

III) Relationship problems and /or unwillingness to be a single mother:

³⁰Akinrinola Bankole, Susheela Singh and Tylor Haas. 1998. “Reasons Why Women have induced Abortions: Evidence from 27 Countries.” International Family Planning Perspective. Vol. 24, No. 3. New York: Retrieved on 15th July from: www.guttmacher.org/pubs/journals/2411798.html.

³¹Ibid.

Majority of women with unplanned pregnancies do not live with their partners or have no committed relationships. These women come to realize that most likely they will be raising their children as single mothers. Many are unwilling to take this big step due to reasons described above namely: interruption of education or career, insufficient financial resources or inability to care for an infant due to care-giving needs of other children or family members.

In a situation involving women cohabitation with their partners, the outlook for unmarried women as single mothers is discouraging. For the women who are still young at the time of giving birth, the relationship ends almost immediately the child is born or sometimes even before the child is born. Therefore, "relationship problems are among the most important reasons why women seek abortion; in these societies, where many women are in consensual unions, the issue of being able to support the child should the relationship end is probably a major concern."³²

What I have attempted to point out above is basically what I would refer to as general reasons. However, below I just want to enumerate and elaborate on specific reasons that are normally given by women when they want to carry out an abortion:

i) Not more children or have done with a child-rearing:

People living family life make decisions how many children they intend to have. When they have already met their target, they do not want to allow any other child to be born. Thus, "the desire to postpone a birth or to stop childbearing is a very common reason given by women seeking abortion."³³ Any other conception is considered as accident and therefore many women decide to carry out an abortion. The age factor also contributes a greater deal. A woman who is advanced in age may find it difficult to carry pregnancy to the full term especially if her other children are already grownups.

ii) Not being ready to become a mother or not ready for another child:

The age factor is important for women to deciding to have a child or not. Some women make up their mind what age is suitable for them to start bearing children. Before they reach this age, they are not ready to compromise even when they become pregnant, they straight away decide for abortion. For instance, "women may need to postpone childbearing because of their own or their children's health, or in societies where young unmarried mothers are commonly ostracized for having a child or where early

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

childbearing disrupts education, women may particularly want to postpone the first birth.”³⁴

Spacing of children also can make a woman decide to carry out an abortion. For example, a woman may want to keep two to three years space between children. If accidentally she becomes pregnant before, she may decide to go for an abortion.

- iii) Not wanting others to know about pregnancy or that the woman is involved in a sexual affair:

This is quite common amongst the single mothers or unmarried women who have just graduated from college. Becoming pregnant when one is a single mother raises suspicion of promiscuity and unwanted sexual behavior. In fact, the woman who becomes pregnant without being married is disrespected in the society. Hence, “being too young or fearing that parents or others would object to the pregnancy is a fairly common reason for having an abortion.”³⁵This creates fear and quite often may lead a woman to decide for an abortion rather than becoming a laughing stock in the village.

- iv) The husband or partner wants an abortion:

Abortion is not only common amongst the unmarried, but also the married couple. The reason as to why married people choose an abortion is because, may be they had not planned for another child. Therefore, the husband may feel that he cannot be able to support another child and thus may agree with the wife on abortion as the only way out.

- v) Problem with the health of the fetus:

A family may decide to go for an abortion if the couple is informed that the fetus has a healthy problem. This comes as a result of diagnosis from the doctor. If the doctor says that the baby will not have a healthy normal life, the family or the woman may decide for a termination of pregnancy to avoid later on many other constraints.

- vi) Problems with the health of the woman:

No human being is one hundred percent healthy. At a certain stage in life, one discovers that there is a certain kind of sickness in his/her body. In a situation where a woman feels that her health is not okay, she may opt to go for abortion if she discovers that she is pregnant. In addition to this, “because a threat to maternal health is often an exception to the law in countries where abortion is illegal, many women may cite

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid.

this reason because it is socially and provides a legal or moral justification for abortion.”³⁶ This means that many women have found a leeway to abortion on account of poor health even in countries where abortion is considered illegal.

vii) The parents wanting an abortion for their daughter:

In a situation of a young girl in her teenage, the parents may have an upper hand in controlling the life of their daughter. This is because she may still be in school, still young and dependent upon the parents. Such situations, the parents may demand that their daughter carries out an abortion to enable her complete her studies or even prepare her well for the greater responsibility.

The above reasons are the most common reasons given by women who have either done an abortion or are intending to have an abortion. With all these reasons which appear genuine, it does not remove the impact that comes with abortion. I would want to point out in very clear and categorical terms that “Abortion is not some magical surgery which turns back the clock to make a woman ‘un-pregnant.’ Instead, it is a real life event which is always very stressful and often traumatic.”³⁷

2.4 EFFECTS OF ABORTION:

Although strongly supported by abortionists or pro-choice, abortion impacts negatively on the life of the woman who is involved. The pro-life group argues against abortion not primarily because of the effects that follow abortion, but because they believe in the sanctity of life. Life originates from God and whoever goes contrary to life, goes against the will of the author of life. In addition to this position taken by the pro-life movement, their decision to protect life is even more strengthened by the aftermaths of abortion. Nobody can refute that those who have aborted in their lives were affected either physically, psychologically, spiritually or at least emotionally. However, some special cases have been reported of women who had abortion and it never impacted on them negatively. Some researchers have shown that it is not every abortion that comes with negative consequences. But while pointing to this fact, it is good to bear in mind that in most cases, there is a tremendous impact that is always tilted on the negative direction.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷David C. Reardon, Julie Makimaa, Amy Sobie (Eds.). 2000. Victims and Victors. Pg. 15, Illinois: Acorn Books.

In this section of my work therefore, I intend to consider the immediate consequences of abortion which involve the risks of damage to woman's reproductive organs and future ability to have children. The second part, I will look at the very hurtful consequences and the Post Abortion Syndrome.

1) Immediate consequences:

Women who undergo abortion may suffer immediate complications which are likely to occur at the time of abortion. These include the following: Infection, excessive bleeding, embolism, perforation of uterus, anesthesia complications, convulsions, hemorrhage, cervical injury and endo-toxic shock. Others are fever, chronic abdominal pain, vomiting and gastro-intestinal disturbances. All these are considered as immediate consequences of abortion. Therefore, they lead to a high likelihood of damaging the woman's reproductive organs and eventually may interfere with woman's future ability to have children.

2) Hurtful Consequences: Post Abortion Syndrome (P.A.S.)

Post Abortion Syndrome is a concept that describes the emotional and psychological consequences of abortion. It is also referred to as "post-traumatic stress disorder." The process of deciding on abortion, going through the experience, and living with the grief, pain and regrets at its very core is traumatic. As with any trauma, individuals often try to forget the ordeal and deny or ignore any pain that comes on the way. "The truth is that most women have some negative feelings following an abortion. Even though many women camouflage their hurt, inside, they are crying."³⁸ From the outside, they may appear to be doing well, but inside they are tormented by their own actions.

We live in a society that ignores the painful consequences of abortion. Men and women who have experienced it are submerged into denial, to an extent that they refuse to talk about it and in the process the normal feeling of anxiety, fear, shame, guilt and grief which follow the abortion. In the situation that these emotions are denied and buried, they often resurface having been magnified and the truth of this loss can no longer be denied.

The Post-Abortion Syndrome does not automatically appear at the same time. Some may happen shortly after, while others may come much later. Dr. Paul and Teri Reisser

³⁸Karl H. Peschke. 2010. *Christian Ethics: Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican II*. Vol. II. Special Moral Theology. Pg. 344, Bangalore: Theological Publications.

in their book entitled 'A solitary sorrow' have attempted to outline and describe the symptoms of the Post-abortion Syndrome namely:

a) Guilt:

Guilt is what an individual feels when she has violated her own moral code. "The guilt she feels extends beyond mere shame that her deeds were discovered or a vague sense that she has violated some rules laid down at home, church, or school. This is definitely not 'false guilt,' a discomfort generated over something that she isn't really convinced is wrong. It is an aching, abiding conviction that she has broken her own moral code—the set of values that she has accepted and internalized as determining what is right and wrong."³⁹ For the woman who has come to believe at some point either before or after the abortion that she consented to the killing of her unborn child, the burden of guilt is relentless. There is little consolation to offer the woman who has transgressed one of nature's strongest instincts; the protection of a mother extends to her young. "This primal urge is not easily squelched and often remains vocal later in life when the circumstances surrounding the abortion may seem far less compelling."⁴⁰

The inner voice of self-condemnation begins playing a repeating tape in their mind that accuses offender as being defective. How could you have done this? You are a desperately wicked person!' It is a common occurrence for many post abortive women entering therapy to verbalize their belief that any unhappy event that have occurred since the abortion were inevitable because they 'deserved it.'

b) Anxiety:

Anxiety is defined as "an unpleasant emotional and physical state of apprehension."⁴¹ This may take the form of tension; physical responses, worry about the future, difficult concentrating and disturbed sleep. The conflict between a woman's moral standards and her decision to perform an abortion generates much of this anxiety. "Anxiety is experienced not only as the familiar symptoms of worry, poor concentration, and difficulty in relaxing, but also as a variety of physical symptoms such as headache, dizziness, pounding heart, abdominal cramps, and muscle tightness, among others. You may coexist with depression, and both conditions may disrupt sleep. Difficulty

³⁹Teri Reisser, Paul Reisser. 1999. A Solitary Sorrow: Finding Healing & Wholeness after Abortion. Pg. 50, Colorado: Water Book Press.

⁴⁰Ibid. Pg. 51

⁴¹Ibid. Pg. 52.

falling asleep, nightmares and frequent waking throughout the night will all magnify the impact of other symptoms.”⁴² Very often, she will not relate her anxiety to a past abortion and yet she will unconsciously begin to avoid anything having to do with little children.

c) Psychological ‘Numbing’:

Post-abortion specialist David Reardon writes, “In a study of post-abortion patients only eight weeks after their abortion, researchers found that 44% complained of nervous disorders, 36% had experienced sleep disturbances, 31% had regrets about their decision, and 11% had been prescribed psychotropic medicine by their family doctor.”⁴³ This clearly indicates that in most cases, abortion is accompanied by serious psychological trauma. In reality, this trauma may not be immediate. But after a while, it starts to be felt by the person who was involved in the abortion procedure.

Persons who have gone through highly painful loss will sometimes develop an instinct to avoid future situations that might lead them into a serious pain. Many post-abortive women maintain a secrete vow that they will never again allow themselves to be put in such a vulnerable position. “This drive for self-protection is like a vow: ‘nothing will ever hurt me that badly again!’ The vow may be unconscious, but it is no less fervent or long-lasting-indeed, it usually demonstrates more permanence than most conscious vows.”⁴⁴ As a result, they may work hard to keep their emotions in tight check preventing themselves from feeling the pain of what has happened, but also greatly hampering their ability to form and maintain close relationships. Cut off even from themselves, they may feel as though their lives were happening to another person.

d) Depression and sense of loss:

Depression is a mood filled with sadness, guilt and feelings of hopelessness. Some women report feeling completely immobilized by their emotional state and unable to get interested in anyone or anything since the time abortion took place. “This can range from feeling a little down to profound sadness arising from painful memories flowing into her conscious mind.”⁴⁵ Uncontrollably crying which can be daily and may continue for years sometimes lasting for hours or days at time. “This emotional

⁴²Ibid: Pg. 52.

⁴³Randy Alcorn. 2004. Why Pro-life? Caring for the unborn and their Mothers.Pgs. 71-72, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers.

⁴⁴Ibid. Pg. 54.

⁴⁵Ibid. Pg. 57.

incontinence may cause a woman to wonder if she is 'going insane' and often prods her (or those around her) to seek help."⁴⁶

Those who report a sense of loss describe a number of related reactions such as inability to look at other people's babies or pregnant mothers, or jealousy of mothers. Many consciously seek a replacement pregnancy.

e) Suicide:

Feelings of rejection, low self-esteem, guilt and depression are all ingredients for suicide. According to some study, "women who have had abortions are nine times more likely to attempt suicide than women in the general population."⁴⁷

There are other Psychological problems which may develop which include the following: Re-experiencing the abortion, survival guilt, development of eating disorders and alcohol and drug abuse.

Sleep problems include: Nightmares concerning the abortion, often involving the 'return' of the aborted child. Teenagers who have had an abortion are especially vulnerable to Post Abortion Syndrome because they are at a critical developmental period of their life. Although teens are likely to be deeply affected by abortions, they are likely to be least expressive about their doubts and pains.

2.5 THE CHURCH'S TEACHING ON ABORTION:

Richard McCormick in his own words described abortion as "A matter that is morally problematic, pastorally delicate, legislatively thorny, constitutionally insecure, ecumenically divisive, medically normless, humanly anguishing, racially provocative, journalistically abused, personally biased and widely performed."⁴⁸ Further, he continued to say, "It demands a most extra-ordinary discipline of moral thought, one that is penetrating without being impenetrable, humanly compassionate without being morally compromising, legalistic without being legally positivistic, instructed by cognate disciplines without being determined by them, informed by tradition without being enslaved by it. Abortion therefore is a severe testing ground for moral reflection and probably a paradigm of the way we will face other problems in the future."⁴⁹ These

⁴⁶Ibid. Pg. 57

⁴⁷Ann Saltenberger. 1977. Every Woman has a Right to Know the Danger of Legal Abortion: Pg. 132, New Jersey: Air-Plus Enterprises.

⁴⁸Thomas Bokenkotter. 1985. Dynamic Catholicism- A Historical Catechism. Pg. 347, New York: Image Books.

⁴⁹Ibid. Pgs. 347-348.

remarks give a clue about the truth in so far as abortion is concerned. To comprehend the reality of abortion requires a very sober approach. One needs to have an open mind and the right judgment. What matters are not so much the scholars and their argument about abortion, but rather those who are directly affected. This does not mean that what the scholars say is not important, but rather, that getting the knowledge from the source is of paramount importance. These are none other than the women who have experienced abortion being done on them. Their testimony and their experience help us to grasp the truth about the reality of abortion.

The rights and values pertaining to the human person occupy a significant place among the queries discussed in the world today. The second Vatican Ecumenical Council “reconfirmed the high dignity of the human person and in particular his or her right to life. The council therefore condemned crimes that contradict the human life, such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia or willful suicide.”⁵⁰ Human life is a human right and each and every human being has the right to life. No one should be deprived of this right unless otherwise stated by another law. From the point of view of second Vatican council, murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia or wilful suicide means either deprivation of human life or denial of the right to life. This must be abhorred at every level of human life. Whether born or not yet born, life remains the most precious gift that God has entrusted to mankind and must be protected at all cost. No wonder the Catholic Church has an unwavering support against any practice that contradicts the right to human life.

We read from the sacred scriptures in the Old Testament, “You shall not kill”⁵¹ and also in the New Testament we read the same message from the gospel of Matthew, “You have heard that it was said to the men of old, ‘you shall not kill, and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment, but I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment.”⁵² The phrase ‘do not kill’ has been looked at by scholars as being contradictory, for the penalty for breaking it is to be put to death. But in this context, the word ‘kill’ is used for the pre-meditated murder. All human beings are created in God’s image and no human being has the right to take someone else’s life. God is the source of life, and He is the only one who can rule on whether a life is to be

⁵⁰Austin Flannery. 1992. Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and post Conciliar Documents. Gaudium et Spes. Pg. 193, Bombay: St. Paul Publications.

⁵¹The New Jerusalem Bible-Standard Edition; Exodus 20:13. 1985. London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd.

⁵²Ibid. Matthew: 5: 21- 22.

preserved or not. In a situation that one accidentally kills the other, God recognizes the difference between such death and murder and he makes provision for appropriate judgment.

The Catholic Church has continuously condemned abortion i.e. the direct and purposeful taking of life of the unborn child. In principle, adherents of the Catholic faith believe that all life is holy beginning from conception to natural death. Therefore, killing an innocent human being, whether born or unborn is morally wrong. The church proclaims that, "Human life is sacred because from its beginning, it involves the creative action of God and it remains forever in a special relationship with the creator, who is its sole end. God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end: no one can, under any circumstance, claim for himself the right to destroy directly an innocent human being."⁵³

The church considers abortion to be a grave evil. Christian writers from the first-century author of the 'teaching of the twelve Apostles' to Pope John Paul II in his Encyclical 'The Gospel of Life' have maintained that the bible forbids abortion, just as it forbids murder. Tertullian being one of the early Christian writer points out to the fact that, the Law of Moses ordered strict penalties for causing abortion. We read from the scriptures, "If men who are fighting hit a pregnant woman and give birth prematurely, but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman's husband demands and the court allows. But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot."⁵⁴

This applies the Law of retribution to abortion. The law of retribution establishes the just punishment for an injury (Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, life for life) compared to much greater retributions that had been common before such as life for eye, life for tooth, lives of the offender's family for one's life.

What the Law of retribution was geared to was justice. In this case, the pregnant woman is hurt, to an extent that her child comes out. The child is the focus of the law of retribution. The aborted child needs to have justice. The aborted children, like older children have souls even though marred by Original Sin. David points out in psalms,

⁵³Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith. 23rd-Feb-2007. Donum Vitae: Instruction on Respect for human life in its origin and on the Dignity of Procreation. Pgs. 9-10, Vatican: Catholic Truth Society.

⁵⁴Exodus 21: 22-24.

“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”⁵⁵ Since sinfulness is a spiritual rather than a physical condition, David must have had spiritual nature from the time of conception. The psalm expresses the terrible reality of our human sinfulness and the marvelous reality of God’s pardon. St. James in his letter demonstrate the same when he says, “The body without the spirit is dead.”⁵⁶ The soul is the life giving principle of the human body. Since from the time of conception, the child’s body is alive, the child’s body must already have its spirit.

2.6 THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT:

The Jews: The respect of the sacredness of life in the womb originates in Christian’s Jewish roots. The ancient Jewish world was much different from the surrounding cultures of Palestine where infanticide, infant sacrifice and abortion were common. In circumstances where the life of the mother was endangered, the child had to be sacrificed in order to save the life of the mother. An important Jewish deliberation about abortion is found in the Mishnah which states, “If a woman is having difficulty giving birth, one dismembers the fetus within her and brings it forth limb by limb, because her life comes before its life. Once the greater part has emerged, one may not touch it for one may not set aside one life to save another.”⁵⁷ In certain circumstances therefore, abortion was permitted in order to save the life of the mother. However, for the Jewish people of the times and orthodox Jews to this day, all human life has God as its author, whose creative power produces the child in the mother’s womb and brings it step by step to full life. Despite the above argument, “Jews considered the fetus a creation of God, not to be purposely harmed. Justice toward the helpless and innocent stood at the center of Jewish ethics. Above all, the Jewish horror of bloodshed impressed itself upon the early Christians, molding their various ethical perspectives into one unified position.”⁵⁸ The Jewish abhorrence of deliberate bloodshed and its respect for life, including that of the unborn, formed a natural foundation for the Christian writings on abortion.

⁵⁵ Psalms 51:5.

⁵⁶ James 2: 26.

⁵⁷ Aaron L. Mackler. 2003. Introduction to Jewish and Catholic Bioethics. Pg. 124, Washington D. C: Georgetown University Press.

⁵⁸ Michael J. Gorman. 1982. Abortion & the Early Church: Christian, Jewish & Pagan Attitudes in the Greco-Roman World. Pg. 82, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers.

The Sacred Scriptures: The Old Testament revelation gives clear evidence that life in the womb was considered as sacred. Moses proclaimed, “When you hearken to the voice of the Lord, your God, all these blessings will come upon you and overwhelm you; may you be blessed in the city, and blessed in the country! Blessed is the fruit of your womb, the produce of your soul and the offspring of your livestock, the issue of your herds and the young of flocks, blessed be your grains bin and your kneading bowl! May you be blessed in your coming and be blessed in your going out.”⁵⁹ The above phrase lists one of the things that would be blessed as the fruit of the womb, a clear demonstration that there was an attachment of greater value to the fruit of the womb. From the fruits of the womb would the nation of Israel grow and prosper.

The Angel told the mother of Sampson, “as for the son you will conceive and bear, no razor shall touch his head, for this boy is to be consecrated to God from the womb.”⁶⁰ Job also stated, “Did not he who made me in womb make him? Did not the same one fashion us before our birth?”⁶¹ In Psalm 139: 13, the Author says, “Truly you have formed my inmost being you knit me in my mother’s womb.”⁶² The psalmist here demonstrates the fact that God’s knowledge of us goes back to our conception. Indeed it is by God that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. In other words, the psalmist talks about God’s amazing power seen in creation.

The Analysis of the above verses from the Old Testament alludes to the fact that human life commences from the very time a human being begins to exist in the womb. The beginning of human existence finds its source in God himself. God recognizes the beginning of Human life as the time when one is conceived in the mother’s womb. In the same direction the Old Testament attests to how God had marked individuals for an important role of leadership from the very first moment of their lives. For example we read from Ecclesiasticus, “Samuel was the beloved of the Lord; prophet of the Lord, he instituted the kingdom, and anointed rulers over his people.”⁶³ This verse refers to Samuel as beloved of his people, dear to his maker, dedicated from his mother’s womb, consecrated to the Lord as a prophet, the judge and priest. God had ordained Samuel from his mother’s womb for a special mission. Similarly, Prophet

⁵⁹Deuteronomy 28: 2-6.

⁶⁰Judges 13:5.

⁶¹Job 31:15.

⁶²Psalm 139:13.

⁶³Ecclesiasticus 46:13.

Isaiah when talking about his own call proclaimed, “Hear me o’ coastlands, listen o’ distant peoples. The Lord called me from birth from my mother’s womb he gave me my name. For now the Lord has spoken who formed me as his servant from the womb, that Jacob may be brought back to him and Israel gathered to him and I am made glorious in the sight of the Lord and my God is my strength.”⁶⁴ The verses one and five of chapter forty nine of the book of prophet Isaiah lays emphasis on the servant’s mission and predestination namely the mission not merely extending to Israel whom he is to re-gather, but also to the nations, to whom he must bring light. God’s plan was with him from the very beginning in his mother’s womb. God designates Israel as his servant from birth. In the same manner, the prophet Jeremiah recalled, “The word of the Lord came to me, saying: Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, before you came to birth, I consecrated you. I appointed you as prophet to the nations.”⁶⁵ To ‘know’ someone, when said of God means to choose and predestine and to ‘consecrate’ means not so much inward sanctification as a setting apart for the prophetic ministry. God formed Jeremiah in his mother’s womb and after his birth consecrated or set him apart for this specific task.

All these biblical references in the Old Testament serve to demonstrate that indeed the value of every human being begins the very moment that person begins to exist. Also they show that God views the pre-born in the womb as persons. No other conclusion is possible. We must agree with theologian John Frame that, “There is nothing in Scripture that even remotely suggests that the unborn child is anything less than a human person from the moment of conception.”⁶⁶ One can give it whatever name he/she wants, but the simple fact is that it is a human being befitting all respect and fair treatment.

The Greco-Roman Tradition:

The Greeks: According to the Greek literature, the exposure of the newborn was a common practice and often went unpunished. Therefore it is possible to assert that abortion was acceptable. However, it is difficult to argue conclusively that abortion did not receive opposition from some quarters. Accordingly, medical ethics opposed

⁶⁴Isaiah 49: 1, 5.

⁶⁵Jeremiah 1:4-6.

⁶⁶John Ankerberg& John Weldon.1989. When does life Begin? Pg. 185, Tennessee: Wolgemuth& Hyatt Publishers, Inc.

abortion. This is witnessed in the formulation of the Hippocratic Oath in the years between 460-357 B.C.

In discussing the role of the women in his ideal Republic, Plato authorized abortion for any women who became pregnant after the age of forty: "A woman I said, at twenty years of age may begin to bear children to the State, and continue to bear them until forty. ... And we grant all this, accompanying the permission with strict orders to prevent any [subsequent] embryo which may come into being from seeing the light; and if any force a way to the birth, the parents must understand that the offspring of such an union cannot be maintained, and arrange accordingly."⁶⁷ Plato's recommendation is that abortion should be carried out when necessary. For him, the need of the state must take precedence over the life and the rights of the unborn. The same mindset is replicated in the Politics of Aristotle. To reproduce the finest human material, the state must regulate marriage. He therefore proclaimed, "let there be a law that no deformed child shall be reared; but on the ground of number of children, if the regular customs hinder any of those born being exposed, there must be a limit fixed to the procreation of offspring, and if any people have a child as a result of intercourse in contravention of these regulations, abortion must be practiced on it before it has developed sensation and life; for the line between lawful and unlawful abortion will be marked by the fact of having sensation and being alive."⁶⁸ These two Greek Philosophers supported abortion from the perspective of personal convenience. They held a utilitarian view of the individual, born or unborn seeing the individual as existing for the state. The right to life also was subordinate to the welfare of the state. For them, any child being born that would not be useful to the state was not necessary. Therefore such person should be eliminated at the earliest possible time. In short, the level to which abortion was practiced by the Greeks is hard to ascertain, but with the above sequence, there is every reason to believe that abortion was not rare, but rather a common happening. It was actually used by the Greeks to avoid overpopulation and also to determine the quality of the people. Only the best quality in so far as utility is concerned was allowed to survive.

⁶⁷Michael J. Gorman. 1982. *Abortion & the Early Church: Christian, Jewish & Pagan Attitudes in the Greco-Roman World*. Pg. 21, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers.

⁶⁸*Ibid.* Pg.22.

The Romans: In the Roman world, abortion was more common than in the ancient Greece. The legal and the moral climate of the Roman Republic were determined by the power of the father. The Father had the power over the life of his slaves, wife and the children. He could kill, mutilate or sell people like possessions. The power extended over the newborn and the unborn. "In the early Republic, exposure was probably more common and accepted than abortion, but neither was ever punished as a crime per se."⁶⁹ With the passage of time, there arose decadence in morality and economic, thus causing rise in murder, and increased freedom for women added to the incidence of divorce, adultery and abortion.

On the other hand, "Roman law never viewed the fetus as a human being but rather as part of maternal viscera."⁷⁰ The earliest fight on abortion came from Cicero, a roman Orator. Cicero recommended for capital punishment for deliberate abortion.

"The first outright condemnation of abortion as a crime was a rescript enacted by the emperor Septimus Severus who reigned between A.D.193- 211."⁷¹ Abortion was classified as an extraordinary crime. "The rescript prescribed exile of an unspecified length for a wife who procured an abortion because it might appear scandalous that she should be able to deprive her husband of children without being punished."⁷² The punishment in this context was not because of killing, but rather because of denying the husband his rights and not because of the rights of the fetus.

An important point to note about the romans is, "that the fetus is not a person was fundamental to Roman Laws. Even when born, the child was valued primarily not for itself but for its usefulness to the father, the family and especially the state, as a citizen, born for the state."⁷³

In Greco Roman world at the time of our Lord and in which Christianity grew permitted abortion and infanticide. In Roman law, the two acts were not distinguished because an infant did not have legal status until accepted by the head of the family. Earlier than that, the infant was a non-person who could be destroyed at will. In parts of the Roman Empire, abortion and infanticide were so prevalent that reproduction was below zero.

