



BIOETHICAL ANALYSIS OF ABORTION AMONG THE YOUTH IN THE CHURCH AND ITS MORAL IMPLICATIONS FOR GOSPEL MINISTERS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *Life is a gift from God to humanity, and it must be preserved. The life of human beings begins at conception and develops through different stages before birth. When life is terminated in the womb, it is called abortion. The sanctity of life is a major tenet in Christianity that influences attitudes towards abortion and the attached moral responsibility that comes to bear. Despite the prevailing belief in the sanctity of life, there are youths who are struggling with the complexities surrounding unplanned pregnancies, often influenced by cultural, societal, and family factors. Stigmatization, shame, alienation, parenting pressure, and economic pressure are consequences of an unplanned pregnancy, which may bring about abortion. This work is analytical in nature, and the author employs a qualitative and persuasive approach that involves a combination of literature review, biblical analysis, and bioethical issues to address the subject of discussion. Abortion can come through health challenges of the mother or fetus, but the abortion that is under investigation is an elective abortion, which is intentional as a result of one reason or another. This paper argues that a comprehensive bioethical analysis of abortion among the youth in the church in Nigeria is essential for understanding its complex moral problems. The gospel ministers have critical moral responsibilities of emphasizing the sanctity of life, human dignity and integrity, sexual ethics, youth moral responsibility, intentional and relational parenting, forgiveness and healing, and provision of counseling services to curtail the menace of elective abortion among the church youth.*

KEYWORDS: Abortion, Bioethical Analysis, Youth, Church, Gospel Ministers.



INTRODUCTION

Life is a gift from God to humanity, and it must be cherished and preserved. The life of human beings begins at conception and develops through different stages before birth. When life is terminated in the womb, it is called abortion. Abortion is a global social vice, and it is unfortunate that it is evident among the church youth. It is a way of destroying the divine work of God and disorganizing the plan of God for humanity. The baby being destroyed or murdered through abortion has specific assignments to carry out on earth. It has led to the death of some youths, while some are suffering from the consequences and perpetually depend on the drugs for the rest of their lives.

The sanctity of life is a major tenet in the Christian faith that influences attitudes towards abortion and the attached moral responsibility that comes to bear. Despite the prevailing belief in the sanctity of life, there are young individuals who are struggling with the complexities surrounding unplanned pregnancies, often influenced by cultural, societal, and family factors. Stigmatization, shame, alienation, parenting pressure, and economic pressure are consequences attached to an unplanned pregnancy, which may bring about abortion. This paper argues that a comprehensive bioethical analysis of abortion among the youth in the church in Nigeria is essential for understanding its complex moral problems. It also affirms that gospel ministers have a critical moral responsibility to address the menace of curtailing its occurrence in the context.

The church youth in this paper means the female and male young adults who identify with the church, not necessarily having given their lives to Jesus Christ. They are between twenty and forty-five years of age, including those who are married and those who are not. Abortion can come through health challenges of the mother or fetus, but the abortion that is under investigation is an elective abortion, which is intentional as a result of one reason or another. This work is analytical in nature and the author employs a qualitative and persuasive approach that involves a combination of literature review, biblical analysis, and bioethical issues to address the subject of discussion. The paper investigates abortion as a concept, the biblical view of prenatal life, the biological view of the fetus, factors responsible for abortion, the consequences of abortion, bioethical issues for and against abortion, and the moral implications for the gospel ministers. This paper aspires to inform gospel ministers about their moral responsibilities in addressing abortion in their church, providing biblical insights and bioethical dimensions to curtail abortion as a social vice in society.