⁶⁹Ibid. Pg. 25.

⁷⁰Ibid. Pg. 25.

⁷¹Ibid. Pg. 30.

⁷²Ibid. Pg. 30.

⁷³Ibid. Pg. 32.

Nevertheless the Christians upheld the sanctity of the life of the unborn child, not only because of the Old Testament revelation as cited, but also because of the mystery of incarnation. The early Christians believed and even now we still do believe that Mary conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and thus Jesus Christ was born. No faithful Christian would ever deny that Jesus was a true person whose life was sacred from the first moment of his conception in the womb of his blessed mother Mary.

The story of the visitation also attests to the sanctity of life in the womb and the personhood of the unborn child; “Thereupon Mary set out, proceeding in haste into the hill country to a town of Judah, where she entered Zachariah’s house and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greetings, the baby leapt in her womb.

Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and cried out in a loud voice, ‘blest are you among women and blest is the fruit of your womb.’ But who am I that the Mother of my Lord should come to me? The moment your greetings sounded in my ears, the baby leapt in my womb for joy. Blest is she who trusted that the Lord’s words to her would be fulfilled.”⁷⁴ It is very important to note therefore, that God chose to begin the process of incarnation at the point of conception rather than at some other point. “Christ had to be made like his brethren in all things.”⁷⁵ The human history of Jesus had to begin at conception. Jesus became one of us for he knows the temptations we endure, that even though he himself did not yield to any of them but remained sinless, he knows what it is like to be tired, hungry and thirsty. He experienced rejection and false accusations. He suffered on the cross and died a humiliating death.

2.7 THE CHURCH TRADITION:

Given the revelation of the Old and the New Testaments, with special emphasis on the mystery of incarnation, the Catholic Church has condemned the practice of Abortion. Several examples of teachings which span the first three hundred years of the church include the following:

The Didache (A.D. 80-100): The Didache is an anonymous early Christian document. In this document was one of the earliest specific written references to abortion. It combined the code of Christian morality with a manual of church life. In the Didache are discussed the two ways namely the way of the light and the way of darkness. The

⁷⁴Luke 1: 39-45.

⁷⁵Hebrews 2: 17.

way of the light refers to the commandment of love to the neighbor and the way of darkness refers to the evil that a Christian must never commit. Therefore the Didache declares, "Though shall not murder a child by abortion/destruction."⁷⁶ By the fact that the teachings of the twelve Apostles (the Didache) addressed the problem of abortion means that it was a pressing and disturbing issue and it required an answer. Procuring an abortion was therefore regarded as evil and therefore the Christians were not supposed to practice it or partake in it.

The letter of Barnabas (A.D. 70-135): The Epistle of Barnabas was written by anonymous author perhaps in Alexandria. Like the Didache the Epistle to Barnabas also made distinction between the two ways namely the way of the light and the way of darkness. The Epistle of Barnabas in its practical section on the way of light condemned abortion in these words: "The life of the infant, unborn or born is protected by the law; thou shall not procure abortion, nor kill the child after it has been born."⁷⁷ According to Barnabas, the love for neighbor must supersede the love for self. Therefore, the mother must look at the baby in her womb as her neighbor and therefore must give her a total protection and not to destroy the infant in her womb. Accordingly, "abortion is presented as an offence against humanity, a defiance of the second great commandment- 'love the neighbor' which the epistle of Barnabas has expanded to say, 'more than thyself.'⁷⁸

The Apocalypse of Peter (A.D. 100-150): It was written by an unknown Author. In this Apocalypse, we read the following: "And near that place I saw another gorge in which the discharge and excrement of the tortured ran down and became like a lake. And there sat women and the discharge came up to their throats; and opposite them sat many children, who were born prematurely, weeping. And from them went forth rays of fire and smote the women on the eyes. And these were those who produced children outside marriage and who procured abortions."⁷⁹ Although not accepted by the church, the Apocalypse of Peter is considered to be an important non-canonical document. Therefore it was held with high esteem by the early church. This apocalypse

⁷⁶Michael J. Gorman. 1982. Abortion & The Early Church; Christian, Jewish & Pagan Attitudes in the Greco-Roman World. Pg. 49, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers.

⁷⁷Johannes Quasten. 1957. Patrology: The Beginnings of Patristic Literature. Vol.1. Pg. 88, Westminster: Utrecht Spectrum Publishers.

⁷⁸Michael J. Gorman. 1982. Abortion and the Early Church: Christian, Jewish & Pagan Attitudes in the Greco-Roman World. Pg. 50, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers.

⁷⁹ibid. Pg.51.

tries to paint a portrait of Hell's population which includes those women who had murdered through abortion. The vision presented above shows the vengeance of the infants on the mothers. The entire text presents abortion as culpable murder of human being. Unborn children are viewed as living beings destined for immortality and those who are responsible for aborting them are guilty and worthy of eternal punishment.

Athenagoras (A.D. 180): On his plea on behalf of Christians, Athenagoras emphasized that Christians considered as murderers those women who took medicines to procure an abortion. He condemned the killer of children, including those still living in their mother's womb. He argues, "When we say that those women who use drugs to bring an abortion commit murder and will have to give an account to God for the abortion on what principle should we commit murder? For it does not belong to the same person to regard the same fetus in the same womb as created being, and therefore an object of God's care and when it has passed into life, to kill it; and not expose an infant because those who expose them are chargeable with child-murder and on the other hand, when it has been reared to destroy it. But we are in all things always alike and the same submitting ourselves to reason and not ruling over it."⁸⁰ Athenagoras was a defender of the Christians who were being accused of cannibalism in the practice of the Eucharistic Meal. According to Athenagoras, abortion is considered to be murder and those who partake in murder are guilty and must therefore give an account before God. In addition, he points out that Fetus is a living being which is taken care of by God.

Tertullian (A.D. 160-225): Following in the footsteps of Athenagoras was Tertullian who sought to defend Christianity against charges of immorality. At that time, the Christians were being accused of killing little child and then eating its flesh at the rite of Eucharist. In his Apology, Tertullian proclaims; "In our case, murder being once for all forbidden, we may not destroy even fetus in the womb, while as yet the human being derives blood from the other parts of the body for its sustenance. To hinder a birth is a merely speedier man-killing; nor does it matter whether you take away a life that is born, or destroy one that is coming to birth. That is a man that is coming to be

⁸⁰Johannes Quasten. 1957. *Patrology: The Beginning of Patristic Literature*. Vol. 1 Pgs.234-235, Westminster: Utrecht Spectrum Publishers.

one; you have the fruit already in its seed.”⁸¹ Tertullian considers Fetus to be a human being though still depending on the mother. He therefore condemns abortion as speedier homicide.

Hippolytus: During the time of Hippolytus, there arose a very strong pagan influence in the church. The Pope Callistus approved the Roman law allowing concubine marriages which resulted in unwanted pregnancies. This laxity on the side of the pope provoked Hippolytus to write stating, “women who were reputed to be believers began to take drugs to render themselves sterile and to bind themselves tightly so as to expel what was being conceived, since they would not on account of relatives and excess wealth want to have a child by a slave or by any insignificant person. See then into what great impiety that lawless one has proceeded, by teaching adultery and murder at the same time.”⁸² The wealthier believing women were practicing immorality and therefore Hippolytus had to write to them discouraging them from such kind of practice. He strongly asserted that abortion is nothing rather than murder.

Basil the great: The legalization of Christianity took place in the year 313. As a result, the church got a better bargaining power on matters of morality and law. Basil the Great, one of the Cappadocian Fathers centered his activities on the purity and unity of the church. In his response to Bishop Amphilochius on church order and moral problem addressed the issue of abortion saying, “She who has deliberately destroyed a fetus has to pay the penalty of murder. And there is no exact inquiry among us as to whether the fetus was formed or unformed. For, here it is not only the child to be born that is vindicated, but also the woman herself who made an attempt against her own life, because usually the women die in such attempts. Furthermore, added to this is the destruction of the embryo, another murder, at least according to the intention of those who dare these things. Nevertheless, we should not prolong their penance until death, but should accept a term of ten years, and we should determine the treatment not by time, but by the manner of repentance.”⁸³ St. Basil alludes to the fact that what matters are both the life of the child and that of the mother. He condemns abortion as a crime and at the same time as sin. However, he goes further to point out the fact that abortion is forgivable. This is possible as a result of sincere repentance which is a

⁸¹Michael J. Gorman. 1982. Abortion and the Early Church: Christian, Jewish & Pagan Attitudes in the Greco-Roman World. Pg. 55, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers.

⁸²Ibid. Pg. 59-60.

⁸³Ibid. Pg. 66-67.

valid sign of God's grace and forgiveness. In any case, abortion must be seen as a serious disregard for human life.

John Chrysostom: on the Homilies on Romans 13:11-14, (A.D 391), John Chrysostom condemned abortion by saying, "why sow where the ground makes it its care to destroy the fruit? Where there are many efforts at abortion? Where there is murder before birth? For even the harlot you do not let continue a mere harlot, make her a murderer also. You see how drunkenness leads to prostitution, prostitution to adultery, adultery to murder or rather to something worse than murder. For I have no name to give it, since it does not take off the thing born, but prevents its being born. Why then do thou abuse the gift of God and fight with his laws and follow after what is a curse as if a blessing and make the chamber of procreation, a chamber of murder and arm the woman that was given for child-bearing into slaughter? For with a view to drawing more money by being agreeable and an object of longing to her lovers, even this she is not backward to do, so heaping upon thy head a great pile of fire. For even if the daring deed be hers, yet the causing of it is thine."⁸⁴ Chrysostom associates abortion with sexual immorality and he referred to it as murder. He pointed out to the fact that abortion is punishable. Due to his abhorrence of abortion, he classified it as worse than murder.

Jerome: Jerome was a learned Doctor of the church known for his scholarly abilities on being uncompromising and outspoken critic of contemporary morals. He observed that the Roman society moral was infiltrating the Mother Church thus impacting on it negatively. He wrote that the mother church loses unmarried women to immorality for they, "drink potions to ensure sterility and are guilty of murdering a human being not yet conceived. Some, when they learn they are with child through sin, practice abortion by the use of drugs. Frequently they die themselves and are brought before the rulers of the lower world guilty of three crimes: suicide, adultery against Christ, and murder of an unborn child."⁸⁵ St Jerome points out the fact that abortion endangers not only the child, but also the mother who on the process may die. Whoever commits abortion commits sin not only against the innocent, but also against Christ.

⁸⁴Ibid. Pg. 72.

⁸⁵Ibid. Pg. 68.

Apostolic Constitutions: This was a manual of Christian life compiled in Syria. In the list of immoral practices contained in the Apostolic Constitution were: illicit sexual relationships, magic, witchcraft, and fraud. To these immoral practices, the apostolic constitution states, “Thou shalt not slay thy child by causing abortion, nor kill that which is begotten. For everything that is shaped, and hath received a soul from God, if it be slain, shall be avenged, as being unjustly destroyed.”⁸⁶ The new concept introduced by apostolic constitution is the concept of soul. The child receives its soul from God and therefore its destruction invites vengeance from God. Anyone who commits an abortion destroys the workmanship of God.

2.8 THE LATEST CHURCH DOCUMENTS:

The Roman Catholic Church has gone through a long history. This history is characterized by many challenges. The challenges gone through by the church has enabled her to be able to adapt to different situation seeking to provide an answer to the problems as they come. One of such challenges is the threat to the dignity of human person.

Unlike all other created things, man stands out very clearly and distinctively as unique and different. (Therefore man holds a special place in God’s creative plan.) This is noted from the biblical words of creation. God created all other things through his word....Let there be.... and it came to be. But towards the end of God’s creative plan, God created man from the soil in his own image and likeness. Then he breathed his spirit in him and he became alive. We acknowledge the fact that because man was created in God’s image and likeness, he holds a superior position than other things that God created.

Apart from being created in the image and likeness of God, man has been given higher faculties than other animals. These faculties are rationality and freedom of the will. Human reason distinguishes man from animals. Through reason, man is able to distinguish between the good and the bad. Through freedom of the will, man can choose what he wants either the good or the bad.

These two faculties make human being to be more close to God who is the creator of the entire universe. Human being therefore rules the universe and directs the universe.

⁸⁶ Ibid. Pg. 69.

Being created in the image and likeness of God, human being has a level of dignity that is attributed to him alone. Any human action either directly or indirectly that diminish this dignity is considered as immoral and ought not to be committed. Some of these challenges that brings the dignity of man to question is the subject of discussion namely abortion. In considering the dehumanizing nature of abortion, the mother church has tried so much to defend the children in the womb of the mother.

Historically, the church has written many documents to respond to various problems that are a threat to the dignity of humanity. There has been a continuity and consistency in addressing these problems. Abortion, being one of these problems is not an exception. Down the line in the history of the church, popes and great scholars have held different opinions about abortion. But one opinion which seems to be popular within the realm of the church and has been taught by many is that abortion is evil because it takes away life under whose authorship is God.

In an earlier reference, I pointed out that abortion is an old problem in the life of the church. It existed in the Pre-Christian tradition and Post-Christian tradition.

At this juncture, I want to focus my energy on the latest church documents that explains the position of the church in the modern times. These documents look at life as a gift from God. As a gift, life ought to be safeguarded in all aspects from the very beginning to the very end; from conception to the natural death. Any action against human life without a just cause is considered unlawful and therefore evil.

In matters of abortion, the church has not played the role of spectator, but rather the role of an actor. The life of the child in the womb is considered untouchable, and thus any direct attempt or aggression against this life is a violation of one of the fundamental laws without which secure human society is impossible. Hence human life is of primordial value which must be protected and promoted.

To verify this fact about the church position on this matter, I want now to look at selected church documents which have spoken strongly against abortion within the modern age. These documents include the following:

Gaudium et Spes:

The church document *Gaudium et Spes*, also called pastoral constitution on the church in the modern world was addressed by the Church Fathers of the second Vatican

Ecumenical Council to all the people. In this document, the Church Fathers points out that the church has always and must always continue to read the 'signs of the time' and they identify both positive and negative consequences of modern development. This document, to be more precise lays emphasis on church's social doctrine in the light of contemporary situation directly touching on the social reality of human life. Although there are many themes that have been treated in this document, I would want to focus basically on the theme of the dignity of human person which comes out very conspicuously. Other themes which future out within the first chapter are: The common good and the unity of mankind.

This first chapter is what captures my attention because the chapter affirms the dignity of human person as made in the image and likeness of God. In this chapter, the Church Fathers proposed that the church affirmation of God and life after death do not detract from the dignity of humankind, but provides the only true answer to the enduring questions of the origin of humankind, meaning and the end. The Fathers asserted that humanity's greatest source of dignity is that people are made in the image and likeness of God, therefore implying that people have the capacity of knowing and loving God and man is created in such a way that he can freely enter into communion with God. Man may choose therefore to enter or not to enter into that communion.

With reference to the human dignity, the church Fathers says, "coming down to practical and particularly urgent consequences, this council lays stress on reverence for man; everyone must consider his every neighbor without exception as another self, taking into account first of all his life and the means necessary to living it with dignity, so as not to imitate the rich man who had no concern for the poor man Lazarus."⁸⁷ Every person must seek to live his own personal life with dignity. In addition, the very dignity must be extended to the neighbor.

There exists in our hearts the law of love. There is an inner voice that calls us to love God and humanity. Within us, we have the ability to choose God or to reject God. Not choosing God is what in the end eliminates that which binds us to God.

At the core of the document's theological anthropology is the concept of man as the image of God taken from genesis 1:27. "Today, there is an inescapable duty to make

⁸⁷Austin Flannery (General Editor). 1992. Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents: Gaudium et Spes; no 27. Pgs. 815-816, Bombay: St. Paul Publication.

ourselves the neighbor of every individual, without exception, and to take positive steps to help a neighbor whom we encounter, whether that neighbor be an elderly person abandoned by everyone, a foreign worker who suffers the injustice of being despised, a refugee, an illegitimate child wrongly suffering for a sin of which the child is innocent, or a starving human being who awakens our conscience by calling to mind the words of Christ: 'As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers or sisters, you did it to me.'⁸⁸ Man, being created in the image and likeness of God, must seek to overcome all the human conditions that tend to destroy the meaning of human life. All human persons have moral responsibility to look at one another as created in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, we must be able to safeguard that image and likeness of God in them irrespective of age, status, race, or nationality. We need not only to stand in defense of those who are visible amongst us, but also the very invisible and defenseless amongst us. They were never consulted whether they wanted to begin their existence. But by the very fact that they were given that chance to begin, then we have no choice but to stand up and protect them at all time.

The Document exclaims that, "all offenses against life itself, such as murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia and willful suicide; all violation of the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, physical and mental torture, undue psychological pressures; all offenses against human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children, degrading working conditions where people are treated as mere tools for profit rather than free and responsible persons: all these and the like are criminal: they poison civilization; and they debase the perpetrators more than the victims and militate against the honor of the creator."⁸⁹ Human life requires a certain level of dignity. Thus, anything that reduces the dignity of man is to be avoided. The Church Fathers are not only against the direct assault on human life, but also those conditions that gradually reduces the human dignity such as imprisonments, slavery, prostitution and degrading working conditions.

In addressing those challenges stipulated above, the society has attempted to propose solutions that do not show any regard for humanity. The solutions are marred with

⁸⁸ Ibid. Gaudium et Spes No. 27 Pg. 816.

⁸⁹ Ibid. Gaudium et Spes No. 27 Pg. 816.

selfish interest which depicts lack of concern for others. This has therefore turned to be a great violation of Christ's law of love.

The Document therefore clarifies that, "Some of the proposed solutions to these problems are shameful and some people have not hesitated to suggest the taking of life: the church wishes to emphasize that there can be no conflict between the divine laws governing the transmission of life and the fostering of authentic married love. God, the Lord of life, has entrusted to women and men the noble mission of safeguarding life and they must carry it out in a manner worthy of themselves. Life must be protected with the utmost care from the moment of conception: abortion and infanticide are abominable crimes."⁹⁰ This position normally taken by the Roman Catholic Church is therefore not only for today, but also for the future days. The Catholic Church holds life to be the greatest gift that God has entrusted to mankind. Life finds its beginning in God and thus its end must also be in God.

Evangelium Vitae:

Evangelium Vitae is one of the greatest encyclical to have ever been written in defense of human life. The encyclical was written by Pope John Paul II and was issued on March 25th 1995. In Popes own words, the encyclical is "a pressing appeal addressed to each and every person, in the name of God: respect, protect, love and serve life, every human life!"⁹¹ The pope considers this problem as a matter of agency that calls for everyone's immediate attention.

The purpose of the document was to strengthen and to widen the scope of the church's teaching on the sanctity of life. It does not simply state the church's position on various issues, such as abortion, euthanasia, and capital punishment, but also seeks to promote a comprehensive program for the transformation of society so that life can and will be protected at every stage.

Evangelium Vitae recognizes three levels of activity for the promotion of life. First there is the level of personal morality. One ought to obey the fifth commandment; 'You shall not kill.' It is however not enough to only obey the fifth commandment without paying attention to other nine commandments for they provide the absolute minimum for a society that safeguards life, and also provides the basis for the

⁹⁰Ibid. Gaudium et Spes No. 51. Pg.840.

⁹¹John Paul II. 1984. Evangelium Vitae: Pg. 10, London: Catholic Truth Society.

promotion of the culture of life. The Holy Father says that, “The ‘no’ which is unconditionally required makes clear the absolute limit beneath which free individuals cannot lower themselves. At the same time they indicate the minimum which they must respect and from which they must start out in order to say ‘Yes’ over and over again, a yes which will gradually embrace the entire horizon of the good.”⁹²

The second level of activity that *Evangelium Vitae* promotes is the direct defense of life at all stages from conception to natural death. This level involves both direct action and political action. Not lacking in any approach is the necessity for prayer. Prayer helps us to recognize the central role that God plays in our lives. We are therefore called to keep on praying to God to enable us to be champions and defenders of life at all levels beginning from conception to natural death.

The third level of activity and the one that is clearly at heart of the Holy Father’s vision is the promotion of the overall culture of life. John Paul II sees the crisis at the end of the twentieth century not only as a crisis of individual morality, but also as a social, cultural crisis. “It is not only a personal, but a social concern to make unconditional respect for human life the foundation of a renewed society.”⁹³

The pope mentions a veritable culture of death at the root of sickness of the twentieth century, saying that, “a new cultural climate is developing and taking hold, which gives crime against life a new and if possible- even more sinister character, giving rise to further grave concern; broad sectors of public opinion justify certain crimes against life in the name of rights of individual freedom and on this basis, they claim not only exemption from punishment, but even authorization by that state so that these things can be done with total freedom and indeed with the free assistance of health-care systems.”⁹⁴

Later he says, “In the background of the current crisis of life, there is a profound crisis of culture, which generates skepticism in relation to the very foundations of knowledge and ethics, and which makes it increasingly difficult to grasp clearly the meaning of what man is, the meaning of his rights and his duties.”⁹⁵ The craving for the rights of women and their freedom appears to be the cause of this misdemeanor. Craving for freedom has taken a new dimension in the modern society. Women have

⁹²Ibid. *Evangelium Vitae* No.75. Pg. 97-98.

⁹³Ibid. *Evangelium Vitae* No. 77.Pg.99.

⁹⁴Ibid.*Evangelium Vitae* No. 4. Pg. 8.

⁹⁵Ibid. *Evangelium Vitae* No.11. Pg.17.

adopted the saying, 'My body, my choice' meaning the body is mine and I am free to do whatever I want to do with it.

John Paul talks about the "veritable structures of sin"⁹⁶ that requires transformation of social realities; "This culture (of death) is fostered by powerful cultural, economic and political currents which encourage an idea of society excessively concerned with efficiency."⁹⁷ Such cultural crisis requires a change of many social realities, including cultural, economic and political; "To all the members of the church, the people of life, I make this most urgent appeal, that together we may offer this world of ours new signs of hope, and work to ensure justice and solidarity will increase and that a new culture of human life will be affirmed for the building of an authentic civilization of truth and love."⁹⁸ To overcome the monster of the culture of death, Pope John Paul invites the entire people of God and good will to the bandwagon in order to fight as a team. He is informed by the very fact that the battle is not small and it is not ending very soon. According to *Evangelium Vitae*, men and women of good will have to consider that promoting the Gospel of life involves activity more broadly than directly combating abortion. They must fight against those things in the culture that threatens not only life, but also the dignity of the human person in any way. They need to overcome the intellectual, social and cultural obstacles that hinder people from automatically affirming life. In order to promote a culture of life, one must obey the ten commandments, including those relating to religion, sexuality and other social realities; "Detached from this wider framework, the commandment 'you shall not kill' is destined to become nothing more than an obligation imposed from without, and very soon we begin to look for its limit and try to find mitigating factors and exceptions. Only when people are open to the fullness of the truth about God, man and history will the words 'you shall not kill' shine forth once more as good for man in himself and in his relations with others."⁹⁹ This comes as a result of interiorizing of the commandment, 'you shall not kill' and henceforth making it part and parcel of our daily life.

⁹⁶ Ibid. *Evangelium Vitae* No.12. Pg.18.

⁹⁷ Ibid. *Evangelium Vitae* No.12. Pg.18.

⁹⁸ Ibid. *Evangelium Vitae* No. 6. Pg.11.

⁹⁹ Ibid. *Evangelium Vitae* No. 48. Pg.68.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church: (C.C.C.2270-2275)

Abortion is one of the controversial issues of our time. The enormity of the matter is demonstrated by the number of global abortions in the entire world. The statistics given by the W.H.O. is approximately forty to fifty million cases of procured abortion per year and these are basically reported cases. This shows the seriousness and the magnitude of the problem.

The church's unfailing teaching on abortion is distinctly clear namely, that to directly procure an abortion or to assist in the procuring of an abortion is considered to be a grave sin. It is considered to be on the same level as murder, the murder of innocent human beings who lack the power to defend themselves. Children in the womb are considered to be innocent and defenseless. Innocent means that they found themselves beginning to exist in a situation of rejection. Defenseless on the other hand means that they are harmless. Although some people who support abortion consider children in the womb of the mother as aggressor, but this is a merely false accusation against the defenseless. In the real sense, the child in mother's womb is always under the mercy of its mother.

It is from the argument stated above that the Catechism of the Catholic Church has come out to define very clearly the position of the Catholic Church. The Catechism of the Catholic Church no. 2270 states "Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the Rights of a person-among which is inviolable right of every innocent being to life."¹⁰⁰ Then who is a person? Personhood is a legal concept. According to the law, "a person is defined as a legal entity recognized by law as having rights and duties. In terms of individuals, a person is someone who is entitled to specific legal protections, and personhood signifies the state of enjoying those protections."¹⁰¹ The Catechism of the Catholic Church goes ahead to state that, "Since the first century, the church has affirmed the moral evil of every procured abortion. This teaching has not changed and remains unchangeable. Direct abortion, that is to say abortion willed either as an end or means, is gravely contrary to the

¹⁰⁰ Catechism of the Catholic Church: No. 2270. 1994. Nairobi: Pauline Publications- Africa.

¹⁰¹ Harold J. Morowitz, James S. Trefil. 1992. The Facts of Life: Science and Abortion Controversy. Pg. 11, New York: Oxford University Press.

moral law.....”¹⁰² The church firm stand is based on what I have already stated that the origin of human life is God. Man is created in the image and likeness of God. Image and likeness of God in man is manifested through the breath that God breathed in man at the very dawn of creation. God put his soul in the first man and it is this soul that is passed down from the parents to the offspring.

Then what is a soul? In relationship to the concept of a person, soul is a religious concept. “The soul is what makes humans different from other living things. In our language, it is what defines humanness.”¹⁰³ The Philosophy has attempted to describe soul as the principle of life. If this is the case, the argument would be that even animals and plants have soul because they have life in them. In my own opinion, I would like to point out that soul being a religious concept it describes the breath that God gave to man at creation. If this is the case therefore, it is only the human beings that have soul. Animals and plants, though they have life, they cannot be said to have souls. Soul is a property of God and at death the soul goes back to God to await judgment.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that “God the Lord of life has entrusted to men the noble mission of safeguarding life and men must carry it out in manner worthy of themselves. Life must be protected with utmost care from the moment of conception; Abortion and infanticide are abominable crimes.”¹⁰⁴

The Church teaching that abortion is murder is rooted in one simple fact namely that abortion is a violation of life which man is entrusted to defend. It is the deliberate killing of a human being without any reason other than the fact that human being is an inconvenience. There are some situation that killing may be permitted. Such situations as in the case of self-defense or just war, killing may occur and the culpability is lessened. However this does not mean that the act in itself is good. The act of killing remains evil. But the circumstance under which the killing occurs dictates that someone has to die, either the attacker or the attacked.

The Catholic Church’s teaching about abortion stands on three important logical premises namely; that the fetus is a human being; that killing a human being is wrong. Therefore, killing a fetus is wrong. This is why the Catholic Church teaches that abortion is wrong.

¹⁰² Catechism of the Catholic Church: No. 2271. 1994. Nairobi: Pauline Publications- Africa.

¹⁰³ Harold J. Morowitz, James S. Trefil. 1992. The Facts of Life: Science and Abortion Controversy. Pg. 14, New York: Oxford University Press.

¹⁰⁴ Catechism of the Catholic Church: No. 2272. 1994. Nairobi: Pauline Publications- Africa.

When handling abortion, we need to be cognizant of the principle stated in Matthew's Gospel namely, "always treat others as you like them to treat you."¹⁰⁵ To argue from a position which does not depend on the existence of God; murder is wrong because it is doing to others what is hurtful to you; why should it be morally okay to murder someone else when it would not be morally okay for you to be murdered or someone you love? This quotation from the Gospel of Matthew should always be the guiding principle. What hurts me should also hurt the other person. The biggest problem today is the don't care attitude to a person until something is done that threatens his personal existence.

A fetus is rightly called a human being because it is genetically a human being-he or she is alive. A fetus may 'just be a clump of tissues' or a 'ball of cells' but that is all a human is if all we are looking at is the physical makeup is his or her body. A fetus has fewer cells, but they are no less human.

Those who assist in abortion, vote it or choose to have one are deemed to be guilty because they are deliberately working towards the goal of an abortion by their actions. They become part and parcel of the process and thus sharing in the responsibilities. They make a deliberate choice to engage in this activity, knowing that it would result in the death of a human being. Although various circumstances can mitigate the degree of guilt, the fact is that assisting with an abortion is a sin and will always remain a sin. A man who finance an abortion of his wife because they are not ready for another child, the parents who assists their daughter to do an abortion because she is still young and needs to continue with her studies and a young man who assists his girlfriend to do an abortion because they are not prepared to become parents, all share in the same sin. That is, they are culpable of their own activities and must be held responsible.

¹⁰⁵Matthew 7: 12.

3 THE HUMAN CONSCIENCE

3.1 THE MEANING OF CONSCIENCE

The reality of human conscience is pivotal in any Christian discussion about morality. The link between the concepts of conscience and morality are intertwined. It is the operation of conscience that provides the main focus in any discussion of morality. The term conscience has no direct reference in the Old Testament. Only the reality of conscience is depicted in different chapters in the Old Testament. The most favored term is the 'Heart' as in the expression, 'God probes the heart'. The Hebrew peoples thought of conscience as an objective, extrinsic and communal thing.

The greatest contribution is found in the prophetic message in which, "they stressed on ones interior dispositions and responsibility of the individual."¹⁰⁶ For example, the Jews looked forward to the day when God would seal with his people a new covenant "written in the heart."¹⁰⁷

An important biblical reference to conscience is the one echoed in St. Paul in his writings. "He undoubtedly drew on the stoics understanding of Syneidesis, but he enriched it with insights from the bible and his own Christian experience."¹⁰⁸ For Paul, "conscience is a God-given faculty residing in everyone that enables one to distinguish right from wrong."¹⁰⁹

In the New Testament therefore conscience refers to awareness of wrongdoing, especially the pangs experienced after one has done wrong.

Without divine revelation, gentiles can be said to have this awareness of right and wrong. It is part of human makeup created by God. "So, when Gentiles, not having the law, still through their own innate sense behave as the law commands, then even though they have no law for themselves, they can demonstrate the effect of the law engraved on their hearts, to which their own conscience bears witness; since they are aware of various consideration, some of which accuse them, while others provide them with a defense..... on the day when, according to the Gospel that I preach, God,

¹⁰⁶Thomas Bokenkotter. 1985. Dynamic Catholicism: A Historical Catechism. Pg. 307, New York: Image Books Doubleday.

¹⁰⁷Jeremiah 11:20, 17:10.

¹⁰⁸Thomas Bokenkotter. 1985. Dynamic Catholicism: A Historical Catechism. Pg. 307, New York: Image Books Doubleday.

¹⁰⁹Ibid. Pg. 307.

through Jesus Christ judges all human secrets.”¹¹⁰ Conscience which is joined to knowledge of moral norms written in the heart serves the gentiles as the demand of the revealed law serves the Jews. People will not be judged on the basis of what they do not know, but of what they do know. Those who have never seen the Bible can still know God’s revelation of himself in nature and in their conscience. They too will be judged. Thus, while the Jews have a moral obligation to obey the law, the gentiles have obligation to their conscience. Conscience is therefore important not only for believers, but also for unbelievers.

In his book entitled “America’s Christian History” J. S. Smithies defines conscience as “internal or self-knowledge or judgment of right and wrong or the faculty power or principle within us which decides on the lawfulness or unlawfulness of our own actions and affections and instantly approves or condemns them.”¹¹¹ Conscience is therefore considered as a “general principle of moral approbation or disapprobation, applied to one’s own conduct and affections, alleging that our notion of right and wrong are not to be deduced from a single principle or faculty, but from various powers of the understanding and will.”¹¹²

In his book entitled Christian Ethics Karl-Heinz Peschke attempts to define human conscience as, “That moral faculty which tells people subjectively what is good and evil and which manifests their moral obligation to them.”¹¹³

Conscience manifests itself in the feeling of obligation we experience, which precedes, attends and follows our actions. Conscience is occupied in ascertaining our duty before we proceed to action, then in judging our actions when performed.

In other words, conscience is a critical inner awareness that bears witness to the norms and values we recognize and apply. The complex of values with which conscience deals with includes not only those that we own but the entire range of values to which we are exposed during life’s journey. Hence there is always a struggle in our reflective process. Upon violating the values we recognize and their application,

¹¹⁰Romans 2:14-16.

¹¹¹J. S. Smithies. 2010. America’s Christian History: Learning History through Principles-Level F. Pg. 80, New York: Intrepids Books TM.

¹¹²Ibid: Pg.80.

¹¹³Karl Heinz Peschke. 1979. Christian Ethics: Moral Theology in the light of Vatican II. Vol. I. General Moral Theology. Third Edition. Pg. 158, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers.

the witness of conscience makes its presence known by inducing mental anguish and feelings to us.

Conscience also provides a sense of pleasure when we reflect on conformity to our value system. St. Thomas Aquinas distinguished between Synderesis, moral conscience and conscience. Synderesis consists of those basic principles which are innate such as “good should be done and evil should be avoided.”¹¹⁴ One must act according to rational nature because happiness is what we pursue naturally. Finally, he asserts that, “conscience is a practical judgment about the morality of a concrete choice I am about to make or have made in the light of general understanding of morality.”¹¹⁵

Vatican II emphasizes the dignity of conscience, a dignity rooted in the law written in our hearts. We do not make this law, but rather we discover it. It consists of moral principles which God gave us in creating us and which we can know naturally. Although this law written in our heart is made up of general principles, it has implications for particular moral issues, as it has been clearly stated in the constitution in the church in the modern world No.16 that, “Deep within their consciences men and women discover a law which they have not laid upon themselves and which they must obey its voice, ever calling them to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, tells them inwardly at the right moment: do this, shun that, for they have in their hearts a law inscribed by God. Their dignity rests in observing this law, and by it they will be judged. Conscience is the most secret core and the sanctuary of the human person. There they are alone with God whose voice echoes in their depths.”¹¹⁶

From the perspective of Vatican II, conscience refers to the knowledge of the principles of morality, to the process of reasoning, from principles to conclusion which are moral judgments on choices made or under consideration.

In using the word conscience, “the bishops of Vatican II spoke eloquently of the sacredness of conscience as person’s most sacred core and sanctuary, that one will be judged by fidelity primarily to conscience that one must search with all persons of

¹¹⁴Thomas Bokenkotter. 1985. *Dynamic Catholicism: A Historical Catechism*. Pg. 307, New York: Image Books Doubleday.

¹¹⁵Ibid. Pg. 308.

¹¹⁶Austin Flannery (General Auditor). 1992. *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*. Gaudium et Spes no. 16. Pgs. 805-806, Bombay: St. Paul Publication.

good-will for the answers to one's moral dilemmas, that freedom is of the essence of the conscience, that one is bound to obey even an erring conscience."¹¹⁷

Since conscience is an expression of the natural law, which can be known by everyone, and since this law is objective, the council proceed to point out that, "Through loyalty to conscience Christians are joined to other men in the search for truth and for the right solution to so many moral problems which arise both in the life of individuals and from social relationships. Hence, the more a correct conscience prevails, the more do persons and groups turn aside from blind choice and try to be guided by the objective standards of moral conduct."¹¹⁸

The council speaks of correct conscience. Correct conscience requires that one be reasonable, that one conforms to objective or true norms, not to subjective substitutes chosen arbitrarily. Important to remark is that conscience is not always correct. At times, conscience makes mistake.

Vatican II teaches that every human person has a right to religious Freedom. This teaching often has been misrepresented and sometimes has been exploited to promote a false understanding of the freedom of conscience. John Courtney Murray in his edition of 'Declaration on Religious Freedom' argues, "It is worth noting that the declaration does not base the right to the free exercise of religion on freedom of conscience. Nowhere does this phrase occur. And the declaration nowhere lends its authority to the theory for which the phrase frequently stands, namely, that I have the right to do what my conscience tells me to do. This is a perilous theory. Its particular peril is subjectivism- the notion that, in the end it is my conscience and not the objective truth which determines what is right or what is wrong, true or false."¹¹⁹ The clear message that is being put across by Murray is that "all men are bound to seek the truth, especially in what concerns God and his church, and to embrace the truth they come to know and to hold fast to it."¹²⁰ Secondly, "in the formation of their

¹¹⁷Thomas Bokenkotter. 1985. *Dynamic Catholicism: A Historical Catechism*. Pg. 309, New York: Image Books Doubleday.

¹¹⁸Austin Flannery (General Editor). 1992. *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*. Gaudium et Spes no. 16. Pg. 106, Bombay: St. Paul Publication.

¹¹⁹Kenneth L. Grasso & Robert P. Hunt (Eds). 2006. *Catholicism and Religious Freedom: Contemporary Reflections on Vatican II's Declaration on Religious Liberty*. Pgs. 14-15, Maryland: Rowman& Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

¹²⁰Ibid. Pg. 15.

conscience, the Christian faithful ought carefully to attend to the sacred and certain doctrine of the church. The church is by the will of Christ, the teacher of the truth.”¹²¹ Conscience so to speak is a psychological faculty through which we become conscious of and are able to respond to the moral character of our own actions. It is thought as the source of pain we suffer as a result of doing what is wrong- the pains of guilt. It is also the source of happiness we experience as a result of doing what is right- the joy of being innocent.

Conscience may also be looked at as the source of what is right and what is wrong. Therefore, a person who is motivated to act on principle is said to act ‘consciously’. The term conscience or consciously originates from the Latin word ‘Conscientia’ which is a direct translation of the Greek word ‘Syneidesis’. “The term Syneidesis which signify literally a ‘knowing with,’ originated from Greek philosophy’s identification of the experience of self-awareness in the forming of moral judgments.”¹²² It ranges in meaning from being aware of something hence our consciousness to knowing something in common with someone. Knowing something in common with someone can mean sharing his secret and this enable one to serve as a witness against the person.

Another element worth mentioning in this work is the religious approach to conscience. Some religious theories of conscience interpret the voice of conscience as the voice of God within us. Augustine believed that when we listen to our conscience, we hear the voice of God whispering to us about what is right and what is wrong.

3.2 SELECTED APPROACH TO CONSCIENCE

Although the endeavor to systematically define conscience had been achieved in the Middle Ages, a further clarity and distinctiveness of conscience was achieved in the medieval period. Here therefore, I want to focus myself on the medieval approach so as to attain more light about what conscience means.

For instance Christian Scholastic Theories of conscience often distinguish synderesis which is supposed source of moral knowledge. For Bonaventure, it is an affective or volitional response to moral knowledge. Bonaventure’s theory combines knowledge

¹²¹Ibid. Pg. 15.

¹²²John Mahoney. 1987. The Making of Moral Theology: A Study of Roman Catholic Tradition. Pg. 185, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

and motivation. For Thomas Aquinas, conscience is the application of moral knowledge to action.

An early modern example of a reflection theory is that of Joseph Butler, for whom conscience consists in calm, rational reflection on what we ought to do. Reflection theories agree that both knowledge and motivation are needed for moral action, but they regard these as either presupposed by the reflection of conscience or else subsumed under it.

It was in this selected period that treatise on conscience became standard. The scholars distinguished two aspects of conscience namely;

- I) Synderesis and
- II) Conscientia.

Synderesis refers to the ineradicable and infallible basis of conscience in human nature while conscientia refers to the more particular judgment that we make about our actions. The scholars raised a variety of issues about these two aspects of conscience; whether they are unborn powers, learned dispositions or actions, whether they are intellectual, motivational or affective and whether conscience is a manifestation of practical reason or separate faculty. They also sought to find out whether conscience is fallible and if so, to what extent one is responsible for acting in accordance with an erring conscience.

Before entering into selected approach to conscience, I will begin by giving a short glimpse to St. Augustine of Hippo. However, important to note is that St. Augustine was an earlier theologian. I have chosen him because of his deep approach to the subject of conscience and his importance. St. Augustine gave a deep reflection on understanding the theme of the human conscience. Being aware of the great role he played permit me to include him under the category of the selected Theologians who gave a serious reflection on the human conscience.

To give a better analysis to selected approach to conscience, I wish to limit myself only to three main characters namely:

- I) St. Augustine of Hippo.
- II) St. Thomas Aquinas.
- III) St. Bonaventure.

Finally I will conclude this section with the position of the most recent theological scholar of our own time who has also extensively dealt with the theme of conscience namely Pope Benedict the XVI.

3.2.1 St. Augustine of Hippo

St Augustine was a major figure in bringing Christianity to dominance in previously pagan Roman Empire. Born in Tagaste, Augustine's journey of faith was far from straight forward. Converting to Christianity in 386 Augustine had immersed himself first in Manichaeism, then Skepticism and then finally Neo-platonism. Once a Christian, Augustine became Bishop of Hippo and a powerful theologian, and defender of the faith.

Augustine was deeply influenced by Platonism and therefore held that there is only one God, who was the source of all goodness. There is only one virtue which is God. All others such as justice and goodness are characteristics of the One Virtue called God. For Augustine, conscience flows from divine love. Therefore, conscience is 'God's Love' being poured to human beings. Accordingly, St. Augustine considered conscience to be the voice of God, speaking within the individual. Conscience is God-given faculty to mankind to enable him or her to observe the law. The sense of moral right and wrong is taught by an inward teaching and the laws are preserved independently of humans. In his book entitled 'De Trinitate Book 14, chapter 15; 21' Augustine asks; "where then are they written, unless in the book of that light which is called Truth? God is regarded as the ultimate source and point of origin for all that comes below. Equated with being, Goodness and the truth, God is the unchanging point which unifies all that comes after and below within as abiding and providentially ordained rational hierarchy."¹²³

St. Augustine's teachings had a great impact on other later scholars. One effect of Augustine's views was to make the conscience the most important element of moral decision making. Some of his followers went as far to argue that conscience is more important than the moral teachings of the church.

For example, Martin Luther who was an Augustinian Monk broke with the church arguing that, "his conscience would not allow him to accept the teachings of the

¹²³Arthur West Haddan. "St. Augustine on the Trinity: Book XIV; Chapter 15." Retrieved on 7th-09-2015 from: <http://www.logoslibrary.org/augustine/trinity/1415.html>.

pope.”¹²⁴ The problem that arose from this understanding of conscience was the unquestionability aspect bearing in mind that conscience was seen as the voice of God within.

3.2.2 St. Thomas Aquinas

St. Thomas Aquinas was the greatest Philosopher and theologian of the medieval church. He was born in Italy, studied at the University of Naples and became a Dominican in 1244. Thomas went to Paris (1252), where he gained great reputation and became a professor of theology.

The moral theory of Thomas Aquinas developed as part of his theological doctrine which had a great impact on the whole of moral philosophy. The doctrine of St. Thomas has influenced much of the present view of conscience and its problem. The idea of God is important and essential for understanding the concept of conscience in the mind-set of St. Thomas Aquinas.

The advancement of the concept of conscience by Thomas Aquinas was more theological in nature than philosophical. Accordingly, God’s revelation through the scripture takes a central position. All the other concepts are treated in the doctrine in so far as they relate to God. The interpretation of the theory of Aquinas helps so much to determine the whole vision of conscience; whether conscience is an application of moral knowledge acquired by the activities of the human intellect alone or is an application of moral knowledge given us by God through revelation.

Although Aquinas experienced strong influence of Aristotle, his vision is mainly theological. In *Summa Theologiae*, he writes, “we always need divine assistance in order to take thought about anything, in as much as it is God who moves the intellect into action.”¹²⁵

Aquinas believed that there are two means of God’s assistance to know the moral truth namely;

- i) By natural Illumination
- ii) By Grace.

¹²⁴John Mahoney. 1987. *The Making of Moral Theology: A Study of the Roman Catholic Tradition*. Pg. 290, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

¹²⁵St. Thomas Aquinas. 2006. *The Gospel of Grace- 1a2ae Pg.106-114 (I-II, 109.1)*. Edited by Cornelius Ernest O.P. From *Summa Theologiae*: Vol. 30, Pg. 73, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

“Although every human being is able to know the moral truth through one’s use of intellect, everyone can hardly escape from making errors of moral judgment. Because of sin, a human being is not able to grasp moral truth completely only through his natural capacities. Reason is subject to sin and it may be corrected only by grace of God who reveals the moral truth supernaturally in his son, Jesus Christ.”¹²⁶ Thomas Aquinas continues to assert that “Man can in no way rise up again from sin by himself without the assistance of grace.”¹²⁷

The contextualization of Thomas Aquinas understanding of conscience:

To comprehend Thomas Aquinas understanding of conscience, four theological and ethical systems must be put in place:

i) **Human rationality:**

Aquinas viewed a human person as a unitary being endowed with both body and rational soul. It is the reason that distinguishes human from other animals. For Thomas Aquinas, human being is psychological-physical unity for whom knowledge begins with experience.

ii) **Natural law and eternal law:**

The eternal law is the plan of the divine wisdom directing all things to the attainment of their ends. For Aquinas, it is not possible for creatures to read the mind of God in order to discern the eternal law. However, given their distinctive rational nature, humans are able to know the natural law through reflection on their experience. In their activity, human beings participate in the eternal law. Every person possesses an innate drive towards the achievement of his/her end which is good. Each person possesses also the light of reason whereby he can reflect on these fundamental inclinations of his nature and promulgate to himself the natural law, which is the totality of the universal precepts namely ‘do good and avoid evil’.

iii) **The meaning of rationality:**

For Thomas Aquinas, reason means regard for and openness to reality. It comprises all modes of perceiving reality.

iv) **The primary precepts of Natural law:**

¹²⁶Ibid. 109.8 Pg. 95.

¹²⁷Ibid. 109.7 Pg. 92.

According to Aquinas the primary precept of the law is that good should be done and pursued and evil should be avoided; and on this are founded all other precepts of the law of nature. This primary precept is known intuitively and by 'natural inclinations'.

"This primary precept of natural law is synonymous with what Aquinas called Synderesis, the first principles of practical reason that are known to human beings by the very nature of their status as being created in God's image and likeness."¹²⁸

SYNDERESIS: According to Aquinas, "Synderesis is in the rational part of the human agent. It is the rational disposition of the human mind by which we apprehend without enquiry the basic principles of behavior."¹²⁹ Thus Synderesis is the basic and practical use of human reason, pointing the right course of action. It is an intellectual activity.

According to St. Thomas Aquinas, synderesis cannot fail but can be obstructed; neither can it be wrong. The content of Synderesis is by definition self-evident, non-negotiable, foundational principles from which we construct our arguments and decide our actions. In summary, Aquinas argues that, "In order that there can be some rightness in human deeds, there must be some enduring principle which has unchangeable rightness and by reference to which all deeds are tested, such that this enduring principle resists everything evil and gives assent to everything good. This is what synderesis is, whose job is to murmur back in reply to evil and to turn us towards what is good."¹³⁰ Therefore synderesis cannot be wrong.

CONSCIENCE: "Conscience then can be understood as the act of applying knowledge to concrete actions and specific conduct whereas synderesis, the knowledge of the first order principles as understood as general universal absolute necessary and not subject to error and as orienting one to good."¹³¹ Aquinas argued that there is 'Synderesis rule': do good and avoid evil. "The conscience is binding. It is wrong to disobey the dictates of your conscience. This applies, even if the conscience makes a mistake.

According to St. Thomas, conscience is an intellectual act of judgment. This judgment is primarily practical and forward-looking, corresponding to and guiding each choice one is about to make. Conscience is one's last and best judgment concerning what one

¹²⁸Robert J. Smith.1998. Conscience and Catholicism: The Nature and Function of Conscience in Contemporary Roman Catholic Moral Theology. Pg. 3, Maryland: University Press.

¹²⁹Douglas C. Langston. 2000. Conscience and other Virtues: From Bonaventure to Macintyre. Pg. 39, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press.

¹³⁰Robert J. Smith. 1998. Conscience and Catholicism: The Nature and Function of Conscience in Contemporary Roman Catholic Moral Theology. Pg. 8, Maryland: University Press.

¹³¹Ibid. Pg. 11.

should choose. With this judgment in mind one chooses either in agreement with conscience or against it.”¹³²

If your conscience after reflection tells you that a particular action is wrong, even if the church should say otherwise, it would be wrong to carry out that action. On the contrary, if your conscience tells you that you must do something which the church forbids, you would commit a sin if you failed to obey your conscience.

Although this appears to be a recipe for anarchy, Aquinas believed that the conscience derives its authority from God. Only an erring conscience would demand that a Christian should defy the authority of the church.

Aquinas believed that wrongdoing came from ignorance or from the dictates of the conscience where a person knows what he should be doing, but fails to do so, is doing wrong. This failure can be due to a failure to develop those virtues that enable a person to make appropriate judgment as based on an evaluation of the situation and careful reflection.

It is important to realize that according to St. Thomas Aquinas, “moral truth is given to everyone. Conscience need not to discover what is already revealed naturally to it. However, sin prevents a human being to grasp and especially to follow the moral truth. The ability to follow the moral truth is enshrined in the nature of being human.”¹³³

Accordingly, Thomas Aquinas says that, “Man is part of the created world, and his position is determined by the fact that he is dependent creature, whose last end, his beatitude consists in achieving the unity with God which is lost as the consequence of the original sin. The particular feature of the moral theology of Thomas Aquinas is the stress on the acts of virtue which direct the human being to salvation from sin and eternal death.”¹³⁴ In addition to this, he continues to argue that, “Like the knowledge of the moral truth, the acts of virtue are possible only through divine grace which embraces not only the supernatural revelation of the truth, but also the supernatural

¹³²St. Thomas Aquinas. 1948. *Summa Theologica: Complete English Edition in Five Volumes. Volume One: 1^a, QQ 1-119, 1^a, II QQ, 1-4. (1, q. 79, a. 13.)* Pgs. 407-408, New York: Christian Classics Publishers.

¹³³St. Thomas Aquinas. 1948. *Summa Theologica: Complete English Edition in Five Volumes. Volume Two: 1a, IIae QQ 1-114. (Treatise on Grace-Question 109).* Pg. 1123, New York: Christian Classics Publishers.

¹³⁴St. Thomas Aquinas. 1948. *Summa Theologica: Complete English Edition in Five Volumes. Volume Three: 11a, IIae QQ, 1-148. (II-II, 4. 3-5.)* Pg. 1187, New York: Christian Classics Publishers.

power to live a virtuous life.”¹³⁵ Because the condition of grace is belief in the Lord Jesus, Aquinas addressed the question of unbelievers and whether they can do any good at all in accordance with what is revealed naturally to their conscience.

He arrived at a conclusion that, “unbelievers can do some good, but not everything that God requires from a human being.”¹³⁶ To prove the issue of unbelievers, St. Thomas relied on St. Paul’s Letter to the romans where Paul wrote that unbelievers, not having the law do by nature things required by the law. “They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness.”¹³⁷ (Romans 2:14-15)

Following Augustine, “Aquinas maintained that believers can do what God’s law requires also because of the spirit of grace.”¹³⁸ Therefore this implies that a theory of good conscience cannot be restricted only to believers, but also to unbelievers.

However, Aquinas emphasized on the importance of God’s grace, not only for grasping moral truth to be applied by the act of conscience. The act of conscience needs divine assistance.

It is worth stressing that the importance of receiving God’s grace through faith in Christ does not exclude those who do not believe from receiving God’s grace at all.

From this theological view of human nature and need of God’s grace for man’s moral well-being emanates the importance of conscience in the life of human beings and the society as a whole. The chief contribution of Thomas Aquinas to the problem of conscience is his main idea that one must act in accordance with one’s conscience. For Aquinas, following one’s conscience is the way to relate to God, for any personal well-being without God is impossible.

3.2.3 St. Bonaventure:

Through conscience, human beings discern what is right and what is wrong. While there are many medieval views about the nature of conscience, most views regard human beings as capable of knowing in general what ought to be done and applying

¹³⁵St. Thomas Aquinas. 1948. *Summa Theologica*. Complete English Edition in Five Volumes. Volume Tree: 11a, Ilae, QQ 1-148. (question 109, Article 1 & 2.) Pgs. 1654-1656, New York: Christian Classics Publisher.

¹³⁶St. Thomas Aquinas. 1948. *Summa Theologica*. Complete English Edition in Five Volumes. Volume Two: 1a, Ilae, QQ. 1-114. (I-II, 109.2). Pgs. 1124-1125, New York: Christian Classics Publisher.

¹³⁷Romans: 2: 14-15.

¹³⁸St. Thomas Aquinas. 1948. *Summa Theologica*. Complete English Edition in Five Volumes. Volume Two: 1a, Ilae QQ. 1-114. (I-II; 109.4). Pg. 1126, New York: Christian Classics Publishers.

this knowledge through conscience to particular decisions about action. The ability to act on the determinations of conscience is tied to development of moral virtues which in turn refines the functions of conscience.

Bonaventure is one of the famous scholastic theologian and a philosopher who involved himself widely in searching to understand the meaning of conscience.

Bonaventure discusses both conscience and synderesis in his commentary on the Sentences, Book II, Distinction 39. He places conscience squarely within the rational faculty, specifying that it is part of practical reason because it is connected to the Performance of actions. It is thus also connected to both the will and the emotions. On the other hand, “he places synderesis in the affective part of human ‘beings, for he regards synderesis as that which stimulates us to the good.”¹³⁹

Lombard’s presentation of his discussion of conscience and synderesis had a great influence on Bonaventure. Apart from discussing the nature of conscience and synderesis, Bonaventure constantly returns to the question of how men can commit evil despite their orientation to good from both conscience and Synderesis.