Abortion as a Concept

Abortion is defined as the termination of pregnancy by the removal or expulsion from the uterus of a fetus or embryo before birth. Oderinde (2001: 29) defines abortion as an attempt to take life after it has begun to develop. It is the expulsion from the womb of the mother of a living fetus that cannot survive outside it. Nwankwo and Bankole (2022:) state that abortion is the expulsion of a fetus before it is visible, and this could include spontaneous abortion (miscarriage) or induced abortion, in which someone (the doctor, the woman herself, or a lay person) causes the abortion. From the above positions, the above is the termination of an unborn baby, which can occur as a result of one factor or the intentional effort of someone to terminate the pregnancy. It also involves introducing foreign objects or substances into the womb of a pregnant woman to terminate the unborn baby. Abortion is evil, and it is the termination of an



unborn baby who is an image with precious worth and values. Abortionists are murderers and enemies of God.

Categories of Abortion

Abortion can be categorized into three major groups:

- i. **Induced Abortions:** This category of abortions involves external intervention in the reproductive process to terminate a pregnancy. Induced abortions can take various forms. For instance, therapeutic abortions are conducted primarily to protect the mother's life. A common example of this is an ectopic or tubal pregnancy, where the fertilized egg implants in the fallopian tube instead of the uterus. Only two options are open to the doctor. Either he intervenes to take the baby's life in order to save the mother's life, or both baby and mother die.
- ii. **Eugenic Abortions** are a second category of induced abortions. They are conducted to terminate a fetus that is diagnosed with or at risk of certain physical and/or mental disabilities, such as Down syndrome. A common method used to identify these conditions is through a procedure known as amniocentesis.
- iii. **Elective Abortions** complete the category of induced abortions. In this situation, the mother's life is not at risk, and there are no identified concerns regarding physical or mental disabilities for the child. The decision to terminate the pregnancy stems solely from the parents' convenience, such as managing family size, alleviating physical or emotional stress on the parents, or addressing financial difficulties. Additionally, with advancements in technology making it easier to select a child's sex, families may opt for gender-specific preferences, resulting in the termination of pregnancies based on the "wrong" sex (Cameron & Sims, 2003:53-56; Feinberg, 1993:46; Ford, 2002:79). The abortion that the study is addressing is the elective abortion which has no moral obligation for its occurrence.

Techniques of Abortion

One method is dilation and curettage (D&C), which is among the two preferred techniques for terminating a pregnancy during the first trimester. In this procedure, the mother's cervix is dilated, allowing the surgeon to insert an instrument that scrapes the uterine wall, dismembering the fetus and removing the placenta from its attachment to the uterine lining. The other commonly used method during the first trimester is suction, which is often utilized alongside D&C. With both methods mentioned so far, it is possible to identify human arms, hands, and legs. Saline injection is the most widely used method for abortion in the second trimester.

The procedures of dilation and curettage (D&C) and suction are not typically performed during this stage due to the increased risk of hemorrhage. By the fourth month of pregnancy, the amniotic sac, commonly referred to as the water bag, along with the placenta, is fully developed. A long needle is carefully inserted through the mother's abdomen into the amniotic sac that encases the baby. Some of the amniotic fluid is extracted and replaced with a concentrated salt solution. The baby ingests and inhales the salt, which can be harmful. Often, this process leads to the burning off of the outer layer of skin. Over the course of about an hour,



the solution gradually affects the baby's viability. Approximately a day later, the mother goes into labor and delivers a lifeless, shriveled baby (Feinberg, 1993:51-52 and Ford, 2002:80-83).

Biblical View of Prenatal Life

The Bible provides profound insights into prenatal life. Humans are created in the image of God, and this image begins at conception. Eckman (2004:26) states that God views life in the womb as having infinite value and as being in need of protection. The challenge is that people in most areas of culture, law, politics, and even religion refuse to heed God's clear teaching on this issue. Thus, the Bible clearly establishes that God views the fetus as human. For instance, Exodus 21:22-24 says, "If men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she has a miscarriage, he shall surely be fined as the woman's husband may demand. But if there is any further injury, then you shall appoint as a penalty life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, and foot for foot." Thus, God views life in the womb as of great value. Whether by accident or by intent, to cause a woman to miscarry demands accountability on the part of the one who caused it. The Law did not treat the fetus frivolously.