Conscience is divided into two general parts by Bonaventure:

The first part seems to be a power for discovering the truth of very general practical principles like ‘obey God,’ ‘honor your parents,’ and ‘do not harm your neighbor’.

Bonaventure regards this part of conscience as unerring as well as innate. Not only does it never make mistake, but the truth of every general practical principles, but also it can never be lost to any person no matter how morally corrupt that person may become.

The second part of conscience is the application of the very general principles to situations that may be either general or particular. A general situation is the one that covers a variety of cases for example the Jewish prohibition against eating pork.

Whether general or particular, we refer to this part of conscience as applied conscience.

According to Bonaventure, applied conscience is also innate for we naturally apply the very general practical principles to situations. It can however be mistaken, and a very general principle may be misapplied through ignorance or faulty reasoning. A person who is ignorant that a situation fits a general practical principle also suffers from

¹³⁹Douglas C. Langston. 2000. Conscience and other Virtues: From Bonaventure to Macintyre: Pennsylvania: Pg. 225, Pennsylvania State University Press.

mistaken applied conscience. For example, “although a person might know that ‘God is to be obeyed,’ he or she might not obey Christ and might harm Christ because he or she is ignorant of the fact that Christ is God.”¹⁴⁰

Bonaventure’s distinction between the Potential conscience and the applied conscience helps to explain how human beings, who are naturally oriented by conscience to the good, perform evil. Their evil actions are as a result of ignorance or misapplication of the applied conscience. Here Bonaventure’s reasoning raises several questions. However, in this case, we consider only two namely:

- 1) The Authority of conscience.
- 2) The formation of practical principles.

Bonaventure discusses in details whether one should always follow one’s conscience. For him, conscience may dictate any of three types of Actions:

- 1) Those in conformity with God’s Law.
- 2) Those in addition to God’s Law.
- 3) Those contrary to God’s Law.

In the first and the second case, one is obliged to follow one’s conscience. The third type is always problematic because we have an erroneous applied conscience, our conscience can command us to do what is against God’s Laws.

We ought not to do what is in conflict with God’s law. However, Bonaventure thinks that it is wrong to act against our conscience, because the conscience is the representative of God within us. So we should never act against our conscience. This creates a dilemma: “On one hand, our conscience mistakenly requires us to act against God’s law and we seemingly should not follow conscience in this case. On the other hand, God’s law requires us not to act against our conscience.”¹⁴¹

Acting against our conscience reveals that we are acting in an evil manner, for we are acting with the wrong intention that is to violate the internal representative of God. By arguing so, Bonaventure was able to solve the dilemma of the authority of conscience. In case of erroneous conscience, we are in ignorance about what God’s law requires and so we are not responsible for acting against God’s law in following our conscience.

¹⁴⁰Ibid. Pg. 26.

¹⁴¹Ibid. Pg. 27.

Bonaventure does not pursue this path of resolution because he seems to be more concerned about a situation where one's conscience is in conflict with the authority of the church.

In such a situation, one should refrain from acting at all to avoid being against one's conscience. One is obligated to educate oneself properly so that applied conscience can be brought in to conformity with the authority.

Self-education thus transforms an erroneous applied conscience into a correct applied conscience and permits individuals to follow their own conscience in good faith.

Though Bonaventure never distinguished between the potential conscience and the applied conscience, with its further division into the general and particular applied conscience, the distinctions are intriguing.

Where do the principles that are endorsed as true by the Potential conscience come from?

- 1) From revelation.
- 2) Church authorities.
- 3) Natural law.

But do they all come from these sources? Some of these principles come from experience. For example, "exercising will prolong one's life or Insomnia will shorten one's life comes from experience."¹⁴²

From this perspective, we can assert that Bonaventure views conscience as a dynamic faculty. Conscience seems not to be a static faculty for Bonaventure, but dynamic.

Bonaventure regards conscience as a dispositional potentiality. The dispositional part seems to relate closely to the Potential conscience. Our ability to apply the very general practical principles seems to be innate for Bonaventure. But we can improve our ability to formulate the principles of the general applied conscience and our ability to apply the very general practical principles without error. In other words, although conscience is innate to all people, it can be improved or weakened in its exercise.

Bonaventure draws a very useful connection with the virtues. Like conscience, the virtues are partly innate and partly acquired. Though we have no control over the development of what we can acquire.

¹⁴²Ibid. Pg. 28.

BONAVENTURE ON SYNDERESIS:

Bonaventure asserts that conscience is dependent on synderesis to the objection that synderesis is the spark of conscience, it ought to be said, that it is called spark insofar as conscience in itself cannot move or vex or stimulate without the mediation of synderesis, which is like the stimulus and flame of conscience. “Just as reason cannot move without the mediation of the will, conscience cannot move without the mediation of synderesis.”¹⁴³

Bonaventure’s use of synderesis as the spark of conscience indicates that the synderesis provides a spark that conscience needs to operate. The spark that synderesis provides conscience is the general drive to do Good that is expressed in human kind’s search for the good.

When Bonaventure claims that synderesis is the desire to do good and avoid evil, “he means that we are directed to the good found in the object. This means that we desire objects insofar as they are good and avoid evil objects insofar as they are evil. Because synderesis is directed to the general good in objects, it can never be mistaken.”¹⁴⁴

Although Bonaventure thinks that synderesis provides the positive drive towards the good that conscience directs, he believes that synderesis also indirectly guides us to the good by making us feel guilty when we follow evil. Bonaventure’s linking of synderesis with guilt plays a prominent role in his view that synderesis can never be destroyed because it is natural and innate to human beings. He argues that, “The exercise of Synderesis can be prevented, but it cannot be extinguished because, as it is something natural, it cannot be taken away from us altogether.”¹⁴⁵

To discuss how synderesis can be prevented temporarily, Bonaventure offers three possible impediments:

- 1) By darkness of Blindness.
- 2) By wantonness of pleasure
- 3) By the hardness of Obstinacy.
 - a) First impediment: Darkness of Blindness corresponds to Plato’s explanation for human being’s Performance of evil. They do it through Ignorance.

¹⁴³Ibid. Pg. 30.

¹⁴⁴Ibid. Pg. 30.

¹⁴⁵Timothy C. Potts. 1980. Conscience in Medieval Philosophy. Pg. 117, London: Cambridge University Press.

- b) Second impediment: The wantonness of pleasure corresponds to Aristotle's explanation of human evil. It is done through weakness of will.
- c) Third impediment: the hardness of Obstinacy implies moral perversity in which one knows the good, but chooses evil even when he knows that the choice leads to suffering.

In the case of 'darkness of blindness' Bonaventure says Synderesis is hampered by the darkness of blindness so that it does not murmur in reply to evil, because the evil is believed to be good e.g. the heretics who while dying for the impiety of their error, believe they die for their piety of faith. In this case, ignorance prevents one from seeing the act as evil and deserving of regret.

In describing the impediment of wantonness of pleasure, he says it is hampered by the wantonness of pleasure. For sometimes, in sins of flesh a man is engrossed by the exercise of the flesh that a sense of guilt has no place, because men of the flesh are so far carried away by the impulse to pleasure that reason has no place. In this second case, being overcome by wantonness prevents one from seeing the evil and reacting with guilt.

The impediment of hardness of obstinacy is different from the other two, for there is no pursuit of good. Synderesis is hampered by the hardness of obstinacy, so that it does not goad towards the good e.g. the damned are so hardened in their sins that they pursue evil in contrast to good. The damned are simply perverse. They know what good is and turn away to pursue evil. "Thus Synderesis is perpetually hampered from goading us to do good and consequently, can be said to be extinguished in respect of its exercise, but not extinguished without qualification, because it has another use, namely, to murmur in reply (to evil). In this use, in which the function of synderesis is to sting and murmur in reply to evil, it flourishes most in the damned."¹⁴⁶

Synderesis murmurs in the damned because it is the justified punishment of God. It is an indication of their guilt. Even though they have shut themselves off from the repentance, the murmuring inside them is a sign of the guilt caused by their pursuit of evil that is synderesis. So for Bonaventure, "even the perverse must have synderesis

¹⁴⁶Ibid. Pg. 118.

although its operation is reduced to punishment not to any longer providing a real likelihood of repentance.”¹⁴⁷

According to Bonaventure, there are human beings who know the good but turn away from it without being overcome by passion. Of great importance is to know that Bonaventure holds that synderesis cannot be corrupted by sin. It is directed to the good and cannot be changed in this respect.

The individual who possesses synderesis may be corrupted and thus synderesis will be connected with corruption. But it does not mean that synderesis itself is corrupted. Here, Bonaventure draws an analogy with a soldier riding a horse. “The rider may sit correctly and direct the horse well, if the horse falls, the rider may also be said to fall, even though he himself does not fall. Similarly, synderesis cannot be found in what is corrupted without itself being corrupted.”¹⁴⁸

Bonaventure explains that the synderesis may fall not from a fault in itself but from a fault in the virtues over which it has control. For Bonaventure therefore, there is close connection among synderesis, conscience and virtues. The virtues are first developed in line with the dictates of conscience. Their continual development is kept in line with the dictates of conscience. Continual development of them is kept in line by conscience and the murmuring of synderesis associated with the turning away from the good.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF BONAVENTURE:

As mentioned above, Bonaventure regards conscience and synderesis as residing in different faculties:

- a) Conscience as part of rational faculty and
- b) Synderesis as part of the affective faculty.

Yet conscience and synderesis interpenetrate each other. Bonaventure sees the formation of ethical rules by conscience as implementation of human being’s desire for the good. Because we have a desire for the good, we also desire the means to that goal.

¹⁴⁷ Douglas C. Langston. 2000. *Conscience and other Virtues: From Bonaventure to MacIntyre*. Pennsylvania: Pg. 34, Pennsylvania State University Press.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* Pg. 34.

Emotional reaction to doing evil is a reaction to the frustration of the desire for good caused when one fails to adhere to what the conscience has determined leads to the good.

Although Bonaventure places synderesis and conscience in different parts of human being, he does not isolate them, but rather views conscience as driven by synderesis and at the same time as directing synderesis.

Why should conscience be followed? Bonaventure responds to this question by saying:

“Because synderesis is the desire for the good and conscience is an expression of synderesis, following one’s conscience is the means for pursuing the good.”¹⁴⁹

Of equal sophistication is Bonaventure’s dynamic view of conscience. He does not see conscience as purely mechanical device for applying the general principles of synderesis. But he regards conscience as a faculty that grows and changes with experience. It directs behavior, but changes with the result of the behavior as well.

3.2.4 Pope Benedict XVI/Joseph Ratzinger

Benedict the XVI is one of the greatest Scholars of the twenty first century. Having grown up at a critical moment in the history of the church and state, he had to make important decisions which would later shape not only the history of the church, but also the history of humanity. His intellectual prowess helped him to climb the ladder from a mere priest, to a university professor, Arc Bishop of Munich, Cardinal and cardinal prefect in charge of the congregation of the propagation of doctrine of the faith. Eventually he became the supreme pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church. During this hierarchical ascend from the lowest clerical state to the highest one, he made both friends and foes. His friends were those who considered him a great defender of the catholic teachings on Faith and Morals. When it came to the defense of faith, he did not mince his words. He was the man behind the success of the Papacy of John Paul the II.

In the same tone, he also made enemies because of his position when it came to the defense of the position taken by the church. “Understandably, he soon acquired the reputation of being the ‘Grant Inquisitor’, Panzerkardinal, or enforcer of the faith- and was presented by the media as practically the enemy of humanity. Again, this was not surprising, since the teaching of the church on issues that affect us all in the depths of

¹⁴⁹Ibid. Pg. 35.

our being contradicts much that is fashionable.”¹⁵⁰ A good example is the case of Leonardo Boff and the theology of Liberation in Latin America. While Benedict the XVI has handled many issues, I am interested only in one namely his teaching on conscience.

Benedict the XVI on Conscience and the Truth:

Benedict the XVI opens his treatment on conscience by arguing that the contemporary debate in moral theology is framed by contrasting two viewpoints namely:

- 1) Morality of conscience
- 2) Morality of Authority.

These two are opposed to each other yet locked in struggle with each other. To describe these two notions, Benedict articulates the popular catholic notions of morality, based on post-enlightenment concept of absolute autonomy seeing the authority of Magisterium as negative at worst and advisory at best; simply providing the material for the deliberation of the conscience which alone can determine the morality of any given act. He acknowledges that the form ‘do good and avoid evil’ of the conscience is infallible but questions whether the material (this is good and that is evil) is the same.

The argument of Cardinal John Henry Newman provides the central theme of pope’s reflection namely, the centrality of the concept of conscience which is linked to the prior centrality of the concept of truth.

Conscience is not the same thing as taste or personal wish nor is it a mere consensus of society at any given time in history. Rather conscience is remembering (anamnesis), based on knowledge of that image. It is an event realized in action of the human person, not an unchangeable quality. Hence, a person’s will can enhance or degrade conscience in both aspects.

There is a moral responsibility to make sure that one’s conscience is properly formed. To develop what he regards as the central anthropological and ontological meaning of conscience as anamnesis, Ratzinger makes use of the thoughts of Cardinal Newman and the Platonic Socrates in his battle against the Sophists. The Sophists had adopted the solipsistic subjectivism at the heart of understanding of conscience.

¹⁵⁰D. Vincent Twomey, S.V.D. 2007. Pope Benedict XVI: The Conscience of our Age. Pg. 37, San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

Ratzinger cites from Newman's letter to the Duke of Norfolk, "Certainly, if I am obliged to bring religion into after-dinner toast.....I shall drink- to the pope, if you please- still, to conscience first and to the pope afterwards."¹⁵¹ Newman never meant to belittle the pope nor conscience above him, but to show that the papacy is correctly conceived only when viewed together with the primacy of conscience; "a papacy not put in opposition to the primacy of conscience, but based on it and guaranteeing it."¹⁵²

For Newman, "the middle term connecting authority without subjectivity is the truth. The centrality of the concept 'conscience' for Newman is linked to the prior centrality of the concept 'Truth' and can only be understood from this vantage point."¹⁵³

Conscience is the demanding presence of the voice of truth in the subject.

"Ratzinger sees the contemporary relativistic understanding of conscience paralleled by the Socratic-platonic battle with sophistry. On one side, Socrates and Plato were confident that man has the ability to grasp truth, while the sophists were relativists who made each individual the measure of all things."¹⁵⁴

Ratzinger sees the final meaning of Socratic search and the profoundest element in the witness of all martyrs, "is that what characterizes man as man is not that he asks about the 'can' but about the 'should' and that he opens himself to the voice and demands of truth."¹⁵⁵

Ratzinger contrast the medieval notion of 'Conscience' with 'Anamnesis'. The medieval tradition recognized that the levels of conscience while distinct must be related to each other and that many unacceptable views of conscience result from neglecting either the difference or the connection between the two.

Mainstream Scholasticism referred these two levels as synderesis and conscientia. The term Synderesis entered medieval through the stoic doctrine of microcosm and its exact meaning was not clear and therefore became a hindrance to understanding conscience.

"Ratzinger proposes replacing this problematic word with clearly defined Platonic concept of anamnesis, a term in harmony with key motifs of biblical thought and

¹⁵¹John R. Conolly. 2005. John Henry Newman: A View of Catholic Faith for the New Millenium. Pg. 112, New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc.

¹⁵²Joseph Ratzinger. 2007. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger Two Essays On Conscience. Pg. 23, San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

¹⁵³Ibid. Pg. 24.

¹⁵⁴Ibid. Pg. 28.

¹⁵⁵Ibid. Pg. 29-30.

anthropology e.g. the thought expressed by Paul in Romans 2:14-15 and by St. Augustine and Basil.”¹⁵⁶

He argues that, “The first so called ontological level of the phenomenon conscience consists in the fact that something like an original memory of the good and the true has been implanted in us, that there is an inner ontological tendency within man, who is created in the image and likeness of God toward the divine..... This anamnesis of the origin, which result from the God-like constitution of our being, is not conceptually articulated knowing, a store of retrievable contents. It is as inner sense, a capacity to recall, so that the one whom it addresses, if he is not turned in on himself, hears its echo from within. The possibility for and the right to the mission rest on this anamnesis of the creator which is identical to the ground of our existence. The Gospel may, indeed must, be proclaimed to the pagans, because they themselves are yearning for it in the hidden recesses of their souls.”¹⁵⁷

“The anamnesis instilled in our being needs assistance ‘from without’ so that it can become aware of itself. But this ‘from without’ is not something set in opposition to anamnesis, but is ordered to it. It has a maieutic Function..... bringing to fruition what is proper to anamnesis, namely its interior openness to truth.”¹⁵⁸

When we consider fundamental conscience in the Christian context a further dimension of memory developed especially in the John’s writings, is that the new identity of the many made one in the body of Christ brings with it the anamnesis of the new ‘We’. John’s Gospel says in a number of places, that in remembering Jesus, the disciple knew him, as they did on the road to Emmaus. What the disciples received in their original encounter with the Lord is what all Christians receive in their incorporation into Christ in baptism and the Eucharist, namely the new Christian memory of faith, which the Anamnesis of creation, unfolds through a constant interaction “between the Word within and the Word without.”¹⁵⁹ The Primacy of conscience does not mean then that the subject is made the standard over against the claims of truth. Rather, “conscience signifies the perceptible and demanding presence

¹⁵⁶Ibid. Pg. 30-32.

¹⁵⁷Ibid. Pg. 32.

¹⁵⁸Ibid. Pg. 34.

¹⁵⁹Brian Lewis (6th Feb 2006). “The Primacy of Conscience.” Australian E- Journal of Theology, Pg. 6. Retrieved on 3rd-August-2015 from:
http://www.aejt.com.au/ data/assets/pdf file/0005/395195/EAJT_6.12_Lewis.pdf.

of the voice of truth in the subject himself. It is the overcoming of the mere subjectivity in the encounter of the interiority of man with the truth of God:¹⁶⁰ It is 'co-knowing' with the truth. The primacy of conscience is thus necessarily linked to the prior centrality of truth in the depths of the person and can be understood only from this vantage point. "We give primacy to conscience and regard moral claims of conscience as absolutely binding, because in conscience is where we meet God's Spirit leading us."¹⁶¹

3.2.5 CONCLUSION:

Having gone through these two important issues namely Abortion as a social Problem in the contemporary society on one hand and the human conscience as the guide to human action on the other, one makes a discovery that there is a relationship that binds the two together. Abortion is a human act which is premeditated and executed with full knowledge and full freedom. But it could as well have been avoided if human conscience as the determinant and defining factor between good and evil was to come in to play.

The Problem that comes about is an abuse of this sacred privilege, which is ordained by God in his gift of free will to all human beings. Some people argue by their own conscience that it is proper to have an abortion. Their actions are often justified for a variety of reasons within the mindset of individual performing them. However, this violates the very principles of Natural Law.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church indicates the ability to discern one's conscience based on God's truth is found in the cardinal virtue namely Prudence. Here it says, "Prudence is the virtue that disposes practical reason to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it. Prudence is right reason in action. It guides the other virtues by setting rule and measure. It is prudence that immediately guides the judgment of conscience. The prudent man determines and directs his conduct in accordance with this judgment."¹⁶²In every way of acting, man must observe the virtue of prudence.

¹⁶⁰Ibid. Pg. 7.

¹⁶¹Ibid. Pg. 7.

¹⁶²Catechism of the Catholic Church: No.1806. 1994. Pg. 439, Nairobi: Pauline Publications- Africa.

4 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ABORTION AND CONSCIENCE

In the second and the third chapters of my work, I have attempted to elaborate on the meaning of abortion and the meaning of conscience. Abortion so to speak has been defined as the deliberate termination of the human embryo before viability. Human life begins at conception when a sperm from a male human being fertilizes an ovum from a female human being. The gestation period of a woman is exactly nine months. This means that the termination of this fertilized embryo even at the very initial stage is considered as abortion and when it is caused to occur deliberately, then, it is morally evil. By asserting that life begins at conception, it would defeat logic to regard the discontinuity of that life as anything else other than abortion. By its very nature abortion is killing and therefore morally evil. However, in some circumstance, abortion may be permitted because of a difficult situation.

In the third chapter, I dwelt on the different Perspectives under which the crucial concept of human conscience has been approached. This phenomenon called conscience is pivotal one in any discussion that entails morality. Conscience is a human faculty through which man is able to distinguish between the good and the bad. Although conscience has a long history, I have attempted to limit myself only to selected approach. The reason for this is because these Theologians mentioned had serious interest in developing the concept of human conscience. Through these Theologians, the concept was fully developed and given the most significant meaning. The elaborate teaching of conscience from these Theologians has continued to influence even the contemporary scholars of our own times such as Benedict the XVI; The Pope Emeritus. As a matter of fact, Benedict the XVI borrowed greatly from the St. Augustine and St. Thomas. His understanding of conscience is hinged on the teachings of conscience as developed by the medieval Theologians.

Having understood what abortion is and what conscience is, then it becomes clear to see the relationship between the two. Abortion is a human act carried out deliberately by a human being. Yet the same human being is endowed with this faculty called conscience which is the guide to help him determine between what is good and what is bad, what is morally right and what is morally wrong.

4.1 THE PRO-LIFE

The pro-lifers also called the conservatives are those who argue for life. They support life at all stages beginning from the moment of conception to the time of natural death. In another language, the pro-life group endures to preserve life from the very moment of conception. The pro-life movement was not only engaged in fight against abortion, but anything that endangers human life at any level. Apart from abortion, the pro-life is also against suicide, euthanasia, etc.

The position taken by the Roman Catholic Church is also referred to as the pro-life position. The term pro-life is taken to imply that the person believes that authorities both civil and religious have an obligation to preserve all human life regardless of intent, viability or quality of life concern.

As a movement, Pro-life was born out of necessity in the United States following the court decision *Wade vs. Roe* in the year 1973 on which abortion on demand was allowed. The Pro-life activities had been in existence earlier before the coining of the term Pro-life. In his book entitled, 'The Conscience of the Nation' Ronald Reagan, a former president of United States said, "more than a decade ago, supreme court decision literally wiped off the books of 50 States statutes protecting the rights of innocent unborn children. Abortion on demand now takes the lives of up to one and a half million unborn children a year. Human life legislation ending this tragedy will someday pass the congress and you and I must never rest until it does. Unless and until it can be proven the unborn child is not a living person, then its right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness must be protected. You may remember that when abortion on demand began, many warned that the practice would lead to decline in respect for all human life, and philosophical premises used to justify abortion on demand would ultimately be used to justify other attacks on the sacredness of human life, including infanticide or mercy killing. Tragically enough, these warnings are proving all too true."¹⁶³ Ronald Reagan argued that he had a divine call to protect life and therefore became one of the greatest pro-life sitting head of State to have ever lived in the history of America.

The pro-life teaching can be regarded as an additional teaching to the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. Pro-life attempts to give an analysis of the meaning of

¹⁶³Ronald Reagan. 2000. *Abortion and the Conscience of the Nation*. Pgs. 12-13, California: New Regency Publishing.

authentic freedom as opposed to the false freedom promoted by advocates of legal abortion. This kind of freedom is intelligently laid out in the gospel of life in tripartite manner:

“Freedom involves solidarity, to openness to others and service of them. While it is true that the taking of life not yet born or in its final stages is sometimes marked by a mistaken sense of altruism and human compassion, it cannot be denied that such a culture of death taken as a whole betrays a completely individualistic concept of freedom which end up by becoming the freedom of the strong against weak who have no choice but to submit.”¹⁶⁴

God has given us responsibility to care for each other, to care for and serve each other. When people act as though freedom is just about themselves the result is that, the strong people exercising their freedom dominate the weak who have no choice, but rather to give in. The true Christian freedom argues that there is no freedom in running away from responsibility for others, but rather in accepting a special obligation to care for the weakest such as the unborn, unseen, unheard, physically and legally powerless. Freedom is complemented by the truth. In John’s Gospel, it is clearly articulated, “The truth shall set you free.”¹⁶⁵ Any action that is against the truth will not only cause damage to the victim, but also to the one acting. Not only the fetus is injured, but also the mother is not assured of her own security.

For a Christian, freedom becomes real and true when one acts in accordance with the will of God. On the contrary, “without the creator, the creature would disappear..... But when God is forgotten, the creature itself grows unintelligible. Man is no longer able to see himself as mysteriously different from earthly creatures. He regards himself merely as one living being, as an organism which, at most has reached a very high stage of perfection.”¹⁶⁶ This implies that “we become out of touch with our wonderful, divine origin and destiny. We cease to see ourselves as ‘Mysteriously different’ from other creatures. Our life becomes a ‘mere thing’ which man considers to be his exclusive property subject to his control and manipulation.”¹⁶⁷ Christian freedom calls for a way of life in which the weakest are not only spared, but are taken care of with great care. This is actually the motto of the pro-life.

¹⁶⁴John Paul II: 1995. Evangelium Vitae No. 19.Pg. 26, London: Catholic Truth Society.

¹⁶⁵John 8:2.

¹⁶⁶John Paul II. Evangelium Vitae: No. 22. Pg. 30, London: Catholic Truth Society.

¹⁶⁷Ibid.No. 22. Pg.30.

4.2 THE PRO-CHOICE:

The pro-choice group is the one that believes that every individual has unlimited freedom with respect to his own reproductive systems as long as he does not breach the freedom of others. Although Pro-choice touches many areas, I would wish to limit myself only to the area of abortion. In this context therefore, pro-choice means pro-abortion. The purpose of pro-choice movement is to ensure that all choices remain legal. In reality, the pro-choice movement promotes the idea that a woman and her doctor can decide to terminate the life of the woman's unborn baby.

The issue dealt with here is whether a woman has a right over her own body? The woman as it were has the right over her own body. But this right is limited to her body alone. But the embryo in her womb is neither her own body nor an extension of her body. For that matter, the right over her body ought not to infringe on the right of another. The baby in the womb is a completely independent being.

The pro-abortionist seeks to defend their position on the following areas:

i) **When human life begins:**

I pointed out earlier that determining when human life begins is not a philosophical speculation or opinion or conjecture or theory but a matter of simple truth verifiable by a scientific observation and analysis. This scientific observation verifiable in a laboratory demonstrates that life begins at the very moment a male sperm meets the female ovum. The two different entities amalgamate to form one living being which has a life in it. Anyone arguing against this belief does out of ignorance.

However, the pro-choice have in the past tried to argue against it to justify their activities. They have tried to assert that at conception, it is just but masses of blood. However, these mass of blood have life in them. If there was no life in them from the very beginning, there would be no any life after nine months. Notice that a journey of one thousand Kilometers begins with one step. If the one step never begins, even the one thousand Kilometers would never come to be. So, life begins at the very moment of conception.

In the historic Supreme Court decision Wade v. Roe, they had already received advice from physician and scientist two years before the decision was made. "They showed the court how modern science had already established that human life is a continuum,

and that the unborn child from the moment of conception on is a person and must be considered a person like its mother.”¹⁶⁸

The argument continues to say, “The process by which a child develops from single cell is miraculous..... Human development is a continuous process that begins when an ovum from a female is fertilized by a sperm from a male. Growth and differentiation transform zygote, a single cell... into a multicellular adult human being.”¹⁶⁹ Therefore the argument that life does not begin at conception holds no ground at all.

ii) **Freedom and the right of every woman:**

The decision to involve oneself in sexual intercourse is the reproductive choice, and the ability to make such a choice is a reproductive right. On the contrary, abortion is neither a reproductive choice nor a reproductive right. People have the right to reproduce, but at the same time, they have obligation to exercise this right responsibly. Killing the human being created by reproduction is irresponsible and can never be a right. In a better language, “If one consents to intercourse, then she must accept the consequences which are known to come from intercourse i.e. the generation of children. When one chooses or consents to have intercourse, he or she is thereby implicitly consenting to have children.”¹⁷⁰ It is impossible to separate sexual activity from its consequences. This is what those who embrace abortion have attempted to do.

For this reason, “Abortion has nothing to do with reproductive choices. The choice is already made before the pregnancy. Once the woman consents to intercourse and becomes pregnant, her only choice is childbirth or abortion. Hence, abortion choice is not a reproductive one, but a choice whether to kill the child that resulted from her willful consent of engaging in intercourse. Morally, any child born of intercourse by consenting parties is implicitly willed and as such has the right to live.”¹⁷¹ The word choice is meaningless without putting into consideration the object that is being chosen. The choice in abortion is between death and life. Choose death by killing an innocent baby or choose life by letting the child be born. Since killing is unjustifiable, then abortion shouldn't be a choice.

¹⁶⁸John Ankerberg& John Weldon. 1989. When Does Life Begin? Pg. 6, Tennessee: Wolgemuth& Hyatt Publishers Inc.

¹⁶⁹Ibid. Pg. 6.

¹⁷⁰Ibid. Pg. 86.

¹⁷¹Ibid. Pg. 86.

“Pro-choice means ‘anything goes.’ Allowing choices without regard for human life, basic morality or personal responsibility is a recipe for anarchy. Saying ‘Anything goes’ regarding the killing of the innocent pre-born babies is what pro-choice really means.”¹⁷² The phrase ‘anything goes’ in the above context means that there are no rules and restrictions. Anything is allowed. You can do what you want and nobody will claim that you broke the rules.

Although we all cherish freedom of choice, but the pro-choice group has twisted this phrase to their own favor. Freedom of choice does not include freedom to murder another human being. As a society, we ought not to allow people to murder one another in the name of freedom of choice and right. Once it is established that the pre-born child is human being then the freedom of choice in the case of abortion can only mean freedom to murder. “The choice is particularly deplorable because the victim is completely innocent, the victim is totally helpless, the order to kill comes from victim’s mother, the order is reasoned, calculated and intentional act, and finally the abortionist is paid for the murder.”¹⁷³

4.3 ABORTION AS A HUMAN ACT

The meaning of human Act: Human actions are crucial for moral theology because it is through human being’s free actions that human beings become moral beings. In his *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas says that “theology’s primary interest in a human being is as the kind of being who is the principle of his actions as having free Will and control of his actions.”¹⁷⁴

Human Acts as defined by the Catechism of the Catholic Church are not merely anything that human beings may bring about. Rather a human act is what humans do through their free and deliberate choices. All such choices in particular instances can be evaluated as being either morally good or morally bad choices which lead to good or bad actions.

Human act is therefore every action and the only one that proceeds from the deliberate will of a human being. It proceeds from the knowledge of the intellect and the free decision of the human will. In this act, the human being is the master, whether

¹⁷²Ibid. Pg. 86.

¹⁷³Ibid. Pg. 87.

¹⁷⁴John Berkman. (2012.) “Catechism Commentary- Human Acts”: ST. II, Prologue Retrieved on 10th-08-2015 From: www.catholicmoraltheology.com/catechism-commentary-human-act/.

the act begins or ends in the will. Only human acts are morally imputable to the one who performs them, unlike what are called acts of man being performed by persons who lack the use of reason or whose freedom is totally inhibited as in sleep or under anesthesia. To morally evaluate a human act, three things must be taken into consideration: the object, the intention and the circumstances.

“A morally good act requires the goodness of the object, of the end (Intention) and of the circumstances together.”¹⁷⁵ A fully human act, that is, one proceeding from the knowledge and free will is either morally good or morally evil. To determine the goodness or evilness of human act, the three above determinants are important:

- a) The object is the thing with which the action is essentially concerned. For example, lying, praying the rosary, stealing etc. For a morally good act, the object of the act must be good i.e. the thing with which the action is concern must conform to the law of God.
- b) The circumstances of the act are second determinant of the morality of any action. The circumstances are such things as the person involved, the time, the place and the occasion which are distinct from the object, but can change or alter its moral tone. Circumstances can make an otherwise good action evil e.g. when a soldier deliberately goes to sleep. They can increase the guilt or minimize the guilt. Since all human actions occur at a certain time and at a certain place, the circumstances must always be considered in evaluating the moral quality of any human act.
- c) Intention/End: The third determinant or moral quality of any human act, no matter how trivial is done for some purpose. “For a human act to be morally good, the agent or the doer must have a good intention..... he must want to accomplish something that is good in one way or another. For our actions to be good, our intentions must be good.”¹⁷⁶

For example, good by ill-advised people who are concerned about over-population or the proper raising of children resort to abortion in order to cut down on the number of births and to avoid unwanted children. But a good

¹⁷⁵Catechism of the Catholic Church: No 1755. 1994. Pg. 432, Nairobi: Pauline Publications- Africa.

¹⁷⁶Fr. Kenneth Baker S.J. 1995. What makes Human Acts good or bad? In Fundamentals of Catholicism, Vol. 1 Part I. Pgs. 123-126, San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

intention, no matter what it is, does not make something essentially evil such as abortion into something morally good.

We need always to know that the morality of every human act is determined by the object, circumstances and the intention. If any one of the three is evil, then the human act in question is evil and should be avoided at all cost.

Having analyzed the meaning of human act, the question that follows is whether abortion is a human act or not. In my earlier chapter, I pointed out that abortion is a deliberate termination of life from the womb of a mother. Abortion is done with full knowledge and freedom of the will. Therefore, abortion is a human act. As a human act, abortion is imputable to the person involved so as to involve responsibility; so that she performs the act deliberately and with self-determination. Abortion as a human act has the three determinants of human act namely; the object, the circumstance, and the intention or the goal.

In a situation of a young girl in high school who becomes pregnant and the parents opt for abortion, the object of this act is to kill the baby in the womb of this young student. The circumstance is that the young girl is a student and must finish her education. The intention of this act is to enable this young girl to complete her education in high school. By the fact that the object of abortion is to kill, and killing is morally evil, then the whole act is morally evil in spite of the End intention being good.

4.4 CONSCIENCE AS A GUIDE TO HUMAN ACT:

Conscience is a judgment of reason by which the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete action provided within a particular situation (ccc1796) and the formation of conscience is a fundamental element of Christian moral teaching.

As it were, conscience represents the general ability we have as human beings to know what is good and right. It helps us to make concrete judgment in a particular situations concerning what we should do or what we have already done. Moral choices confront us with the decision to follow or depart from reason and the divine law. A good conscience makes judgments that conform to reason and the good that is willed by wisdom of God. A good conscience requires life-long formation.

Human actions are the outward expressions of a person's choice. They reveal what sort of a person the agent is as a moral being. At the core of a human action is a free self-determining choice. For example, I choose to give you a birthday present, I choose to shout at you and insult you, or I choose to take part in a concert tonight.

"Human Acts are moral acts precisely because they express and determine the goodness or evil of the individual who performs them. They do produce merely a change in the state of affairs outside of man, but to the extent that they are deliberate choices, they give moral definition to the very person who performs them, determining his profound Spiritual traits."¹⁷⁷ From this approach morality would signify the habits and norms of behavior that establish right and wrong conduct for individuals in particular societies.

"Our choices are good or evil depending on how they relate to the highest norm of human life..... the divine law- eternal, objective and universal, whereby God orders, directs and governs the entire universe and all the ways of the human community according to a plan conceived in wisdom and love."¹⁷⁸

The moral law is the objective norm which determines the morality of a particular action. A person's intention is the subjective norm. In evaluating human act, we have to understand how these elements are combined.

For clarity purpose, it would be of great importance to distinguish between Moral Law and the Divine Law. The two sets of Laws are closely intertwined, but not exactly the same. Divine Laws are derived from Eternal Laws as it appears to humans through revelation. St. Thomas Aquinas has divided Divine Laws into two namely the Old Law and the New Law. The Old Law corresponds with Old Testament and the New Law corresponds with the New Testament. When Speaking of the Old Law, Thomas is thinking of the Ten Commandments and when speaking of the New Law, he is thinking of the Teaching of Jesus. In short, Divine Law is "that which is enacted by God and made known to man through revelation."¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷John Paul II. 1993. The Splendor of Truth (Veritatis Splendor) No 71. Pg. 109, Vatican: Libreria Editricia Vaticana.

¹⁷⁸Austin Flannery, O.P. (General Editor). 1992. Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents. (Dignitatis Humanae. No.3) Pgs. 704-705, Bombay: St. Paul Publication.

¹⁷⁹Thomas Slater. (1910). "Moral Aspect of Divine Law." In the Catholic Encyclopedia-New Advent. Vol. 9, New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved on 17th-October- 2015 from: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09071a.htm>.

Karl Heinz Peschke gives the universal meaning of Moral Law as, “a directive ordering man’s activity towards the ultimate end.”¹⁸⁰ Moral Law is meant to guide human activity to contribute to the realization of the final goal of the human history and of creation. It is also aimed at preventing human being from obstructing the attainment of this End.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines Moral Law as “The work of Divine Wisdom. Its biblical meaning can be defined as fatherly instruction, God’s pedagogy. It prescribes for man the ways, the rules of conduct that leads to the promised beatitude; it proscribes the way of evil which turn him away from God and his love. It is at once firm in its precepts, and its promises, worthy of love.”¹⁸¹ (ccc.1950)

In our daily life, we have heard statements such as ‘my conscience is clear’ ‘a guilty conscience’ etc. Conscience is spoken of as a sense of right and wrong. It is that which makes one feel bad when he/she has done something wrong. In another case, it has been considered as God’s voice inside man/woman telling him/her what to do.

Pope John XXIII writing the Encyclical ‘Pacem in Terris’ had this to say; “The creator of the world has stamped man’s inmost being with an order which his conscience reveals to him and strongly enjoins him to obey.”¹⁸² What Pope John XXIII is trying to say is that conscience is given to each human being by God. As the person grows, the conscience also continues to grow, thus creating awareness in man of what is good and what is bad and helping man to choose that which is good. But man has the freedom to make the choice without any external force. Conscience does not dictate to man the choice that he must make. It only helps him to judge and decide which way to go.

Conscience these days is often confused with individual will. People resort to ‘freedom of conscience’ in order to excuse all kinds of immorality. What they tend to imply when they use the phrase freedom of conscience is that one has the right to do whatever his/her conscience tells him/her. This is a terrible trend which seems to appease everyone in the contemporary society. This kind of thinking encourages what

¹⁸⁰Karl Heinz Peschke. 1979. Christian Ethics: Moral Theology in Light of Vatican II. Vol. 1 General Moral Theology: Third Edition. Pg. 65, Oregon: Wipf& Stock Publishers.

¹⁸¹The Catechism of the Catholic Church; No 1950. 1994. Pg. 464, Nairobi: Pauline Publications-Africa.

¹⁸²Pope John XXIII. (11th-April-1963) “Encyclical on establishing Universal peace in Truth, Justice, Charity and Liberty- Pacem in Teris No 5, Vatican: Libreria Editricia Vaticana. “Retrieved on 8th-August 2015 from:www.vatican.va/holy-father/john.xxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf-j-xxiii-enc-11041963-pacem-en.html.

is called subjective morality, thus denying the objective truth which is supposed to determine what is ultimately right and wrong. "Conscience in certain sense confronts man with the law and thus becomes a 'witness' for man: a witness of his own faithfulness or unfaithfulness with regard to the law, of his essential moral rectitude or iniquity."¹⁸³ What takes place in every heart of a person is hidden from outside world. Only the person himself is conscious of his own response to the voice of conscience within.

"Conscience is not independent and exclusive capacity to decide what is good and what is evil. Rather, there is a profoundly imprinted upon it a principle of obedience vis-à-vis the objective norm which establishes and conditions the correspondence of its decisions with the commands and prohibitions which are at the basis of human behavior."¹⁸⁴

Conscience has to do with freedom in the truth and not freedom from the truth. Man's genuine dignity consists in doing the good and practicing the truth, even in the face of lies, propaganda, and the abuse of power by others. Claiming right of conscience in order to validate immoral conduct or act in the name of an alleged autonomy is an abuse of conscience and leads to lose of human dignity.

Conscience is "applying the objective law to a particular case."¹⁸⁵ It reveals what ought to be done in practice here and now..... it is the proximate norm of personal morality. Karl H. Peschke summarizes the description of conscience by saying, "it is that faculty, situated in the very depth and center of the human person, which accords to man an understanding of his meaning and destiny an awareness of the divine purpose behind the world, a perception of his personal calling within God's plan, an experience of the imperative character of his calling."¹⁸⁶ As a result, the faculty makes known to man his moral obligations and directs him to fulfil them.

The human act and the human conscience are closely interconnected. Conscience helps a human person to act in a particular way. Conscience however does not force a person to act in a particular way. The person is always free. Conscience is guided by

¹⁸³John Paul II. The Splendor of Truth (Veritatis Splendor); No 57. Pg. 89, Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

¹⁸⁴Ibid. No 60. Pg.92.

¹⁸⁵Ibid. No 59. Pg.92.

¹⁸⁶Karl H. Peschke . 2012. Christian Ethics: Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican II. Vol. I. General Moral Theology. Third Edition. Pg. 168, Oregon: Wipf& Stock.

knowledge and freedom of the will. That is why, although man is guided by conscience, he may decide to choose evil rather than the good because he is free. When deciding to act in a particular way, the determinants of human act come in handy namely, the object, the intention and the goal.

Abortion is of no doubt a human act committed with full knowledge and freedom of the will. As a human act, anyone who commits abortion is fully responsible and moral responsibility is imputed upon her. However, in the case of a minor who is under the care and the directive of his parents, the responsibility is not only imputed on her alone, but also on the parents who are seen as accomplice in this act.

4.5 ABORTION AS A VIOLATION OF CONSCIENCE

The human conscience is supposed to conform to the moral law. Moral is something discernible and not invented. It originates in the relationship with God and not only with the relationship with one another. Moral law is defined as a rule of moral action with sanctions. It is that rule to which moral agents i.e. human beings ought to conform all their voluntary actions, and is enforced by sanctions equal to the value of the precepts. Moral law is primarily a rule for the direction of the action of free will and strictly of free will only. But secondarily, moral law is the rule for the regulation of all those actions and states of mind and body that follow free actions of will by a law of necessity.

All human beings are called to conform to the moral law so as to form their conscience. This conformity is to be understood as a genuine liberation, a freeing of ones capacity to choose, so as he/she chooses the good.

Bishop Robert F. Vasa, in his article entitled 'Moral Conscience and Aborted Fetal Vaccines' has pointed out that, "Moral conscience is the inner sanctuary where man meets the divine. It is embodied in the natural law and it is written in the human heart. It is the very root of all religious tenets where the supreme principle of moral action must have goodness at its center."¹⁸⁷

The human exercise of conscience is not just a legal claim of immunity, but a way of responding to God's invitation of love and communion.

¹⁸⁷ Bishop Robert F. Vasa. 2015. "Moral Conscience and Aborted Fetal Vaccines." Diocese of Baker; Oregon: Retrieved on the 10th October 2015 from: <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm>.

When I think of abortion and conscience, what comes into play is the abuse of this sacred privilege, which is ordained by God in his gift of free will to all human beings. Some people believe and argue that by their own conscience it is proper to have an abortion. In the act of abortion, the role of the conscience is related to the moral law. It is good to know that those who take the decision to abort do it with a reason. In other words, there are causes that lead one to taking such a serious decision. However, even those who arrive at such decision to commit abortion, do so while knowing very well that what they are carrying in them is individual life worthy of protection at the very early stages of pregnancy. By carrying out an abortion, a person is aware that what he/she is doing is against the moral law and the natural law. To have a well-informed conscience, the actions of the person must not be contrary to the natural law or in opposition to the teachings of the church which the faithful acknowledge to be an interpretation of the divine will. "On his part, man perceives and acknowledges the imperatives of the divine law through the mediation of conscience. It is through his conscience that man sees and recognizes the demands of divine law. He is bound to follow his conscience faithfully in all his activity so that he may come to God, who is the last end. Therefore, he must not be forced to act contrary to his conscience, nor must he be prevented from acting according to his conscience, especially in religious matters. The reason is that the exercise of religion of its very nature consists before all else in those eternal, voluntary and free acts whereby man sets the course of his life directly towards God. Acts of this kind cannot be commanded or forbidden by any merely human authority."¹⁸⁸

True conscience is the disposition to will what is absolutely good. Jewish theologian Martin Buber defines conscience, "as the capacity and tendency of man radically to distinguish between those of his past and the future actions which should be approved and those which should be disapproved. Conscience only rarely fully coincides with a standard derived from the society or community."¹⁸⁹

Thomas Aquinas observed, "That conscience implies the relation of knowledge to something, applied to an individual case..... conscience is said to witness, to bind, to

¹⁸⁸ Austin Flannery. O.P. (General Editor). 1992. Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents. (Dignitatis Humanae.) Pg. 705, Bombay: St. Paul Publications.

¹⁸⁹ Judith Buber Agassi. 1999. Martin Buber on Psychology and Psychotherapy: Essay, Letters, and Dialogue. Pg. 123, New York: Syracuse University Press.

stir up and also to accuse, torment or rebuke.”¹⁹⁰ Anyone who commits an act that is not acceptable by the society, always hear an internal voice which nags him to stop what he wants to do. If the person decides to go ahead to carry out what he had planned to do, the inner voice continues to perturb the person. It reprimands, accuses, torments and sometimes rebukes the person for the action committed.

This is what Martin Buber refers to as Guilt conscience. Buber points out that guilt is not simply acquired from transgressing ancient taboos or social customs or law or parental values. He states, “There exists a real guilt, fundamentally different from all the anxiety-induced bugbears that are generated in the cavern of the unconscious. Personal guilt whose reality some schools of psychoanalysis contest and others ignore does not permit itself to be reduced to the trespass against a powerful taboo. Each person stands in an objective relationship to others..... it is that person’s share in the human order of being, the share for which that person bears responsibility. This responsibility or share in the human order is the action demanded by conscience.”¹⁹¹ Commission of an abortion is therefore a violation of human order of which we all bear responsibility. We cannot therefore be at peace with ourselves and with God when we see innocent life being eroded while we remain silent. Therefore, there is a moral accountability which is objective and not subjective, intrinsic and not determined by opinion or social customs. The greatest danger of our time is an attempt to eliminate guilt. However, this can never be realized fully because even when one is not a Christian, there is an inner voice which speaks to a person at the bottom of his/her heart.

Many women who have had or experience an abortion always say that it is an experience one would not want to repeat. “Abortion is an action many women disapprove. There is personal guilt experienced, following induced abortion, even in the absence of societal or legal prohibitions against it. Following legal abortion, women may experience depression on the perceived date of the child’s birth, anger at not receiving accurate information prior to the abortion, resentment at manipulation by others, increased sexual activity in an attempt to atone for the destruction of the aborted child by having another replacement child. Women may contemplate or

¹⁹⁰St. Thomas Aquinas.1952. Summa Theologica: Volume I of the Edition within “Great Books of Western World.” Edited by Robert M. Hutchins. Pg. 426, New York: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc.

¹⁹¹Judith Buber Agassi (Ed.). 1999. Martin Buber on Psychology and Psychotherapy: Essay, Letters and Dialogue. Pg. 121, New York: Syracuse University Press.

attempt suicide following abortion. Some women will initiate or expand their use of alcohol or drugs. Any of these symptoms are indications that these women fell short of their own standards.”¹⁹² Although I have acknowledged earlier that there are some studies that shows that some cases of abortion did not have any negative ramification, but the very biggest percentage has shown that most of the women who committed abortion suffered from negative effects. Therefore the cases under which the negative effects were not experienced could be said to have been exceptional cases.

¹⁹²Thomas W. Strahan. 1995. “Induced Abortion as a violation of Conscience of the Woman.” Association for Interdisciplinary Research in values and social change, Vol. 8.No. 4. Retrieved on 20th-August-2015 From: www.abortionresearch.us/images/vol8No4pdf.

5 THE JUSTIFICATION OF ABORTION AS A MORAL ISSUE IN THE FACE OF HUMAN CONSCIENCE

5.1 MORAL JUSTIFICATION OF ABORTION/IS ABORTION MORALLY JUSTIFIABLE?

One of the greatest problems in the contemporary society is the arguments over reproductive rights. This implies that each human being should be free to do what is within his/her right with his/her reproductive life.

When we talk about the right to reproduction, there is also the obligation that accompanies it. The right to reproduction means that at a certain age in life, a person may give birth or may not. Reproduction comes through the act of human sexuality. In engaging in human sexuality, one must always realize that it comes with responsibility. Reproduction right is accompanied with duties and obligation. The duties and obligation of reproductive rights is the birth of children. This means that when exercising the reproductive right, the products must be accepted and protected.

Therefore, the biggest question that arises is whether abortion is morally justifiable? From religious perspective and in the strict sense of the term, abortion can never be morally justified. John Paul II has asserted very categorically in *Evangelium Vitae* that, “the deliberate decision to deprive an innocent human being of his life is always morally evil and can never be licit either as an end in itself or as a means to a good end. It is in fact a grave act of disobedience to the moral law and indeed to God himself, the author and guarantor of that law. It contradicts the fundamental virtues of justice and charity.”¹⁹³ Pope John Paul II condemnation of abortion was informed by his personal understanding of the value of human life which is a gift given by God to man. Man therefore must take all necessary measures to protect and safeguard life.

Without doubt and fear of contradiction, I have already asserted that life begins at conception. And therefore, at the very moment of conception, the long journey of the nine months gestation period begins. It cannot be reduced or increased. If one day ovum or fertilized egg was not human being, it would not become after nine months. If it is a human being, it has its own rights and it is entitled to protection.

Ronald Reagan in his book entitled ‘Abortion and the conscience of the Nation’ says, “The real question today is not when human life begins but what the value of human

¹⁹³John Paul II. 1995. *Evangelium Vitae*: No. 57. Pg. 73, London: Catholic Truth Society.

life is. The abortionist who reassembles the arms and legs of a tiny baby to make sure all its parts have been torn from its mother's body can hardly doubt whether it is human being. The real question for him and for all of us is whether that tiny human life has a God-given right to be protected by law-the same right we have."¹⁹⁴

Reagan goes further to say, "Regrettably, we live at a time when some persons do not value all human life. They want to pick and choose which individuals have value. Some have said that only those individuals 'with consciousness of self are human beings."¹⁹⁵

When we hold such an opinion, then we assume the role of the creator. It is only the creator who has power over life and death. He decides who should die and who should live.

Quoting from the declaration of independence from National Anthem Reagan proclaims, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."¹⁹⁶ If all men are created equal, and are endowed with unalienable rights, that means that all are equal in the eyes of God regardless of whichever stage of life, whether in the mother's womb or outside the mother's womb, whether a newly born baby or an old man/woman. In the eyes of God, they are equal and are endowed with an alienable right. An important aspect to note from the above quote is that 'all are created equal.' He does not say 'all are born equal.' This means that our equality begins from the very moment one is conceived in mother's womb. Our moment of birth is not our moment of creation. We are created when we begin to exist in our mother's womb. Our equality also begins at this time. From the strict religious sense of the term, abortion can never be morally justified because, "From the moment of conception, the life of every human being is to be respected in an absolute way because human being is the only creature on the earth that God has wished for himself and the spiritual soul of each man is immediately created by God, his whole being bears the image of the creator. Human life is sacred

¹⁹⁴Ronald Reagan. 2000. Abortion and the Conscience of the Nation. Pg. 43, California: New Regency Publishing.

¹⁹⁵Ibid. Pg. 47.

¹⁹⁶Ibid. Pg. 49.

because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains forever in a special relationship with the creator, who is its sole end.”¹⁹⁷

Abortion in itself is essentially evil because it consists in the taking away or destroying the life of an innocent human being. The law of God and the state is very categorical that “Thou shall not kill.” Conscience sheds light to man so as to distinguish between the good and the evil and therefore making him free to choose between either the good or the bad. Hence, there shouldn’t be any justification on any human act that contradicts the moral law.

5.2 FACTORS THAT ARE USED TO JUSTIFY ABORTION FROM A LIBERAL PERSPECTIVE.

James J. McCartney in his book entitled ‘Unborn Persons’ asserts, “.....indeed the creative role of the conscience consists in the fact that it shapes the norms into that unique and unparalleled form they acquire within the experience and fulfilment of the person. The sense of conviction and certitude, whereby the truthfulness of a norm is molded within the personal dimension are followed by the sense of duty.”¹⁹⁸

What matters in this case is the truthfulness about life and a moral duty to safeguard it at all time. The following therefore are the situation under which the liberals argue for the justifiability of abortion:

5.2.1 Rape:

Rape is a sexual assault involving sexual intercourse. Rape is a very common phenomenon the world all over. It happens not only among the unmarried, but also amongst those who are married. That is why we talk about rape among the married people.

In the simplest sense of the word and in our own situation, rape is taken to imply the use of force to compel a person to having a carnal knowledge without his or her own consent. In some cases, though rare, the situation may lead to conception and therefore pregnancy.

¹⁹⁷ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. 23rd-Feb-2007. Donum Vitae: Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation: Pg. 9, Vatican: Catholic Truth Society.

¹⁹⁸ James J. McCartney. 1987. Unborn Persons: Pope John Paul II and the Abortion Debate. Pg. 58, New York: Peter Lang.

Rape has great psychological, emotional and physical trauma to the victim. From my own encounter with victims of rape, I have realized that rape victims suffer for almost entire life especially those who were raped while they were still young.

While no one would wish to go through such an experience, the reality has shown that it is a common occurrence. It is something that humanity has had to reckon with. The issue that concerns us here is the case of rape that results to pregnancy. How should it be handled? Should abortion be carried out because pregnancy came through rape?