Isaiah 49:1 and 5 says, "The LORD called me from the womb; from my mother's womb he has spoken of my name. The calling of God for mission works starts from the womb. Prenatal life is precious to God, and Luke 1:15 says, "He will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb." As with Isaiah, God viewed Jeremiah and John the Baptist from the womb as of infinite value. He even filled John with the Holy Spirit when he was in Elizabeth's womb. No other passage deals with the question of prenatal life so powerfully and conclusively as Psalm 139. In this wonderful psalm, David reviews four phenomenal attributes of God: His omniscience, His omnipresence, His omnipotence, and His holiness. In reviewing God's omnipotence, David reflects on God's power in creating life, which he describes as God weaving him in his mother's womb. God made his "frame," his skeleton. Then, in verse 16, he writes, "Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance...." Undoubtedly, David is referring to the embryo. Thus, the divine perspective on life is that it begins at conception. So extraordinary is God's omniscience and His omnipotence that He knew all about David even when he was a fetus. This is God's view of prenatal life. Therefore, abortion is an unacceptable practice from God's viewpoint. The Creator of heaven and earth considers the fetus to be valuable and a potential human being.

In the New Testament, Luke 1:39-42 states that when Mary visited Elizabeth, the child "leaped in her womb." The message of these passages clearly indicates that God is involved with man's history prior to his birth. According to Shield (2004:238), conception is presented as marking the beginning of Jesus' incarnate life. Nothing demonstrates the sacredness of the life of the unborn child more clearly than the fact that the Son of God humbled himself and became the offspring of the Virgin's womb. He, as a person and not just as a collection of physical cells, was present there from the moment of conception. Human life surely begins at conception.

Biological View of Fetus

This section provides a brief biological view of the fetus, which provides moral ground for its right to life and care. The biological view of the fetus involves understanding its development, characteristics, and reasons that justify it as a human being. The process of human beings begins at conception when a sperm fertilizes an egg in the womb of a woman. The formation is known as a zygote. The zygote goes through different stages in the gestation period till the delivery stage. The life in the fetus makes it a living being and it has the right to life. Once the



life is out of the fetus, it is no longer a baby but dead. The indicator of heartbeat in a fetus, which is God's breath in humans, is a strong moral ground to consider a fetus as a person who has the right to life and care.

Similarly, Cameron and Sims (2003:59) state that when human life is present in a fetus, a person is present, which provides the right to life. Since species-specific DNA strands, which identify the fertilized egg as human, are present at conception, a human person with rights is present from the moment of conception. Ford (2002:15) states that human beings begin at conception, and on account of possessing a human nature, the fetus and newborn baby are human. Thomas, Burke, and Mercer (2015:5) affirm that the "potential biological life begins at conception and at implantation at viability and at birth." Reflecting on the above position, the paper submits that the life of every man begins at conception and a fetus is a person who has moral grounds for care and life, and this position negates those who consider functional delivery of a baby as the point for a human's life.

Factors Responsible for Induced Abortion

There are many factors that are responsible for abortion among the youth, and a few of them are explained below. A desire to delay or end childbearing, concern over the interruption of work or education, issues of financial instability, immaturity, rape, sexual misconduct, ungodliness, availability of abortion service, harmful contents of mass media, wrong counseling, corrupt information on media about abortion, a baby conceived outside of wedlock, and many such factors. Davis (2004:153) asserts that Joseph Fletcher's view on abortion is an example of wrong information about abortion. Fletcher is of the opinion that an unborn child becomes a person at the moment the umbilical cord is cut. Prior to this point, the unborn child is a non-person, and abortion would be justifiable on these grounds. Thus, the position of Fletcher as cited by Davis is not biblical and cannot justify abortion.