“The state of affairs in which a woman is pregnant as a result of rape is a continuing violation of her liberty, but it is not as such a threat to her life. The situation is caused by a wrongful and unlawful act, but not by any act of the unborn individual who would be killed by the abortion. The continuation of pregnancy does not as such violate the mother’s rights or harm her except in so far as it is a continuation of an infringement upon her liberty.”¹⁹⁹

Many people believe that abortion will have reprieve to a rape victim if she becomes pregnant. Through abortion, the victim of rape may be able to put the assault behind her and get on with life. However, in jumping to such conclusion, people have adopted an unrealistic view of abortion.

“It is always good to realize that abortion is not a magical surgery, but a real life event which is always very stressful, and often traumatic. By accepting that abortion is itself an event with deep ramifications on woman’s life, we ought therefore to look carefully at the special circumstances of the pregnant sexual assault victim. Will having an abortion truly heal the victim or will it cause further injury to her already bruised Psyche?”²⁰⁰

The victim has already been injured through rape. Now, to advice the victim to carry out an abortion is like adding salt to a wound. One famous Doctor once observed; “That even the terrible emotional turmoil of a rape cannot justify the taking away of a human life. Neither the intent behind intercourse nor its moral status can change the value of life; even degradation, shame and emotional disruption are not the moral

¹⁹⁹ Germain Grisez and Joseph M. Boyle Jr. 1979. *Life and Death with Liberty and Justice*. Pg. 205, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

²⁰⁰ David C. Reardon, Julie Makimaa and Amy Sobie (Eds). 2000. *Victims and Victors*. Pg. 15, Illinois: Acorn Books.

equivalent of life.”²⁰¹ While empathizing with the woman who is a victim of rape, we also need to feel with the innocent child in her womb. The baby ought not to be punished because of the sin of the rapist.

Therefore “If sympathy and concern are due to the woman as they clearly are, are not sympathy and concern due also to the human life inside the woman? Why kill the innocent child? Doesn’t that child have its own right to live? Why punish the child for what its father did? Regardless of the circumstances, once the child exists generally, the woman is its mother. Will she at least honor that life within her or further compound the problem of bringing a greater violence upon it and destroying it?”²⁰²

While rape is an intrusion into someone’s sexual life by force and without consent, on the other hand, abortion could also be regarded as “painful intrusion into a woman’s sexual organs by masked stranger who is invading her body.”²⁰³ Further, we can say that “In both sexual and medical rape, a woman is violated and robbed. In the case of sexual rape, she is robbed of her purity. In the case of medical rape through abortion, she is robbed of Maternity.”²⁰⁴

In another language, the solution to a victim of rape who conceived is not abortion for many at time abortion causes more damage than healing. “Those that encourage abortion often do so because they are uncomfortable dealing with sexual assault victims, or perhaps because they harbor some prejudice against victim whom they feel let it happen.”²⁰⁵ Thus abortion becomes a way of hiding the problem. It is a quick and easy way to avoid dealing with the woman’s emotional needs.

Abortion is an act of violence that kills a living human being. The circumstances surrounding the conception do not change this simple reality. A woman who raised a child conceived through rape once said, “I, having lived through rape, and also having raised a child ‘conceived in rape’ feel personally assaulted and insulted every time I hear that abortion should be legal because of rape. I feel that we’re being used by pro-abortionists to further the abortion issue, even though we’ve not been asked to tell

²⁰¹John Ankerberg and John Weldon.1989. When Does Life Begin? Pg. 117, Tennessee: Wolgemuth& Hyatt Publishers Inc.

²⁰²Ibid. Pg.117.

²⁰³David C. Reardon, Julie Makimaa and Amy Sobie (Eds.).2000. Victims and Victors. Pg. 15, Illinois: Acorn Books.

²⁰⁴Ibid. Pg.15.

²⁰⁵Ibid. Pg.16.

our side of the story.”²⁰⁶ Rape and abortion have one thing in common namely; they are both acts of violent assault against an innocent victim. Aborting a child conceived through rape simply extends this pattern of violence and victimhood. As it were, Abortion does not ‘un-rape’ the woman, but it rather increases her misery and regret. Whereas rape is an act of violence for which she bears no responsibility, abortion is an act of violence for which would be morally culpable.

5.2.2 Incest:

Incest can be defined as sexual relationship between a male and a female who are closely linked by blood or by affinity. For example a brother and a sister, uncle and niece, Aunt and Nephew or even some time a father and daughter.

In the modern world, cases of incest have become more common than ever before. This is facilitated by the behavior change in modern society. The moral fiber that held the society together has completely disintegrated. The relationship between parents and children has taken a completely different course. The cultural bond which was formerly seen as a taboo is no longer the same anymore.

Due to too much preoccupation of both parents in the society, they are no longer able to carry out their parental duties towards their children. Apart from these, the too much engagement of the women in working in order to provide for the family needs, roles which were traditionally for women have being relegated to men. On the process, men have found themselves undertaking duties that were reserved for the women. For example, giving advice to a girl child that has shown signs of maturity. It is from this perspective that men have developed a close relationship with their daughters which in some cases have reached to the level of intimacy. Intimacy, means in this sense sexual relationship between a father and her daughter. This has also happened between a brother and a sister or a cousin.

The big difference between incest and rape is that incest quite often is characterized by the consent between the persons involved. The information comes only when the person reports to the other parent or relevant authority. On the other hand, rape is characterized with violence or threats.

Investigation has demonstrated that incest victims voluntarily agree to abortion. However, “while incest victim may treasure her pregnancy because it offers her the

²⁰⁶Ibid. Pg.16.

hope of release from her situation, it poses a threat to the man who is exploiting her. It also poses a threat to the pathological secrecy which may envelop other members of the family who are afraid to acknowledge the abuse. Because of this dual threat, the victim may be coerced into an unwanted abortion by both the abuser and other family members.”²⁰⁷ In most instances, there is always the shame that goes together with incest. Often, the family may decide to conceal the happening in order to save the name of the family. And the best way to do so is by doing an abortion. By so doing, there arises a problem of continuity in the same evil because of the fact that it was not known.

Reports have confirmed that abortion can be damaging both mentally and physically even in the hard case of incest. Would it not be better for a woman to lovingly care for an innocent child and provide it a good home either by adoption or making part of their family? A twelve year old victim of incest impregnated by her step-father wrote twenty five years after abortion, “Throughout the years I have been depressed, suicidal, furious, outraged, lonely and have felt a sense of loss..... the abortion which was to be in my interest just has not been. As far as I can tell, it only saved their reputations, solved their problems, and allowed their lives to go merrily on.....My daughter, how I miss her so; I miss her regardless of the reason for her conception.”²⁰⁸ As it were therefore, those promoting abortion of incestuous pregnancy, “not only are they robbing the victim of her child, they are also concealing a crime, abetting a perpetrator, and handling the victim back to her abuser so that the exploitation may continue.”²⁰⁹

5.2.3 Disability

There is no body that chooses to be born with disability. There are different types of disability. Some are mental, while others are physical. Sometime, it is difficult to discover the disability of a child while still in the womb of the mother, more especially in developing countries. However, with modern technology, it is possible to establish that a child will have a serious disability, be it mental or physical while it is still in the mother’s womb.

²⁰⁷Ibid. Pg.16.

²⁰⁸Ibid. Pg.16-17.

²⁰⁹Ibid. Pg.17.

While birth of a disabled child is received as a shocking reality in a family, putting such a child to death through abortion would still not be an acceptable solution. This is because disease or disability does not strip a person his/her right to life and relegate him or her to a life of misery. Therefore, aborting a child because it is handicapped is barbaric and inhuman and has no place in a just society. Justice must never be denied to someone because he/she is physically or mentally handicapped.

In the contemporary society, there are children of all ages and adults who are alive today and are living through all manners of diseases and disability. The question that each one of us should ask is, 'Do these physical limitations make them less human?' Is killing those who are disabled or deformed really an acceptable way of treating sickness?

It is good to note that even the disabled person is created in the image and likeness of God. Disability therefore should not be the issue, but rather the humanity. We must never kill people because of their disabilities. Disability is synonymous to suffering and there is no life without suffering. Even the disabled persons are created in the image and likeness of God.

Suffering and hardships as it were are not bad things. They should always be seen as a means to a greater end and a crucial part to human life. Thus, anyone who tries to eliminate the suffering by killing the sufferer establishes a horrific trend. It should not be for us to decide who has a life worth living and who doesn't. Such decision should be left to God alone.

To advocate for abortion on account of disabilities would become offensive to disabled persons because it means that they are less worthwhile than the lives of normal people. In fact, disability must never be taken to mean inability. Even in disabled persons, God's power is made manifest. I personally have encountered disabled persons who were far much better than even those who have no disability. In other words, I am trying to say that in the eyes of God, the whole humanity is equal. Because someone does not have one leg or two hands does not make him less human.

Aborting children on the basis that they are handicapped jeopardizes the rights of born people who are handicapped. Therefore, to justify abortion on the ground that the baby is or might be disabled is to express bigotry against people with disabilities which should not be countenanced in an equal democratic society.

“In a society that stresses physical beauty, the issue of deformities becomes an unjust one, principally because of perception; what is perceived as unlovely and a burden becomes so, whether or not this is the case. While not minimizing the problems involved with a child having a severe physical or mental difficulties, few will deny that beauty is in the eyes of the beholder or that couples who have chosen to raise such children almost never regret it; indeed far from thinking the child as an unbearable burden- most discover them to be a blessing.”²¹⁰

This actually is the reason for the emergency of the two groups namely, the pro-choice who consider a deformed or disabled child as a curse or burden and on the other hand the pro-life who preach about the sanctity of life. For them, even the handicapped or disabled person is a blessing and a gift from God.

Thus, “if we prepare to kill a child merely because it is handicapped, we are back in Hitler’s Third Reich no matter how noble we consider our endeavors. Although abortions are promoted by those who consider themselves great humanitarians attempting to alleviate the suffering of others, the fact is that, those of us who are normal are not better or greater than those who have mental or physical disabilities. The handicapped are simply differently gifted. The deformed and the handicapped are not our problem- we are their problem. They do not wish to harm us. It is we who wish to destroy them.”²¹¹

The scripture categorically asserts that, “God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”²¹² Arguing against the life of the disabled is like trying to imply that the crippled and deformed are without heart for God to observe. What is of great value for man may not be of any value to God.

Likewise, what is of great value for God may not have any value to man. That is why the sacred scripture warns us against external judgment. For God looks not the external appearance, but rather he looks at the heart.

The scripture makes it clear that Jesus came for such people. “And great multitudes came to him, bringing with them those who were lame, crippled, blind, dumb and many others and they laid them down at his feet, and he healed them, so that the multitude marveled as they saw the dumb speaking, the crippled restored, the lame

²¹⁰John Ankerberg and John Weldon.1989. When Does Life Begin? Pg. 126, Tennessee: Wolgemuth& Hyatt Inc.

²¹¹Ibid. Pg.133.

²¹²1st Samuel 16: 7.

walking, the blind seeing and they glorified the God of Israel.”²¹³ This is what the pro-life endeavor to do in their struggle to fight for life. We too are called to do the same i.e. to care for those who have no one to care for them and to restore hope to those who are hopeless.

5.2.4 Health of the mother and the life of the mother.

There is a law which says ‘Difficult circumstances leads to a creation of bad laws.’ This is because a good debater can justify the overturning of any principle when circumstances are difficult. The pro-choice have used ‘difficult circumstances’ to obtain a negation of valuing individual life. The ‘difficult circumstances’ are what I have already talked about in the case of rape, incest and handicap or deformities and now in the case of health of the mother and the life of the mother. The pro-choice always try to portray these reasons as the norm.

In his book entitled, ‘Abortion yesterday, Today and Tomorrow: The case for legalized abortion’, Alan Guttmacher said, “Today it is possible for almost any patient to be brought through pregnancy alive, unless she suffers from fatal disease such as cancer or Leukemia, and if so, abortion would be unlikely to prolong, much less save the life.”²¹⁴

What Guttmacher is trying to say in simple terms is that yes ill-health ought not to be taken as a reason for abortion in the world of technology that we are living in. With modern technology and high profiled medicine a woman who has ill-health can still be accompanied up to the ninth month of her pregnancy. If a person is suffering from cancer or leukemia, abortion does not necessarily guarantee the life of the mother. So the health of the mother must never be used as ground to justify abortion. A woman who is pregnant and has cancer and on the process of chemotherapy, the baby dies or abortion occurs, then the case does not put the culpability upon the mother or the doctor. The intention of the doctor giving chemotherapy to the cancerous woman is not to kill the baby, but rather to treat the sickness.

In an attempt to save the life of the mother, if the child dies, the child’s death was never intended. Its death was the by-product of an attempt to save the mother’s life.

²¹³ Matthew 15:30-31.

²¹⁴ Alan F. Guttmacher. 1967. Abortion Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow: The Case for Legalized Abortion Now. Pg. 9, Berkeley: Diablo Press.

The former U.S Surgeon General Everett Koop made an observation that: “Protection of the life of the mother as an excuse for an abortion is a smoke screen. In my 36 years of pediatric surgery, I have never known of one instance where the child had to be aborted to save the mother’s life. If toward the end of the pregnancy complications arise that threaten the mother’s health, the doctor will either induce labor or perform a caesarean section. His intention is to save the life of both the mother and the baby. The baby’s life is never willfully destroyed because the mother’s life is in danger.”²¹⁵

5.3 THE PRO-LIFE POSITION

5.3.1 Abortion never Justifiable:

The pro-life position on abortion as pointed out earlier is clear and distinct. That life is to be considered sacred and thus must be protected at all cost. Even in ‘Difficult circumstances’ such as rape, incest, disability and even the life of the mother, life must never be destroyed intentionally. In his book, ‘Abortion and the conscience of the Nation’ Ronald Reagan said, “America was founded by men and women who shared a vision of the value of each and every individual. They stated this vision clearly from the very start in the declaration of independence, using words that every school boy and girl can recite: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.’”²¹⁶Life is the first of the unalienable rights of which every human person is entitled. Others such as liberty and happiness come only when one is alive.

As mentioned in an earlier chapter, no one is better than the other. Our equality is not when we are born, but rather when we are created. Creation begins from the womb. That means that even in the mother’s womb the child has the right to life.

Accordingly, the Catholic Church does not allow herself to be compromised in so far as the matters of abortion are concerned. Abortion as it were is never permissible in the Roman Catholic Church. This is because life is considered to be sacred and a gift from God. Life begins at the very moment of conception and it should end the moment of

²¹⁵John Ankerberg and John Weldon.1989. When does Life Begin? Pgs. 121-122, Tennessee: Wolgemuth& Hyatt Publishers Inc.

²¹⁶Ronald Reagan. 2000. Abortion and the Conscience of the Nation. Pgs. 48-49, California: New Regency Publishing.

natural death. A direct procured abortion is morally evil and is never acceptable in the church. It is considered as a grave sin.

On the other hand, “an indirect abortion can be justified at times, but only where at issue is an action with two simultaneous effects, one good and the other bad and where all four conditions of the principle of double effects truly apply. Thus a woman with cancerous uterus who is pregnant might well be urged to hysterectomy, legitimate under principle of totality, to sacrifice the part of her own body for the sake of the whole or radio or chemotherapy to save her own life. Yet such procedures have simultaneous effect of killing or of gravely impairing the unborn child. If all conditions were met, such procedures would be legitimate, but if anyone of these conditions were not met, would be gravely morally wrong.”²¹⁷

5.3.2 Permissibility in situation which endangers mother's life

The Principle of Double Effect: The basic moral principle that the Catholic Church follows is to do Good, and avoid that which is evil or bad. The principle of Double-effect is an ethical formula that enables someone to evaluate the moral dimensions of complicated moral issues that may involve consequences or side effects which are positive and negative, good and bad. This principle may be employed when one is considering an action that is morally good, yet the action involves one or more unintended bad consequences. Because these consequences are side effects, and not directly willed, the choice that brings them about is morally acceptable. The church therefore teaches that one may legitimately chose to carry out an act that is morally good, but which has one or more unintended side-effects that are morally evil. The principle of double effect has several guidelines that must be met for an act to be morally acceptable:

-The intended act must be good in itself. The intended act may not be morally evil. This is evident, for if the act is evil of its very nature, nothing can make it good or indifferent. If the action is fundamentally and inherently morally illicit, then it cannot be morally permitted regardless of any good intentions or goals, or under any good circumstances. From this understanding, the act of abortion by its very nature is

²¹⁷G. J. Woodall. 2008. *Humanae Vitae; Forty Years on: A New Commentary*: Pg. 99, Oxford: Family Publications.

inherently evil, because it is the intentional and direct killing of an innocent human being.

-The good effect of the act must be that which is directly intended by the one who carries out the act. The bad effects that result from the act may be foreseen by the agent but must be unintended. For example, In the case of abortion procedures, the death of the unborn child is directly intended, and therefore is morally illicit. On the other hand, in the use of chemotherapy or the Performance of a hysterectomy to remove a cancerous Uterus, etc., the death of the unborn child may not be directly intended, but only permitted or allowed as a possible by-product.

-The good effect must not be brought about by using morally evil means. The evil must not be an actual factor in the accomplishment of the good. For instance, in the case of abortion procedures, the death of the unborn child may not be used as a means of limiting family size, preventing birth defects, enhancing a career, etc. On the other hand, the curing of the potentially deadly disease of Cancer could be obtained by means of the morally acceptable actions of the administration of chemotherapy or the Performance of a hysterectomy. The death of the unborn child is not the means used to cure the Cancer.

-The good effect must be of equal or greater proportion to any evil effect which would result.

Acts that have morally negative effects are permissible only when they are truly necessary i.e. when there is no other means by which the good may be obtained. A good example of where the principle of Double-effect is in the case of a woman who has an ectopic pregnancy i.e. one which the pre-born child has become implanted in a place other than the uterus. In most ectopic pregnancies, the pre-born baby has become implanted in one of the mother's fallopian tubes which normally transport unfertilized eggs. Because the Fallopian tubes are small and narrow, implantation within one of them presents a serious problem. The growing child will eventually rupture the mother's tube and cause a life threatening situation. If the situation is left untreated both mother and the child are likely to die.

By the time an ectopic pregnancy is diagnosed, the life of a pregnant mother is already in danger. If the fallopian tube is not already ruptured when pregnancy is already

diagnosed, a person applies the principle of Double effect to make a morally acceptable course of action. In such situation, a person has two legitimate options:

- Remove the entire fallopian tube or
- Remove a portion of the tube at the site of implantation.

The side-effect of this procedure is the death of the unborn child, yet this end is not the end which the mother or the physician intends or chooses. Direct attacks on unborn child are always forbidden, as in elective abortion which intends the death of the child.

If the death of a child was not the intended effect, an abortion would just be an early means of delivering a child. However, abortion is an evil means that attempts to bring about some good end, real or perceived. This kind of treatment is morally permissible because it meets all of the conditions of the principle of double effect. The morally good end which is directly sought is to save the life of the mother. That which is treated is the life threatening damaged tissue of the tube. Therefore the child is not attacked. The removal of the damaged tube or a portion of the tube is morally permissible, because the death of the child is an effect which may be foreseen, but it is unintended. The good end of saving the mother's life is proportionate to the unintended evil side effect, that of unborn child's death. Because there is no other means by which the mother's life may be saved, the principle of necessity also applies. There are other medical procedures that can save both mother and child.

In short a pregnant woman who is faced with grim reality of impending death short of the use of for example Chemotherapy or hysterectomy may use these and other morally licit medical treatments and procedures for the reasonably grave reasons of saving her life, as long as the death of her unborn child is not directly intended as the end of using these procedures or in the means by which her life is saved, but only allowed or permitted to happen as an accidental by-product of these medical actions and no other reasonable medical treatment is available.

However, the directly intended death of unborn child by means of procured abortion remains morally indefensible.

The proper understanding and application of the principle of double effect offers a commonly accepted, morally legitimate and objectively grounded basis for clarifying

the important moral distinctions which need to be made within these very tragic and difficult moral dilemmas, which is agreeable.

6 THE HISTORICAL PRACTICE OF FORGIVENESS IN THE CASES OF ABORTION

At this juncture of my work, it has become apparent that abortion is a reality that humanity has had to reckon with. The reality of abortion is as old as mankind. While such research may be very important in the present society by drawing some light to the reality of abortion, it may not provide a clear cut solution to the problem. Abortion therefore continues to remain a matter of conscience, the voice between one's inner self, the society and God.

One of the most important reasons for this undertaking is to try to demonstrate how abortion has divided humanity down the middle i.e. those who believe in freedom and those who believe in life. Both aspects are very important in human life. Life without freedom is equivalent to slavery. Without life, there can be no freedom. On the other hand, without freedom, life will be full of misery. These two aspects are like the two sides of the same coin. Yet, the two aspects are the ones that have created the proponents of pro-life for life and the proponents of pro-choice for freedom.

Since abortion is real, what I intend to underscore in this chapter of my work is to interrogate on the aspect of forgiveness especially those who committed abortion. Abortion is a sin. Sin separates us from God. But sin does not separate God from us. Therefore, there is always room for a sinner to go back to God. The woman who has committed an abortion separates herself from God. But God does not separate himself from the woman. This therefore means that God is always ready to receive her back if she repents her sin. God's mercy supersedes everything. Even the woman who has killed through abortion, if she repents her sin, God will surely forgive her. In the prophecy of Isaiah it is written, "Come, let us talk this over, says Yahweh. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow, though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."²¹⁸ God's Word, 'come now' is an invitation to the people to a real meeting with him, the only one who can forgive their sins. They are invited to him in order to reason together.

From early time, the church faced the problem of how to handle the sinners. Sin was not an invention of the Christians. Human failures, human malice, human guilt and the need to find forgiveness are as old as mankind and fill the pages of world literature.

²¹⁸Isaiah 1: 18.

The remedy to these problems was faith in Jesus Christ and the incorporation into his community through baptism. Another way of obtaining forgiveness was by participating in the Eucharist. "Here, the baptized pleaded for forgiveness in the great prayer of our lord which was recited before communion, while the Eucharistic table fellowship with the Lord and with one another was a dramatic means of experiencing healing and reconciliation with God and neighbor."²¹⁹ But these were normal sins as stipulated in works of St. Paul, for example; factionalism, jealousy, quarrel, drunkenness etc. With these kinds of sins, the method mentioned above was applicable to reconcile one with the community.

However, "some sins were scandalous and disruptive of community life as to call for the expulsion of the offender. Paul advised the Corinthians to expel the incestuous man although the discipline was intended ultimately to effect salvation. It is also noteworthy that some means of reconciliation was available for those who had greatly offended the community."²²⁰ With the passage of time and increased number of Christians in the early church, the church had to gradually develop a system for dealing with notorious sinners.

The procedure of readmission of the notorious sinners was not simple. The first step was recognition of a person as an official penitent then followed the imposition of certain works of penance. Thereafter, the public support of the prayers of the faithful and eventual reconciliation with the church. This is found in the writings of Tertullian and the rite included, "wearing penitential clothes, fasting and tearfully expressing one's sorrow for sin before the community and begging their intercession."²²¹

As the time passed, there was a new development in penance, i.e. the coming up of private penance. The new system was completely private- a spiritual transaction between confessor and the penitent. In this situation, the bishop needed no longer be involved, since the rite of reconciliation consisting of an imposition of hands with prayer begging God to forgive the sinner could be administered by the Abbot or priest and it was repeatable. The penitent could ask for it as often as he felt the need.

This kind of penance became very popular among the people. However it was abused because somebody could sin, go for confession and later commit the same sin again.

²¹⁹Thomas Bokenkotter. 1985. *Dynamic Catholicism; A Historical Catechism*. Pg. 121, New York: Image Books Doubleday.

²²⁰Ibid. Pg. 221.

²²¹Ibid. Pg. 222.

So, somehow it was not taken seriously. We read about this from a complain which originated from the council of Toledo (589) which noted, "Some Christians sin as many times as it pleases them to sin..... ask presbyter to grant them pardon, and in order to put an end to such an abominable presumption, it commanded that penances be given according to the rite prescribed by the ancient canons."²²²The private penance became a threat to the sacrament of confession. It guaranteed more repetition to the same sin. As a result people never feared the sacrament of penance again.

"The penitential books prescribed very severe penances thus perpetuating the legalistic spirit of the older system. The punishment was supposed to fit the crime. Years of fasting, strokes of the lash, and compulsory pilgrimages were prescribed for serious sins and in many cases the penitent had little chance to complete the penance in life time. Eventually a system of commutations was devised by which a penitent could constitute a shorter, but even more severe penance for a longer one or even hire others to help him carry it out. With the increasing tendency to reconcile the penitent prior to the performance of the penance, milder forms of penance came to prevail and the penitential books faded out of the picture."²²³

6.1 THE CHURCH LAW AND ABORTION:

To talk about forgiveness after abortion is rather a complex issue without understanding the magnitude and the weight that abortion carries in the light of the church teaching. Abortion is one of the greatest sins as stipulated in the law of the church that warrant an automatic excommunication (Latae sententiae excommunication). The other grave sins are the following:

- 1) Physical attack to the roman Pontiff.
- 2) Apostasy: The total rejection of Christian faith.
- 3) Heresy: The obstinate post-baptismal denial of some truth, which must be believed with divine and catholic faith.
- 4) Schism: The rejection of the Authority and jurisdiction of the pope.
- 5) Desecration of sacred species (Holy Communion).
- 6) Sacramental Absolution on an accomplice in sin against the sixth and the ninth commandments.

²²²Ibid. Pg. 224-225.

²²³Ibid. Pg. 225.

- 7) Unauthorized Episcopal Consecration.
- 8) Direct violation of the seal of confession by the confessor.

I have attempted to put down this layout to demonstrate the seriousness of the sin and the position of the church. Whoever committed any of the above sins was automatically expelled from the church.

There are several laws in the code of canon Laws that relate to abortion. The first is canon 1398 which states, "A person who actually procures an abortion incurs a *latae sententiae* excommunication."²²⁴ Once the woman knows she is pregnant, the intentional killing of the new life within her is not only murder, but an excommunicable offense. A woman who only thinks she might be pregnant has a grave responsibility to find out and to protect the possible life within her.

While the law of the church talks of the sin of abortion as punishable with excommunication, there is a threshold to be used to determine the excommunication of the culprit or the offender. Reading canons 1321-1324, what comes out clearly is that it is not every violation of the law that is punishable. This means that it is not every abortion that is punishable by excommunication. For instance canon 1323 defines the conditions which weakens the punishment namely; the age, ignorance, physical force, grave fear, legitimate self-defense, etc. Important to note is that to incur the excommunication, one must know that it is an excommunicable offense at the time of abortion.

From this understanding, we can say that excommunication is a penalty that is designed to encourage the reform of the person who is being punished. Therefore, once a person has reconciled to the community, the punishment ceases to exist. *Latae sententiae* is often interpreted as automatic. Canonically, it is used to describe the way a person receives a punishment without an investigation or trial by another person or people. "In cases of *latae sententiae* punishments, the person who committed the act is, at first responsible for judging himself/herself according to the law provisions."²²⁵ Due to the mitigating factors, most women who have abortion would probably not find themselves guilty under law.