Consequences of Induced Abortion

There is no doubt that there is a price to pay for an abortion. Although some youths seem to escape the consequences, the opposite is true for others. Female youths are the major victims and bearers of this menace. Those who impregnated them can carry a guilty conscience and are answerable to the government when it turns into a legacy issue. The men who are responsible for the pregnancy are sometimes not ready to take the responsibility of parenting. They only desired sexual pleasure, which put other people into trouble. Thus, when they are not interested in parenting, abortion is the next step for them. Shattered dreams and wasted years are other consequences of abortion among the youth. To involve oneself in immorality is to waste one's destiny. There are youths who dreamt of great academic achievements but have died in an inglorious death through abortion, and there are those who are supposed to be future leaders and their families' breadwinners who have wasted their lives and dreams because of abortion. Ekeke (2009) notes that many youths, who would have been instrumental to the development of Nigeria, have been buried due to their practice of abortion. In some hospitals in Nigeria, clinics, maternity hospitals, health centres, and patient medicine stores, doctors, nurses, midwives, and quack practitioners in medicine who are involved in abortion have turned from being physicians to murderers and executioners (163). Pregnancies that end up in abortion are upsetting and sometimes traumatic to the pregnant woman. Whenever they have flashbacks of the menace, their experience will be unpleasant.



Cameron and Sims (2003:59) aver that there are instances of common complications in abortion. The most immediate problems are infection and bleeding. Bleeding is related to the difficulty in getting the cervix to dilate in the first pregnancy of young girls. Therefore, in situations where the case for abortion seems most compelling, the potential for harm is also the highest. The long-term complications are equally problematic. If an infection is severe enough, it may result in infertility. Even a legal abortion may hinder a woman's ability to carry a child in future pregnancies. The most difficult damage to assess is the psychological damage to the mother and the father. Both parents of an aborted fetus often experience severe depression over what has been done.

It is observed that the immediate consequence of abortion is the risk of damage to a woman's reproductive organs and her future ability to have children. Other effects of abortion include denial and repression of emotions, avoidance patterns which lead to isolation, emotional numbness, violence or aggression towards themselves or others, psychometric symptoms (bodily signs, continuing stress), sleep problems (insomnia, nightmares, hearing a baby crying), back pain, abdominal cramps, skin irritations, non-hormonal PMT, sexual difficulties (cervical pain, frigidity), eating disorders (excessive weight gain or loss, anorexia, bulimia), trouble with relationships and intimacy in general, among others. The victims of this experience suffer from depression, turn to drugs or alcohol, and have recurring thoughts of suicide. The trauma of destroying an unborn baby has been destroyed (Ford, 2002:85; Ahmed, Hasnat, Khair, Sharmeen, Choudhury, and Haque, 2002:1776; Foster, 2025:4-5). Shields (2004:241-242) adds that the father of an aborted pregnancy violated the value of sanctity of life and has feelings of grief and guilt. Abortion also affects the role of doctors by turning them into executors rather than physicians. Abortion is evil and causes irreparable loss to the perpetrators, society, and cultural values.

Bioethical Issues for and Against Induced Abortion

Abortion is a bioethical issue, and the sanctity of life, the right of the fetus as fully human to life and care, and God's values for prenatal life as revealed in the Bible are the bases for moral ground against abortion in this paper. Ford (2002:63) submits that the zygote is a human individual and person, and it must be protected from harm. There are arguments for and against abortion. Ekeke (2009:155) identifies three basic positions on abortion, and they are centered on the humanness of the unborn baby. The paper adopts these schools of thought or positions that argue for and against the value or lack of value and the humanness or lack of humanness of the embryo or fetus.

The first group comprises those who see the unborn as "sub-human" such that it could be aborted at will by the mother. The second group views the unborn as "potentially human" and so favours abortion in specified instances, such as in the case of incest, rape, and when the health of the mother is threatened. The third group comprises those who see the unborn as "fully human" and so they should be preserved. Geisler (1989:136-137) and Ford (2002:63) argue that the unborn baby has a separate life from that of the mother and is fully human, possessing a distinct genetic identity similar to that of an adult. Selanno (2019:1) adds that the life of a fetus in the womb is a gift from God.

The scholars in the third category who consider the unborn as fully human and should be preserved are known as pro-life activists or authors. According to Munson (2008:3), a few members of the pro-life group are Ziad W. Munson, Doug McAdam, Freedom Summer, and



Kristin Luker, among others. Thus, in all arguments, they opposed abortion, and the moral ground for their position is the status of the unborn. The paper posits that abortion is justified in the case of higher moral value and not justified based on rape, incest, sex of the baby, financial instability, and many other reasons. For instance, in the case of rape, it is the rapist who should be punished, not the innocent child conceived as a result of the rape. Abortion is the killing of a child, which is pure murder. Since personhood begins at conception, abortion is absolutely wrong, and it is purely an act of injustice for the unborn baby. Since the unborn baby is a person, the law against murder should be strictly applied to all individuals who are involved in the murder of an unborn innocent child.

Moral Implications for Gospel Ministers in Nigeria

Abortion poses challenges to the church as the body of Christ on earth. The church is to uphold and teach biblical standards to the world on matters of abortion from the perspective of the sanctity of life. It is unfortunate that abortions are mentioned among the youth in the church. This soils the integrity of the church and the acceptability of the gospel message in the face of other faiths. In light of these challenges, ministers of the gospel who are the leaders of the church have moral responsibilities to the youth, parents, and the church of God to address the menace of abortion among the youth in the church.

Sanctity of Life among the Youth in the Church

The church is the instrument and vessel through which God's moral standard will be proclaimed and exemplified in the world. Birch and Rasmussen (1989:130) assert that the church is a community that keeps biblical moral traditions. Moral traditions provide a framework of accountability. The church is an arena of learning issues. Hence, the ministers of the gospel who are leaders of the church should rise to the task of giving keen attention to abortion, which is a moral issue, and the church of God should not fold her hands.

The Bible prohibits abortion, which is murder and destruction of life. This implies an implicit command to promote the sanctity and safeguarding of life. The sanctity of life is the supreme basis for the prohibition of murder. Vere (2005: 757-758) says that human life is a gift of God and should be handled with integrity. God's sovereignty over human life must not be usurped. Human life is sacred because it is precious to God (Psalm 116:15), and because God took human nature at the incarnation, it provides no moral ground for abortion among the youth in the church. Therefore, human life can never become disposable for reasons of utility. The ministers of the gospel are to teach the sanctity of life among the youth, and this is believed to curb them from the practice of abortion.

Human Dignity and Integrity

The ministers should teach the truth of the gospel, and the youth must be taught by the ministers to hold faithfully to it. They should be taught to appreciate self-dignity and sexuality as a gift from God that must be held sacred even before marriage and after marriage (Heb. 13:4). The ministers of the gospel should constantly preach and teach God's word against abortion as murder. Abortion is a crime, and it is capable of ruining lives. The good news to the youth is that abortion is avoidable, and this is possible through total abstinence from sexual misconduct. Indulgence in illicit sex is a risk of getting pregnant, which could lead to abortion. Therefore, the ministers should intensify their efforts in constant teaching and preaching against abortion.



Christian Sexual Ethics

Teaching of Christian sexual ethics is another aspect of the ministers' responsibility to the youth. The Bible provides explicit moral standards on matters of sexuality, which should be strictly upheld. Human sexuality is the expression of sexual interaction and related intimacy between humans. God, who created sex, has a divine purpose for it (Walters, 20025:11). For instance, Leviticus 18:1-24, Romans 1:24-27, Hebrews 13:4, I Corinthians 7:2, 6:18-20 and I Thessalonians 4:3-5 among others provide moral codes guiding human sexuality. Gospel ministers should provide guidance on sexual ethics from a biblical perspective. The paper submits that elders and parents should not feel embarrassed in answering the youth's questions on sex. The youth should receive accurate and relevant answers to their questions from credible sources. The parents and responsible adults should pay more attention to the youth than ever before.