²²⁴The Canon Law Society Trust. 1983. *The Code of Canon Law (English Translation)* - Canon No. 1398. Pg.248, London: Collins Liturgical Publications.

²²⁵Jon O'Brien. 2010. "Catholics for Choice, Catholics and Abortion- Notes on Canon Law No 1." Washington D. C.: Pg.7. Retrieved on 29th-August 2015 from: www.catholicsforchoice.org/topics/abortion/documents/CopyOfNotesOnCanonLaw12010forweb.pdf.

In some situation, a woman could be excommunicated *latae sententiae* for procuring a successful abortion but within the parameters outlined in canon law is not automatic as it is believed. Contrary to general rules about the effects of excommunication, there is a special situation for people who are excommunicated *latae sententiae*. For instance, “when the observation of the *latae sententiae* excommunication would cause scandal in the community or seriously harm a person’s reputation, he/she is excused from observing it, unless a bishop has investigated the case and made a public declaration of the excommunication.”²²⁶

Another code of canon law that addresses the issue of abortion is canon 1329§2 which states, “In the case of a *latae sententiae* penalty attached to an offense, accomplices, even though not mentioned in the law or precepts, incur the same penalty if, without their assistance, the crime would not have been committed, and if the penalty is of such nature as to be able to affect them, otherwise they can be punished with *ferendae sententiae* penalties.”²²⁷

This canon law is strongly applicable to abortion and it means that the accomplices to the act of abortion are also included in the punishment. Quite often in the cases of abortion, accomplices are the boyfriends, the husband, the Doctor, or in the cases of minor, the parents.

The canon law on abortion does not name the accomplices. People are considered accomplices only if they directly participated in specific successful abortion. According to the canon law, since the sin of abortion leads to *latae sententiae* excommunication, this means that it is reserved to the bishop of a particular church.

In my common knowledge and experience, I know some dioceses in Kenya where the absolution from the sin of abortion is still reserved to the bishop.

With the passage of time, the bishops of particular churches have started delegating the absolution of the sin of abortion to the priests. By delegating the sacrament of penance for the sin of such a great magnitude, the church tries to demonstrate a change of attitude from a very legalistic approach to a lighter approach.

The change of heart does not mean that abortion is becoming acceptable, but rather it seeks to demonstrate the law of love as demonstrated by Christ himself. John Paul II in

²²⁶Ibid. Pg. 7.

²²⁷The Cano Law Society Trust. 1983. The Code of Canon Law (English Translation)-Canon No.1329§2. Pg. 236, London: Collins Liturgical Publications.

his encyclical letter *Evangelium Vitae* proclaimed, "I would now like to say a special word to all women who have had an abortion. The church is aware of the many factors which may have influenced your decision and she does not doubt that in many cases it was a painful and even shattering decision. The wound in your heart may not yet have healed. Certainly what happened was and remains terribly wrong. But do not give in to discouragement and do not lose heart. Try rather to understand what happened and face it honestly. If you have not already done so, give yourselves over with humility and trust to repentance. The Father of mercies is ready to give you his forgiveness and his peace in the sacrament of reconciliation. You will come to understand that nothing is definitely lost and you will also be able to ask forgiveness from your child, who is now living with the Lord. With the friendly and expert help and advice of other people, and as a result of your own painful experience, you can be among the most eloquent defenders of everyone's right to life. Through your own commitment to life, whether by accepting the birth of other children or by welcoming and caring for those most in need of someone to be close to them, you will become promoters of a new way of looking at human life."²²⁸

In other words, the document recognizes in a compassionate way that the decision by a woman to have an abortion is often tragic and painful for the mother because the decision is not necessarily based on selfish reasons or convenience. Women often are motivated to have an abortion to protect their own health or to protect the standard of living of their family. Yet, however serious and tragic such reasons are, they can never justify the deliberate killing of an innocent human being.

John Paul II addresses women who have had an abortion, referring their experience as painful and shattering choice in the light of many factors influencing them. What happened was and will always remain wrong. But such women should not become discouraged and should henceforth be defenders of life.

The healing of post-abortion trauma comes only when we understand that the pain which follows an abortion is the pain experienced when "Mother love" is violated. "Mother love" is a mysterious feeling which is written deep within the heart of a woman. Every woman is naturally created with an orientation towards nurturing young ones. Any situation that contradicts this orientation goes against the principle of

²²⁸John Paul II. 1995. *Evangelium Vitae*-No. 99, Pgs. 124-125, London: Catholic Truth Society.

“Mother love.” Abortion is such an act. The mother love is a mysterious feeling which the aborting woman may not have anticipated and found that she could not control. As pointed out in earlier chapter, every woman who commits an abortion experiences grief and trauma. For example quoting from a woman who had experienced abortion, she said, “Over the years, I continually went to confession. A priest once told me, God has forgiven you. You need to forgive yourself. You are putting yourself through your own purgatory. But I could not bring myself to accept forgiveness.”²²⁹

This kind of experience do not tell us who God is, neither do they tell us how efficacious the sacrament of penance is. The example enlisted above tell us that such women are devastated by the loss of their children, aware of the seriousness of their sin, and that they have never encountered such merciful love in their relationship with others- love that might have allowed them to hope in God’s infinitely greater merciful love.

In situation of abortion, suffering can be an extra-ordinary gift because it is a suffering love in view of a loss, and in the presence of this suffering, a profound grief is witnessed. In this place of great suffering, there is found an echo, not only of destruction caused by abortion, but also of a long ago and distance destruction which is then followed by an echo of the response of that destruction.

The response is the calling into being of a new and holier creation, which has been ministered to by God himself, who willed himself to suffer and die, so that the sinner would have his/her sins forgiven.

Post-abortion suffering is a legitimate type of suffering experienced precisely because the person belongs to the human family with all its sins and imperfections. It is penitent suffering which is profound and experienced by the spirit as it travails to achieve conversion.

Within this type of suffering is hidden the key to the forgiveness of Jesus Christ. It is at this level where he Judges forgives and heals. Legitimate suffering and penitence produce a fruit of healing because the experience turns one towards understanding of the wrong committed and regret and sorrow over that wrong. Suffering makes humanity realize its limitedness. That all alone, it is not possible. We are not

²²⁹Susan Wills E. 2013. “Life Matters: Forgiveness and Healing After Abortion.” The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; Retrieved on 25th-September 2015 from: www.usccb.org/about/pro-life-activities/respect-life-program/2013/upload/2013 .

independent but rather dependent. We depend on a supreme being who is the creator. When we go against his laws, then we experience even more pain.

Pope John Paul II in *Salvific Doloris* proclaimed that, "Joy comes from discovery of the meaning of suffering."²³⁰ This could be taken to mean that joy is found in totality of suffering which is abortion. However, it must in this context be clearly understood the suffering that follows abortion is not redemptive of by itself. But understood correctly, accepted willingly and experienced and expressed with graciousness, even this type of suffering can bring with it a moment of divine grace leading to conversion. This kind of suffering could also lead to true repentance when taken positively.

Suffering acquires its final meaning for humanity from God, with its ultimate meaning translated for us by God, in the story of the life and death of Jesus Christ. In his response, we can come to truly understand that greatest revelation of God took place in the setting of deepest darkness and most disgusting of suffering and human failure namely the cross.

Under the circumstance of abortion, the origin of suffering is not divine. But the response to it is divine. Thus, the woman turning towards God in an attitude of humility can be forgiven, because through the suffering of Jesus Christ, the sin of abortion can be forgiven, followed by the transformation and the re-establishment of the woman within the divine life of God.

In the book of Psalms, David wrote, "Bless the Lord O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases; who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies.....He has dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his mercy towards those who fear him. As far as the east is far from the west, so far has he removed transgression from us."²³¹ David gives the picture of God as one who is always there for us and ready to forgive our sins. God does not judge as men judge. But he judges as God. His judgment is fair and just. He judges with mercy and compassion. When we turn to God, sorry for our sins and wanting to turn away from them, he does not treat us as our sins deserve, or repay us according to our iniquities, instead of his righteous anger we find his pardon and love.

²³⁰John Paul II. 1984. Apostolic Letter "Salvific Doloris" No. 1.Pg. 1, Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

²³¹Psalms 103: 2-4, 10-12.

Therefore, “God is not some stern cosmic judge, sitting in heaven and waiting to punish those who transgress his holy standards of righteousness. He does not treat us as our sins deserve. God is our loving heavenly Father who redeems our lives and crowns us with love and mercy.”²³²

The forgiveness and conversion of the post-abortive woman is a visible sign of mercy. She exudes a grace that is not cheap or easily gained but resplendent. She is the woman who has experienced the healing and forgiving power of God in and through Jesus Christ.

Sorrowing in remembrance, but sanctifying the future through living a life focused on goodness is the pinnacle of repentance and forgiveness. The memory of the abortion remains salvific because it deepens and continues to deepen the understanding of the individual’s personal history, action and salvation.

The painful experience gone through by the woman who has done abortion offers her a chance to discover and perhaps redefine her concept of God. For one to experience forgiveness, one must acknowledge the existence of personal God. Long-term healing is possible when the woman asks for a total and unconditional forgiveness. And one can only ask for forgiveness when she has recognized the mistake she has committed.

6.2 THREE ASPECTS OF FORGIVENESS:

Most of us were raised up within formal religious training. As a result, we have grown up in a society that is African-Christian in heritage. This means a mixture of African cultural values and missionary Christian values. As a result, some basic concepts about God, right and wrong and life after death are usually part of our life. So, every person would want to maintain a relationship with God. People describe God not only as creator of the universe, but also as a perfect, loving parent who desires a deep and abiding relationship with those whom he has created.

“God made us with the ability to choose whether or not we will have any relationship with him. Our relationship with God is often disrupted by our tendency to ignore him—living as though he doesn’t exist at all or engaging in outright rebellion, whether sporadically or as long life pursuit. Our relationship with him will be re-established only when God offers and we accept forgiveness for our countless violations of God’s

²³²Thomas Nelson. 2007. Ten Truths about Abortion. Pg. 62, Florida: Coral Ridge Ministries.

law.”²³³ God in his own part keeps offering those who have sinned against him forgiveness. But on the part of the sinner, he/she must accept forgiveness. God beckons and the sinner responds. The decision to respond is the prerogative of the sinner. He may choose to or not to respond. It is only in making the right choice that God responds by offering the forgiveness.

Many women who have done abortion are secretly convinced that their transgressions are beyond the reach of God’s forgiveness. Their most important task is to accept on an emotional level what they may already know on an intellectual level: that God’s forgiveness is available and that they must decide to reach out and grasp it. There are three important aspects to this firm grasp on forgiveness:

- 1) Knowing who ultimately has paid the debt for their wrong-doing.
- 2) Allowing intimacy with God to be restored.
- 3) Understanding the difference between punishment and consequences

6.2.1 Debt paid in full:

Christians ought to know that God has made provision for the forgiving of wrongdoing. God has made this provision by dying on the cross. But on the contrary, many women who have done abortion have a difficult time believing that forgiveness is available for their selfish and catastrophic choices. Hence they find it difficult to accept God’s forgiveness. They continue to live in a state in which their head knowledge and heart knowledge do not match. When one applies head knowledge, then forgiveness remains a mirage. Faith is paramount to the reality of forgiveness. Without faith, forgiveness will always be elusive. Thus, the woman who has committed an abortion must have faith in God for her to be forgiven.

6.2.2 Intimacy restored:

Restoring intimacy is the second aspect of forgiveness and can best be understood in parent-child relationship. When a child chooses to do something wrong, the parent needs to know that the child takes full responsibility for his/her choice and that he/she demonstrate genuine sorrow for his/her actions. If acceptance of responsibility and appropriate sorrow are in place, the path to reconciliation and restored intimacy is completely cleared.

²³³Teri Reisser, Paul Reisser. 1999. *A solitary Sorrow: Finding Healing and Wholeness after Abortion*. Pg. 107, Colorado: Water Brook Press.

A very touching illustration of God's forgiveness is found in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15). After leaving home with his inheritance and squandering it on wine, women and dance, the son eventually finds himself starving in a pigpen. As he begins to remember the benevolence of his father's household and the kindness his father showed to even the lowliest of servants, he comes to his senses and repents of the terrible decision he had made. Knowing that he does not deserve to be received back as a son, he formulates a return formula to his father. I will go and beg to be hired as a servant. After all the lifestyle of even the servants in his father's house is better than what he is currently experiencing.

In great joy the father receives him, sparing no expenses with the 'homecoming' party and lavishing him with expensive gifts. Like the son in this parable many women who have done an abortion just want to 'go back home' long for the days before all the pains started. They have written off the possibility of enjoying a close relationship with God, but would be happy just to be in the fold. To make such decision requires courage and determination. The woman who has done an abortion like the prodigal son must take a decision to go back. Surprisingly, God is always ready to welcome back all those who have sinned against him without looking at the magnitude of their sins.

6.2.3 Punishment and consequences:

The third aspect of forgiveness is to understand the difference between punishment and consequences which are easily misunderstood. In the story of the prodigal son, there was no punishment given by the father, but he could not magically create a new endowment for his son. Although the relationship was completely restored, the son had to live the rest of his life knowing that he had wasted his inheritance. The father could soften that blow somewhat by providing for him, but the squandered fortune was gone.

God as our loving parent is as aggrieved as we are about the losses brought on by our choices and are remorseful longing to go back in time in order to make different decisions. But living with the consequences of our choices is an integral part of relationship that is not coerced that God desires to have with us. If we were to step in and override the adverse consequences of the choices we make, there could be no real free will and no real power to choose. Our choice would be meaningless because any

decision we make would be automatically be fixed by an indulgent and paternalistic father.

One of the greatest expressions of loss, grief and repentance came from King David after planning for the death of Uriah and taking his life. After being told of his sin, in great pain, he came to God, broken in spirit, and without realization for his actions, he said, "Have mercy on me O God, because of your unfailing love. Because of your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sin. Wash me cleans me from my guilt. Purify me from my sin. For I recognize my shameful deeds-they haunt me day and night...purify me from my sin, and I will be clean. Wash me and I will be whiter than snow. O give me back my joy again, you have broken me, now let me rejoice. Don't keep looking at my sins remove the stain of my guilt. Create in me a clean heart O' God renew a right spirit within me."²³⁴ And God saw the remorsefulness in the heart of David. He restored David and forgave him all his transgressions. By merely recognizing and acknowledging his failures, David received God's mercy. Any woman that is able to recognize that what she has done is displeasing to God and begs for God's mercy, then God will always forgive her. God is always ready to grant his forgiveness. In return we must be ready to let go our sinfulness and receive the forgiveness of God.

In the spirit of mercy, the church has continued to lessen its hard stance in so far as the sacrament of forgiveness in abortion is concerned. As I pointed out earlier, the sin of abortion has always remained a reserve of the local ordinary in every diocese. However some Bishops had already allowed priests in their respective dioceses to give absolution to the sin of abortion.

In a very positive move, the sitting Pope Francis at the beginning of the month of September this year gave permission to all catholic priests to give absolution to those who had committed the sin of abortion. This has been considered to be a great step in the right direction. The pope in his letter dated 1st September 2015, proclaimed that, "the forgiveness of God cannot be denied to one who has repented."²³⁵ Forgiveness comes as a result of repentance. Those who have committed sin must repent to earn forgiveness.

²³⁴Psalm 51: 1-11.

²³⁵Stephanie Kirchgaessner. (1st-September-2015) "Pope Francis tells Priests to pardon women who have Abortion" The Guardian. London: Retrieved on the 5th-October 2015 from: www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/01.

The Pope's action is compelled by the recognition of different factors that pressurized women to carry out abortion. He says, "I am well aware of the pressure that has led them to this decision. I know that it is an existential and moral ordeal."²³⁶ Pope Francis move is an attempt to read and interpret correctly the signs of the time. There is a need to break from the traditional past which is not compatible with our contemporary times.

The Pope's action should not be construed to mean an acceptance of the sin of abortion. Abortion remains a serious sin and can never be accepted in the church. What the Pope is telling the world is that what appears impossible to man is possible to God. We must appreciate the forgiving spirit of our Lord and put it into practice.

²³⁶Ibid: "Pope Francis tells priests to Pardon Women who have Abortion."

7 A PROPOSAL PLAN OF ACTION AND THE POSSIBLE HELP FOR THE MOTHERS:

When I talk of 'plan of action' I intend to mean what should be done to salvage the situation. In every point and time, there has to be a solution to a particular problem within every generation. This does not mean that those generations that existed before did not do enough or that they failed. But rather each generation must seek to assert itself and find its own solution to the problems that poses a challenge. It is in this respect that I feel morally obliged to propose a plan of action to the problem of abortion which is as old as humanity itself.

As it were, there are many things that an individual person, group of persons, a particular church or churches can and should do on behalf of the innocent individuals who are still in the womb. In addition, there is a lot an individual or a group of persons, church or churches can do about the mothers who are contemplating abortion or have already done an abortion who need help to be able to heal and continue with their life normally.

Important to remember is that even a single individual can have a far reaching impact than can be comprehended. The history of the church has enlisted a number of average men and women whose vision and dedication to a certain cause produced marvelous results. One may not have to devote the full time, but rather merely an hour or two hours per week. Such sacrifices of time, money or strength when put together become powerful agents for change. While I stand for the church's position which is purely pro-life, I am also aware that the opposite force is equally powerful. There are those who believe that every woman has the right and freedom to do what she wants with her body.

However it is good to bear in mind that a right is considered to be a right insofar as it does not infringe on the right of another. While a woman would argue that it is her right to do whatever she wants with her body, but by the very fact that that right violates the right to life of an innocent being in her womb, then that right ceases to exist.

The following therefore are my proposal plan of action:

7.1 Prayer

Prayer is communication with God. Through prayer, we are able to enter into communion with God. All life originates from God. Although the present situation seems complex, every believer can pray that God would work to change the situation. The word of God says, "Pray for one another."²³⁷ This means that prayer is powerful and active. There is no reason as to why Christians cannot be active in prayer either as an individual or as a group. Christians are specifically called to pray for guidance on how God should personally lead them to be involved in their church and community. I have chosen to take prayer as the first plan of action because of my personal faith in God and belief that without God nothing is possible. With God, all is possible. By trusting in God, all that we ask in faith through prayer shall be granted. It is my conviction, that prayer offered in faith can move mountains. Hence, my first plan of action is to pray.

7.2 Organize the support group for pregnant mothers

The society today has abandoned its women. Nobody seems to care what happens to them. When women who are not married become pregnant, they are abandoned on their own to face the challenge as though they made themselves pregnant. This is really bad. When a woman who is not married becomes pregnant she develops the fear of society reprisal and rejection. She is seen as a scandalous person and hence unacceptable. Apart from unmarried women, the younger women especially the students in high school and universities develop a feeling of betrayal on the side of their parents. They feel that they have betrayed their parents or their guardians and hence they do not know what to do.

It is from this perspective that I would propose and organize support groups for the pregnant women. These ought to start from local levels. The Christians and churches should begin to support wide variety of pregnancy crisis ministries and counselling ministries.

Depending on the status in the society, women need to be assisted through the birth process and beyond with financial, emotional and spiritual encouragement and counselling. Prevention is better than cure. One must not wait until the sickness strikes in order to go to hospital. We all know how pregnancy comes about namely through

²³⁷James: 5:16b.

irresponsible sexual behavior that is not allowed by the society. Positive alternatives to abortion should be given priority by those who are policy makers such as the State.

This can be achieved in such a manner that the irresponsible sexual behavior leading to pregnancy is discouraged.

In the church, I propose formation of youth groups within a certain age limits.

Especially those who are in high school or university who should be given special seminars through which education on matters of life and its importance shall be imparted. Through these seminars, there should be creation of awareness about the dangers and side effects of abortion. In addition, the youth need to be educated about the sacredness of human life and the need to avoid any situation that may lead to its destruction. This kind of education may contribute a great deal in promoting the culture of life among the upcoming generation who holds the future of the nation and the future of the church.

In addition to youth-groups, there is a need to form single-mothers organization which will include women who are still young and single. Quite often such women fall prey to this problem because they are still sexually active. Such organization would help a great deal to advice the women and also to provide counselling to those who have already become victims, to seek to give reassurance to those who have gone through abortion procedures and to discourage those who may be contemplating to follow the same path. The following are possible ways that the Christian church may be involved in supporting the pregnant mothers:

- a) Giving financial assistance to pregnant mothers throughout their pregnancy to enable them to meet medical expenses and other expenses.
- b) Spiritual, emotional and medical counselling should be availed at low cost. As a matter of fact, the church can be able to provide these services for free. This means therefore that the church must seek to establish counselling centers and adoption homes for children and mothers.
- c) In some cases, the idea of abortion may not originate from the women, but rather from the woman's Doctor. The church therefore should seek to establish contact with him/her and inform him/her that the church is ready to aid the woman through the pregnancy.

- d) With creation of more social support for women, the more their life normalizes and therefore creating greater chance for healthy adjustment to their pregnancy and positive outcome. These kinds of support are not only to exist before birth. The same social support must continue after the child is born.
- e) Every available means must be undertaken in the church to change irresponsible sexual behavior. Adult men and women must take responsibility for their actions. Parents must never abandon their teenage daughters who are pregnant. Abandoned teenagers find it easier to seek a quick solution to their pregnancy than if they are given love, understanding, encouragement and support for their families.

7.3 Being informed

Ignorance is the lack of knowledge and therefore the greatest enemy of development. Each person needs to become intellectually convinced and be able to argue in favor of the position of pro-life.

The theme of abortion has a lot of literature written by different Authors from different perspective. In order for one to defend life against abortionist or proponents of pro-choice, one needs to be well informed what abortion is all about. To teach people on the negative impacts of abortion is not possible without having read enough literature.

For the case of abortion, there are two types of literature. The literature written by the proponents of abortion, also called the pro-choice. Their literature attempts to demonstrate the right of the women and freedom to do what they want with their own bodies. On the contrary, the literature written by the opponents of abortion, also called pro-life. Their literature attempts to demonstrate the right of the child and the right of the mother to life. This means that both the mother and the child have the right to life and must be saved together. Both literatures are important and necessary. To argue for life, one needs to understand the position of the pro-choice and their mode of argument.

“Such information should have a practical result. We must not only work for the overthrow of Roe v. Wade. To ensure that the Supreme Court will not once again change its mind and reverse its reversal, the church must also work for a constitutional

amendment guaranteeing the right of life of the unborn.”²³⁸This implies that we must never relent in our fight against this vice which is wrecking the society down the middle. To be able to qualify for this battle, one needs information. There is a saying which says that knowledge is power. Without knowledge, one knows not which course of action to take. But with knowledge which comes through information, one can be able to argue against the opponents reasonably.

7.4 Vote

The issue of abortion is not only a religious affair, but also in some countries in the world today, abortion is a big political battlefield. In countries where abortion has been legalized, any candidate contesting for a political office and is opposed to abortion may easily loose. In countries where abortion is illegal, a politician known to support abortion may also loose a political office due to such belief. This means that Christians can use their voting power to influence the illegality of abortion by electing leaders that are pro-life.

Christians ought to support the candidates who are committed to protecting unborn human lives and oppose pro-choice candidates. Christians should let them know why they will not vote for them and why they think the abortion issue deserves their re-evaluation. If all the Christians in the world would actively be involved on behalf of the children in the womb, there is no doubt that abortion would become a thing of the past. If not totally, it would reduce drastically.

7.5 Organize rallies locally

Christians can organize peaceful demonstrations on behalf of the unborn in their own town. During these peaceful demonstrations the media should be informed of the events. Such demonstrations may have an impact at the local level and may generate interest and can become catalyst for unexpected benefits. The crowd attending the peaceful demonstration must not be big, but the participants must be ready to respond to the media queries expressing the reason for their activities.

²³⁸John Ankerberg, John Weldon. 1989. When Does Life Begin? Pg. 217, Tennessee: Wolgemuth & Hyatt Publishers, Inc.

7.6 Conducting interviews with media houses and Article writing in the Newspaper

We are living at the time of modern technology. The world has become a global village. People pass information so easily through the social media. There are media houses all over and in these houses, interviews are conducted freely. What one requires is to seek audience with them and you tell them what you intend to discuss about. For instance, in Kenya where I come from, we have more than ten television stations. These stations are always ready to conduct an interview on topical issues that affect the society.

In addition, we have the Newspapers which carry a lot of information. Christians can always write articles in the column in the local daily Newspaper. In Kenya, we have four main Newspapers and other small Newspapers. In each Newspaper, there is a letter column where one can always write an article. There are also other Gutter-presses which also carries a lot of information. In a nutshell, these are means through which the Christians can use to carry out the campaign against abortion.

But in addition to Television and Newspaper, there has of late developed easier means of passing information such as through twitter and WhatsApp messages that keep on circulating around the world. The message circulates from one continent to another. Very interesting, what happens today in my own village reaches me within a very short time. Even a village scandal will reach me within a very short time. That is the mystery of modern social media.

In short, what I am trying to say is that what is important is to know what we want and how we want it done. The means are readily available. If the desire and the will are there, then we shall get it exactly the way we want.

7.7 Individual Christian mobilization and church mobilization for action:

There are different ways through which churches or individual persons can become active at the local and also national level to oppose abortion by promoting right to life. The church ought to establish a right to life committee which shall co-ordinate the activity at the local level. The church can also use the existing groups such as the youth groups, the women groups, the men associations, the Marian groups etc. All these groups, when used well can become great instruments of spreading the Gospel of life not only within the realm of the church walls, but also to the external world.

7.8 Support Pro-life Organization with finances:

For any just course to excel there must not be only moral support and encouragement but also financial support. To be successful in any activity, one needs to make material sacrifices. Material sacrifice is basically money or any other useful materials that can be used in promotion of life such as printed materials.

There are many pro-life organizations in the world today which are already mobilized to educate and to support the victims. Few coins dropped in a coffer somewhere may change life either of a woman who would have aborted, but did not due to the support you gave. Also may help a child in an adoption home. It could also be used to facilitate a seminar for the youths in order to create awareness about the dangers of abortion and the meaning of human life.

8 CONCLUSION:

The world may be so far down the path of destruction that perhaps only this way of acting will alter the current situation. In modern world so to speak, we endeavor to save Elephants, Rhinos, and many other species of wild animals considered to be endangered species. Yet, the pro-choice proponents and some governments encourage women to throw away their babies.

A United States of American Army General once lamented, "It is quite possible that when the inevitable swing of the pendulum takes place and life once again becomes precious, it might be too late to stop the slide that will ultimately hold the decline and demise of our civilization."²³⁹ Our civilization is at stake and the time to act is now for tomorrow will be too late. Because we cannot determine the future, we must therefore take a step now. The battle cannot be won by arguments, but rather through great effort, sacrifice and great commitment.

Reading through history, Nations and Peoples got liberated from slavery through great sacrifice that was so costly. Even the delivery of Israelites from Egyptian bondage occurred through the hand of God. We must know that for humanity to be liberated from this form of slavery, price has to be paid. Blood has to be shed. People have to stand up and say no to abortion.

As I make concluding remarks, I wish to summarize the whole work with the words of Benedict XVI in his book entitled 'God is love' where he argues that love is one of the most frequently used word to express one's emotions, yet the word love has several different meanings. The love between man and woman (Eros), love between father and son or daughter (Filial) and love between God and man (Agape). These types of love are interconnected. Eros and filial love are limited because they have conditions attached. However, agape is used to describe a 'searching' love- One that involves the discovery of another and moving beyond selfish character.

Gazing at the reality of abortion, we realize that pregnancy comes about because of misunderstood concept of love. A man and a woman enter into intimacy with a conviction that their love is genuine. Thereafter, the dawn of pregnancy sets the man against the woman or the vice versa. The only solution is to destroy an innocent child.

²³⁹Ibid. Pg. 220.

Hence, the concept of love which is good turns to be a source of sin and separation from God.

Man is created in the image and likeness of God. Through sin, man separated himself from God. But God never wanted man to perish. So he embarked on a mission to save man from sin. Therefore, Jesus became the ultimate example of love. "His death on the cross is the culmination of that turning of God against himself in order to raise man up and save him."²⁴⁰

The inability to recognize guilt following an abortion is a destructive sickness, a sleeping sickness of the human conscience. When conscience enters into slumber, human being destroys himself/herself and the entire world. Therefore, abortion is a sleeping sickness that has affected man's conscience and must therefore never be ignored. In this work therefore, I have attempted to awaken the human conscience in man as confronted by the evil of abortion so that man may change and seek forgiveness from God who is the origin and the author of life.

To allow your neighbor to become forgetful or let his or her conscience to wither away and die is showing a lack of love towards him or her. Hence we are all called to help in awakening the conscience of our neighbors so that they may be able to grasp the reality of abortion and its negative impact upon humanity. In another language, it is a sign of love for one's neighbor to harass him/her so that he/she wakes up to God thus enabling him or her once again to become a loving person in the eyes of God. There is a moral obligation for each one of us to be our brother's keeper. We must never speak the language of Cain after killing his brother because the blood of the innocent children will disturb our conscience. But when we have done something small to change the situation, then we will not be held responsible. "Whether they listen or not, these tribes of rebels will know there is a prophet among them."²⁴¹ These were the words of God addressed to prophet Ezekiel. The same words are being addressed to us. We must not remain silent about abortion but rather keep on talking about it and its evil nature. Whether they hear or not, they will know that there was a prophet among them. The prophet is you and I. There is no need of feeling ashamed of doing that which is right.

²⁴⁰Pope Benedict XVI. God is love- Deus Caritas Est; No. 12. Pg. 26, Maryland: The Word Among us Press.

²⁴¹Ezekiel 2: 5.

If we would love one another in the same way that God loved us, then, there would be no such sin as abortion and many other types of sins. But because we have chosen to hate one another, we continue to live in sin and even more still, we encourage one another to sin by justifying the same sin. The message of love expressed by Benedict XVI should be the same message used to those women who have gone through abortion. Women who have done abortion often go through feelings of dejection and rejection. They need to be loved, accepted and reassured that God still loves them. They are not the only ones who have sinned, but rather all have sinned and fallen short of the grace of God. But God is merciful and forgiving to all that turns to him. He loves us unconditionally. His love to us is unlimited.

We are all called to a special mission, to restore those who are heart-broken because of abortion, seeking to assure them that God has already forgiven them. For those who are planning to carry out abortion, we need to reawaken their conscience that they may be able to rethink their decision and be able to see the sanctity of life. We must seek to reach out to them and let them know that what they are carrying in their womb is precious gift of God and God abhors those who destroy life. This is the duty of each one of us and a Christian duty.

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10 THE SUMMARY OF DIPLOMA THESIS.

10.1 “The Morality of Abortion and the Human Conscience”

Human beings are a unique part of creation living in a society governed by habits and norms. The habits and norms constitute a basic component of human morality. Hence morality specifies the practice of individual and communal life and it prescribes what it basically constitutes and the means of attaining it.

In this summary, I have tried to show that my Thesis is focused on abortion and human conscience in general. However, it is based on personal experience from my home country Kenya where abortion till today remains a serious problem. This problem inspired me to write on this Thesis which has an influence of great magnitude in the society.

Etymologically, abortion comes from the word “aboriri” meaning to perish and it implies the loss of fetal life. Abortion has a long history dating back to the origin of man, but at Greco- Roman times, it became more pronounced. The reasons for the existence of abortion depended on the cultural background on which it existed and was practiced. The specific point pertaining to the beginning of human life became the center of disagreement between those in support of abortion and those in opposition to the abortion practice which degenerated to the birth of the pro-life and the pro-choice movements.

In many cultures today, abortion remains a taboo, yet attracting a tremendous public debate both in religious and political spheres. Many motivating factors behind writing on the theme of abortion and human conscience is based on induced abortion and complication from unsafe abortions around the world and specifically my personal encounter with victims of abortion as pastor of souls in my pastoral life in Kenya. Considering that human life should be protected from its very beginning, killing that occurs in abortion is morally wrong.

Man is created with the faculty of conscience to help him differentiate between good and evil. Through conscience, human beings ought to choose the good and avoid evil. This means that there are not only evil consequences for the child to be avoided, but also for the mother of the child. Abortion has a serious ramification in the life of every woman physically, emotionally, spiritually and psychologically. The psychological effects are normally referred to as post-abortion syndrome.

The Mother Church has taken it to itself the role of protecting human life. This is based from the fact that life is a gift of God and must always be cared for. Secondly, the protection of human life is a human right, and according to the teaching of the Church each and every human being, also the unborn human being, has a right to life.

Although abortion has received opposition almost throughout the life of the Church, the greatest concern about abortion came with its growing legalization. Church documents such as *Gaudium et Spes*, *Evangelium Vitae* and others made clear statements against abortion. Especially Pope John Paul II framed the position of the Church as condemning a “Culture of death” and promoting a “Culture of life”.

The Human Conscience: Borrowing from Karl-Heinz Peschke, conscience can be defined as “that moral faculty which tells people subjectively what is good and evil and which manifest their moral obligation to them.”²⁴² Simply, conscience is a critical awareness bearing witness to norms and values we recognize and apply.

The scriptures look at conscience as a God-given faculty residing in everyone enabling the person to distinguish right from wrong. One needs not to be a believer to be guided by conscience. Non-believers also have a conscience. Different theologians have fronted different religious interpretations of human conscience. With reference to particular and specific theologians such as St. Augustine, St. Thomas, St. Bonaventure and Pope Benedict XVI, one notices a common denominator in all of them beyond remaining differences.

St. Augustine considered conscience to be the voice of God speaking within an individual, a God-given faculty to mankind to enable him or her to observe the law. For Thomas Aquinas, conscience is the act of applying knowledge to concrete actions and specific conduct. He introduced the principle of *synderesis*- meaning to do good and avoid evil. According to Thomas Aquinas, *synderesis* does not fail. However conscience can make an error, but one must always act in accordance with one’s conscience. Following one’s conscience is the way to relate to God. St. Bonaventure held that through conscience human beings discover what is right and what is wrong. In introducing the concept of *synderesis*, Bonaventure regards *synderesis* as that which stimulates us to do the good. For Bonaventure, conscience is the representative of God within us. Thus it would be evil to act against one’s conscience. In the case of erroneous conscience, one should not act so as to avoid acting against conscience hence violating God’s law. For Bonaventure, conscience is dependent on *synderesis*. *Synderesis* is the spark insofar as conscience in itself cannot move. For Bonaventure, *synderesis* cannot be corrupted by sin.

²⁴²Karl Heinz Peschke. 1979. *Christian Ethics: Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican II*. Vol. 1 General Moral Theology; Third Edition. Pg. 158, Oregon: Wipft and Stock Publishers.

The final take on the concept of conscience is from Pope Benedict XVI. He contrasted the viewpoints of morality of conscience and the morality of authority. The two viewpoints are opposed to each other yet locked in struggle with other. Conscience is the remembering (anamnesis) based on knowledge. Conscience is the demanding presence of the voice of the truth in the subject. Conscience signifies the perceptible and demanding presence of the voice of the truth in the subject himself.

Conscience and morality are intertwined. Therefore, morality and human conscience can be said to be two realities that are closely related. Abortion is a human act carried out deliberately by human being. The same human beings are endowed with the faculty of conscience which is meant to guide and help them to determine between the good and the bad. Abortion carried out with the intention of termination of life is considered evil in a Christian context because killing innocent human life is evil and goes against the principle of life. How is it possible that a clear moral judgment about abortion seems to result from the decision of the conscience and yet there is the reality of a great number of abortions taking place in our societies?

How then do we reconcile these two realities? The pro-life movement propagates the doctrine of the preservation of human life. On the other hand, the pro-choice movement advocates for the freedom of women with respect to their own body and supports the right to abortion. From the two positions taken by these two groups, we discover what one would call the collision of rights. Freedom is a human right and ought to be respected. On the other hand, life is a human right and a greater or more fundamental one for that matter. One needs to be alive to enjoy the right of freedom. Every woman has a right over her own body. But this right is limited to her body alone. The embryo in her womb is neither her own body nor an extension of her body. Hence, the right over her body ought not to infringe on the right of another.

Those in support of abortion, struggle to justify their position disregarding the presupposed role of human conscience. The possibility of abortion is normally discussed in the context of difficult circumstances, such as rape, incest, disability and also the health and the life of the mother. In all these situations, one may become convinced of the necessity to do an abortion. However, it is never just to disregard the fundamental value of human life and therefore the right to protection of every innocent human life, also in the womb.

In opposition to pro-choice is the pro-life who consider life to be sacred and worthy of protection at all times. Life is an unalienable right of which every human person is entitled. Even in the mother's womb, a child has the right to life. Hence, a directly procured abortion is morally evil and never acceptable in the church. But an indirect abortion that is also called "therapeutic abortion" can be justified under the circumstances of the principle of double effect.

Abortion represents the reality of human finitude as opposed to God who is infinite. It demonstrates the fact that we are limited while God is unlimited. The sin of abortion has been a sore and remains a sore in the eye of the Church. It is the wish of the Church up to this date to eliminate abortion. But this is practically impossible. Hence, the church has resorted to looking for the way of dealing with this sin.

The Church begins with an acknowledgement that abortion is a threat to human life and the right to life. For a long time, the Church attempted to impose sanctions on those who committed abortion. This is very articulate from the teachings of the Church Fathers and also the church laws. But with passage of time, the Church has continued to change her hard stance on those who committed abortion, advocating more on the principle of mercy and forgiveness. The latest development on the same is the letter written on the 1st September 2015 by Pope Francis permitting all the Catholic priests to forgive the sin of abortion which was a reserve for the local bishops, hence breathing a new life in the church. This action of Pope Francis which marks the Jubilee Year of Mercy (2015-16) is a clear indication signaling change on how abortion was perceived in the past, how it is perceived now and probably how it will be perceived in the future.

Although many at times we stand at the fence pointing a finger at those considered as culprit, we ought to know that God does not judge as man does. Rather than judging, we need to stop being spectators and become actors. It is only a common effort that can help us reduce this vice that threatens the human life.

Apart from offering prayers, we need also to support and participate in rehabilitation programs, give financial support to the victims and those organization that are fully involved in rehabilitation programs that help mothers to take decisions and to live with the results of their decisions under difficult circumstances.

To conclude, history has demonstrated that nations and people got liberated from slavery through great sacrifices. Abortion is a form of slavery. For humanity to be liberated, people must stand up and say no to abortion. The inability to recognize guilt following an abortion is a destructive sickness, a sleeping sickness of human conscience. Abortion is a sleeping sickness that has affected man's conscience threatening to annihilate humanity and hence must never be ignored.

This work is therefore an attempt to re-awaken the human conscience in man as fronted by the evil of abortion so that man may change and seek forgiveness from God who is the author and the origin of life. Remaining silent in the face of abortion is consenting to evil thus going against the principle of love. We are called to help in awakening the conscience of our neighbors so that they may be able to grasp the reality of abortion and its negative impact upon humanity. There is a moral obligation for each one of us to be our brother's keeper.

10.2 „Die Moralische Beurteilung von Abtreibung und das Menschliche Gewissen.“

Der Mensch ist ein einzigartiger Teil der Schöpfung, der in einer Gesellschaft lebt, die von Gewohnheiten und Normen geregelt wird. Die Gewohnheiten und Normen bilden einen grundlegenden Bestandteil der menschlichen Moral. Daher betrifft Moral die Praxis des individuellen und gemeinschaftlichen Lebens und beschreibt, was zu einer guten Gemeinschaft gehört und wie diese erhalten werden kann.

In dieser Zusammenfassung möchte ich zeigen, dass meine Arbeit sich auf Abtreibung und das Gewissen im Allgemeinen fokussiert. Jedoch stützen sich meine Thesen auf die Erfahrungen, welche ich in meinem Heimatland gemacht habe, da Abtreibung ein großes Problem in der kenianischen Gesellschaft ist, welches bis heute nicht gut aufgearbeitet wurde. Diese Problematik hat mich inspiriert, dieses sensible Thema zu behandeln, welches unsere Gesellschaft gravierend beeinflusst.

Etymologisch stammt Abtreibung von dem Wort "aboriri", das heißt untergehen, und es bedeutet den Verlust des fötalen Lebens. Abtreibung hat eine lange Geschichte seit dem Ursprung des Menschen, aber in der griechisch-römischen Zeit kam es zu einer stärkeren Ausprägung. Die Gründe dafür liegen am kulturellen Hintergrund. In der Gegenwart wurde die spezifische Frage nach dem Anfang des menschlichen Lebens zum Zentrum der Meinungsverschiedenheiten zwischen Unterstützern und Gegnern von Abtreibung, die in den „Pro Choice“ und „Pro Life“-Bewegungen ihren Ausdruck

finden.

In vielen Kulturen heute ist Abtreibung ein gesellschaftliches Tabu, und dennoch gibt es eine enorme öffentliche Debatte sowohl im religiösen als auch im politischen Bereich. Es gibt zahlreiche Faktoren, die zu dieser Arbeit über das Thema Abtreibung und das menschliche Gewissen motivieren: medizinisch induzierte Abtreibung, Komplikationen durch unsichere Abtreibungen auf der ganzen Welt und insbesondere meine persönliche Begegnung als Seelsorger mit Opfern der Abtreibung bei meiner pastoralen Arbeit in Kenia. In Anbetracht dessen, dass das menschliche Leben von Anfang an schützenswert ist, zeigt sich die Tötung menschlichen Lebens durch Abtreibung als moralisch falsch.

Menschen sind mit einem Gewissen ausgestattet, das ihnen die Möglichkeit gibt, zwischen Gut und Böse zu unterscheiden. Mit Hilfe des Gewissens sollten Menschen das Gute wählen und das Böse meiden. Das bedeutet, dass es nicht nur böse Folgen für das Kind zu vermeiden gilt, sondern auch für die Mutter des Kindes. Abtreibung bringt ernste Folgen im Leben jeder Frau mit, sei es körperlich, emotional, geistig oder psychisch. Die psychologischen Auswirkungen werden normalerweise als Post-Abortion-Syndrom zusammengefasst.

Die Mutter Kirche macht sich stark für den Schutz von Menschenleben. Dies wird aus der Tatsache, dass das Leben ein Geschenk Gottes ist, für das Menschen Sorge tragen müssen, begründet. Zweitens ist der Schutz des Lebens ein Menschenrecht, das jedem Menschen zusteht. Die Kirche vertritt die Auffassung, dass dieses Recht auch dem ungeborenen menschlichen Leben zukommt.

Obwohl die Opposition gegen Abtreibung fast die gesamte Geschichte der Kirche betrifft, findet sich eine verstärkte Thematisierung des Problems der Abtreibung seit deren wachsender Legalisierung. Kirchliche Dokumente wie *Gaudium et spes*, *Evangelium vitae* und andere machen klare Aussagen gegen die Abtreibung. Vor allem Papst Johannes Paul II stellt die Position der Kirche in den Rahmen der Verurteilung einer "Kultur des Todes" und der Förderung einer "Kultur des Lebens".

Zum menschlichen Gewissen: In Anlehnung an Karl-Heinz Peschke kann das Gewissen als "die moralische Fähigkeit, die Menschen auf subjektive Weise sagt, was gut und böse ist, und das ihnen ihre moralische Verpflichtung vermittelt"²⁴³ definiert werden.

²⁴³Ibid. Pg. 158.

Einfach gesagt ist das Gewissen ein kritisches Bewusstsein, das auf Normen und Werte aufmerksam macht, die wir erkennen und anwenden.

Die Heilige Schrift betrachtet das Gewissen als eine von Gott gegebene Fähigkeit, die es jeder Person ermöglicht, Recht von Unrecht zu unterscheiden. Man muss nicht gläubig sein, um sich durch sein Gewissen leiten lassen zu können. Auch Nicht-Gläubige haben ein Gewissen. Verschiedene Theologen haben unterschiedliche religiöse Interpretationen des menschlichen Gewissens entwickelt. Mit Bezug auf spezifische Theologen wie Augustinus, den Hl. Thomas, Hl. Bonaventura und auf Papst Benedikt XVI kann man trotz aller Unterschiede einen gemeinsamen Nenner in ihren Darlegungen finden.

Der Hl. Augustinus sah das Gewissen als die Stimme Gottes im Menschen, als von Gott gegebene Fähigkeit, die es dem Menschen ermöglicht, sich an das moralische Gesetz zu halten. Für Thomas von Aquin ist das Gewissen der Akt, in dem moralisches Wissen auf konkrete Handlungen und Verhalten angewendet werden kann. Er führte die Synderesis ein, also das Prinzip der praktischen Vernunft, welches besagt, man solle Gutes tun und Böses meiden. Nach Thomas von Aquin kann die synderesis nicht fehlgehen. Auch wenn das Gewissen einen Fehler machen kann, muss man immer in Übereinstimmung mit seinem Gewissen handeln. Indem man seinem Gewissen folgt, folgt man dem Weg zu Gott.

Der Hl. Bonaventura ging davon aus, dass Menschen durch das Gewissen entdecken, was richtig und was falsch ist. Synderesis ist für ihn der Antrieb, das zu tun, was gut ist. Für Bonaventura ist das Gewissen der Repräsentant Gottes in uns. Somit wäre es böse, gegen sein Gewissen zu handeln. Im Fall von irrendem Gewissen sollte man nicht handeln, um zu vermeiden, gegen das Gewissen und damit gegen Gottes Gesetz zu handeln. Für Bonaventura hängt das Gewissen von der Synderesis ab. Synderesis ist der zündende Funke, während das Gewissen nicht zu etwas bewegen kann. Die Synderesis kann nach Bonaventura nicht durch Sünde beschädigt werden.

Das letzte Beispiel in der Reihe ausgewählter Gewissensdarstellungen stammt von Papst Benedikt XVI. Er verglich die Standpunkte einer Moral des Gewissens und einer Moral der Autorität. Die beiden Sichtweisen widersprechen einander und sind doch in ihrem Widerstreit miteinander verknüpft. Das Gewissen ist die Erinnerung (Anamnesis), die auf Wissen beruht. Das Gewissen ist die Präsenz der Stimme der

Wahrheit im Menschen, die Forderungen stellt. Gewissen bedeutet die wahrnehmbare und beanspruchende Präsenz der Stimme der Wahrheit in der Person selbst.

Gewissen und Moral sind miteinander verflochten. Daher können Moral und das menschliche Gewissen als zwei Realitäten gesehen werden, die eng miteinander verbunden sind. Abtreibung ist eine menschliche Handlung, die absichtlich von Menschen durchgeführt wird. Dieselben Menschen sind mit einem Gewissen begabt, das dazu bestimmt ist, sie anzuleiten und ihnen zu helfen, zwischen Gut und Schlecht zu unterscheiden. Abtreibung als eine Handlung mit der Absicht, menschliches Leben zu beenden, wird in der christlichen Tradition als böse angesehen, weil Töten unschuldigen menschlichen Lebens als böse betrachtet wird und dem Prinzip des Lebens widerspricht. Wie ist es möglich, dass ein klares moralisches Urteil gegen Abtreibung aus der Entscheidung des Gewissens resultiert und es dennoch in unseren Gesellschaften eine große Zahl von Abtreibungen gibt?

Wie verhalten sich diese beiden Wirklichkeiten zueinander? Die Pro-Life-Bewegung verbreitet die Lehre, dass menschliches Leben erhalten werden muss. Auf der anderen Seite setzt sich die Pro-Choice-Bewegung für die Freiheit der Frauen in Bezug auf ihre eigenen Körper ein und unterstützt das Recht auf Abtreibung. Aus den beiden Positionen, die durch diese beiden Gruppen vertreten sind, lässt sich eine Kollision von Rechten erkennen. Freiheit ist ein Menschenrecht und sollte respektiert werden. Auf der anderen Seite besteht das Recht zu leben, das zugleich ein größeres bzw. fundamentaleres Recht darstellt. Man muss am Leben sein, um das Recht auf Freiheit genießen zu können.

Jede Frau hat das Recht, über ihren eigenen Körper zu entscheiden. Aber dieses Recht bezieht sich nur auf ihren Körper allein. Der Embryo im Mutterleib ist weder ihr eigener Körper noch eine Erweiterung ihres Körpers. Daher sollte das Recht, über den eigenen Körper zu bestimmen, nicht das Recht eines anderen Menschen beeinträchtigen.

Die Verfechter der Abtreibung bemühen sich, ihre Position ohne Berücksichtigung der Rolle des Gewissens zu vertreten. Die Möglichkeit einer Abtreibung wird in der Regel im Zusammenhang mit schwierigen Umständen, wie Vergewaltigung, Inzest, Behinderung und Gefahr für die Gesundheit und das Leben der Mutter, thematisiert. In all diesen Situationen kann man die Überzeugung gewinnen, dass eine Abtreibung

nötig sei. Allerdings ist es nie gerecht, den fundamentalen Wert des menschlichen Lebens und damit das Recht auf Schutz des unschuldigen menschlichen Lebens auch im Mutterleib zu missachten.

Im Gegensatz zur Pro-Choice-Bewegung ist die Pro-Life-Bewegung der Auffassung, dass Leben zu allen Zeiten heilig und schützenswert ist. Das Leben ist ein unveräußerliches Recht, auf das jeder Mensch Anspruch hat. Selbst im Mutterleib, hat ein Kind das Recht auf Leben. Daher ist eine direkte Abtreibung moralisch böse und für die katholische Kirche nicht akzeptabel. Aber eine indirekte Abtreibung, die auch als "therapeutische Abtreibung" bezeichnet wird, kann unter den Umständen des Grundsatzes des doppelten Effekts begründet werden.

Abtreibung stellt die Realität der menschlichen Endlichkeit dar, im Gegensatz zu Gott, der unendlich ist. Sie veranschaulicht die Tatsache, dass wir begrenzt sind, während Gott unbegrenzt ist. Die Sünde der Abtreibung ist und bleibt eine Wunde in den Augen der Kirche. Es ist der Wunsch der Kirche bis zu diesem Zeitpunkt, dass es keine Abtreibung geben soll. Dies ist jedoch praktisch unmöglich. Daher hat die Kirche versucht, einen Weg zu finden, um mit dieser Sünde umzugehen.

Die Kirche beginnt mit einer Bestätigung, dass die Abtreibung eine Bedrohung für das menschliche Leben darstellt und dass es ein Recht auf Leben gibt. Für lange Zeit versuchte die Kirche, Sanktionen gegen diejenigen zu verhängen, die eine Abtreibung begangen haben. Dies geht klar aus den Lehren der Kirchenväter und des Kirchenrechts hervor. Aber im Laufe der Zeit hat die Kirche weiterhin ihre harte Haltung gegenüber denen, die eine Abtreibung vornahmen, verändert und ist stärker für das Prinzip der Gnade und Vergebung eingetreten. Die neueste Entwicklung auf diesem Gebiet stellt der Brief vom 1. September 2015 dar, in dem Papst Franziskus allen katholischen Priestern erlaubt, die Sünde der Abtreibung zu vergeben, was gewöhnlich nur den örtlichen Bischöfen erlaubt war, und er blies dadurch neues Leben in der Kirche. Diese Aktion von Papst Franziskus, die das Jubiläumsjahr der Barmherzigkeit (2015-16) markiert, ist ein klares Indiz dafür, dass sich darin, wie Abtreibung in der Vergangenheit, wie sie jetzt und wahrscheinlich zukünftig wahrgenommen werden wird, eine Veränderung gibt.

Obwohl wir oft mit einem Sicherheitsabstand mit dem Finger auf diejenigen zeigen, die wir als Schuldige ansehen, sollten wir wissen, dass Gott nicht so wie die Menschen

urteilt. Anstatt zu verurteilen, müssen wir aufhören, Zuschauer zu sein und zu Akteuren werden. Es kann nur durch eine gemeinsame Anstrengung gelingen, dieses Laster, das das menschliche Leben bedroht, zu reduzieren.

Wir müssen über Gebete hinaus auch Rehabilitationsprogramme unterstützen, betroffene Frauen und solche Programme finanziell unterstützen, die Mütter bei ihrer Entscheidung unterstützen und ihnen helfen, unter schwierigen Umständen mit ihrer Entscheidung zu leben.

Die Geschichte hat gezeigt, dass Länder und Menschen aus der Sklaverei durch große Opfer befreit wurden. Abtreibung ist eine Form der Sklaverei. Damit die Menschheit davon befreit werden kann, müssen Menschen aufstehen und zur Abtreibung „nein“ sagen. Die Unfähigkeit, Schuld nach einer Abtreibung anzuerkennen ist eine schwelende Krankheit, eine Schlafkrankheit des menschlichen Gewissens. Abtreibung ist eine Schlafkrankheit, die das menschliche Gewissen befallen hat und droht, die Menschheit zu vernichten betroffen. Daher muss man ihr immer Aufmerksamkeit widmen.

Diese Arbeit ist daher ein Versuch, das menschliche Gewissen im Menschen angesichts des Übels der Abtreibung aufzurütteln, so dass sich Menschen ändern und um Vergebung von Gott bitten, der der Autor und der Ursprung des Lebens ist. Angesichts von Abtreibung im Schweigen zu verharren kommt einer Zustimmung zum Bösen gleich und verstößt damit gegen das Prinzip der Liebe. Wir sind aufgerufen dabei mitzuwirken, das Gewissen unserer Nachbarn aufzurütteln, damit sie in der Lage sind, die Realität der Abtreibung und ihre negativen Auswirkungen auf die Menschheit begreifen. Es ist eine moralische Verpflichtung für jeden einzelnen von uns, unseres Bruders Hüter zu sein.

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