Furthermore, Mangel (2013:587-588) states that right attitudes toward members of the opposite sex should be developed among young boys and girls. They must learn to pay due regard to the opposite sex. He added that sex orientation cannot bear the desired fruit unless it is imparted in a natural and sincere atmosphere without involving emotional reactions. Sex orientation should start as early in life. Sexual ethics should be viewed as a continuous process, from infancy to old age. This will curb illicit sex, which results in unwanted pregnancies. Appropriating sexual ethics can prevent situations leading to abortion among the youth.

Youth Moral Responsibility

Every individual has moral responsibility for their actions. Engaging in sexual immorality and taking responsibility for the consequences is inevitable for escaping further damage for personal growth in life. The youth should be encouraged to take responsibility for their immoral actions. This principle often encourages the youth to avoid situations that may lead to unwanted pregnancies. Also, the youth are to fear God in their daily endeavours and run away from sexual misconduct, which could lead to unwanted pregnancies. They should avoid appropriating incorrect information on the internet, which could waste their lives.

The consequences of abortion are devastating. The youth are to run away from abortion because it wastes destinies and attracts divine punishment. Committing an abortion is the murder of an innocent baby. The only solution for youths who are guilty of abortion is to come to Jesus Christ. Any youth who is pregnant should take moral responsibility to give birth and not consider abortion as a last resort, which is a great sin before God. The Bible says to do unto others as you would have them do unto you (Matthew 7:12 and Luke 6:31).

Intentional and Relational Parenting

When youths are involved in abortion and the consequences are devastating, the parents will suffer and bear the responsibilities. If it results in death, the parents will suffer irreparable loss. Therefore, the ministers of God are to emphasize intentional and relational parenting to every parent in the church. The combined efforts of the church and parents will curb the increasing rate of abortion in society. The parents and the church have roles to play in reducing, if not totally eradicating, the prevalence of abortion among youth in the church. Every parent should instill the fear of God in their children and run away from sin (Psalm 119:9). The paper posits that children with a God-fearing upbringing will rarely involve themselves in abortion. The minister of the gospel should use every opportunity to encourage intentional and relational



parenting because it is the responsibility of every parent to provide for the basic needs of their children, including sex education and guidance on body mechanics, and to be available to bring up their children in the way of God. The parents should take necessary steps in cases of rape to see a physician to clear the mess before developing into pregnancy. If it is allowed to grow into pregnancy and the pregnancy is terminated, murder has been committed, and there is no moral justification to murder the innocent baby.

Forgiveness and Healing

Ministers of the gospel are to preach and teach forgiveness of sins and healing to the hurting souls. The consequences of abortion are inimical to the personal growth of all individuals involved in the termination of unborn babies and necessitate an emphasis on grace, forgiveness, and healing for those who have experienced abortion. Ministers of the gospel are called to support individuals struggling with the guilt and trauma of abortion and encourage repentance that will lead to restoration.

Provision of Counseling Service

The minister of the gospel, as a caregiver, is to provide counseling services for the youth. This will guide them in decision-making. Youths who are pregnant should be counselled on what to do, and the church, as a redemptive community, should not abandon them to live their lives as they please, because they are the future leaders of the church and society.

Promoting Social Justice

Socio-economic factors contribute to abortion among the youth in the church. The youth are encouraged to engage in missions and social action to support women facing unplanned pregnancies, advocating for alternatives to abortion, such as adoption or parenting support.

CONCLUSION

Abortion is the termination of an unborn baby who is an image of God, and it is a secret menace that is detrimental to the lives of abortionists, parents, and the church of God. The paper has examined elective abortion, which has no moral ground for its acts. Elective abortion is murder that attracts divine punishments. The Bible condemns abortion, which is murder, either at the beginning of life or at a later stage. The stage of life does not negate the sanctity of life. Human life begins at conception, and God has good plans for every life from the moment of conception. Abortionists should think twice about the consequences of abortion before considering it as an option. Gospel ministers have critical moral responsibilities of emphasizing the sanctity of life, human dignity and integrity, sexual ethics, youth moral responsibility, intentional and relational parenting, forgiveness and healing, and provision of counseling services to curtail the menace of elective abortion among the church youth.



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