

## **ABORTION AND THE DIGNITY OF HUMAN LIFE: A REFLECTION ON THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT AND A CHRISTIAN POLITICAL RESPONSE TO CONTEMPORARY CULTURE OF DEATH**

**Aghamelu Fidelis Chuk, Ph.D**  
Department Of Philosophy  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka  
PHONE: 08160559569  
Email: [helen.fidelis@yahoo.com](mailto:helen.fidelis@yahoo.com)

### **Abstract**

*The problem of abortion has acquired more pervasive outlook in contemporary global political culture. It is perhaps the only single phenomenon that questions the democratic spirit of our time. As a paradox of democracy, it renders all claims to true democracy spurious. It has become at the international political front a living contradiction to the aspirations of human dignity, rights and freedom. It challenges the Christian conscience on its efforts in evolving a socio-cultural order that is responsive to the democratic tenets of human dignity and human rights. Applying the critico-historical method of inquiry, this paper traces the root of the prevailing culture of death of modernity of which abortion is a representative, it argues that egocentrism in the cultural life of contemporary society helps to evolve a political order that foster this culture of death. The work concludes that Christian conscience has a political task in the remedying of this situation.*

### **Introduction**

A discussion on abortion and contemporary culture of death puts enormous challenges on individual and political responses to our Christian witnessing. It provokes great issue of conscience within the context of cultural aberration as reflected in the pervasive problems of moral abortion. Many cultures and peoples of the world profess attitudes of respect for, and dignity of the human person. But critical examinations of the socio-political economic, cultural and scientific phenomena of the world around us provocatively testify to the glaring lack of commitment to the absolute value of human life and human person. In moments of serious decisions, options are often made at the slightest invitation against life. This has become the precarious situation which is presented by contemporary phenomenon of abortion. It has therefore, become necessary that man and society be once again alerted to the big moral responsibilities which providence attaches to the value of human life which irrevocable is an option for life. This commitment is unambiguously expressed in the fifth commandment of God as an expression of His desire to protect and advance the cause of the dignity of human life. It is, therefore, not sufficient for society to profess respect for human life but always

and in all circumstances to make an option for human life and dignity. To promote, so to say, a culture of respect for life. This is the burden of our Christian vocation. However, this culture is hard to come by in society that is greatly consumed by materialism. The materialistic centered society fails to evolve a Christian conscience of openness to life. A materialistic society is one that does not promote human care and love. It places relative value on human life. It is a society that does violence to life.

An authentic metaphysics of respect for life or culture of life has its ontological root in Christianity. This becomes the foundation for the cultivation of authentic love for human life. Human life achieves its absolute value from the background of divine love that defines its dignity.

### **Biblical Vision of Human Dignity and Life**

It is important to note that “the biblical traditions nowhere directly speak of the dignity of human beings.”<sup>1</sup> However, the biblical vision of human dignity, which is based on revelation, is the essential source for Christian teaching on human dignity. Antony Arulraj gives insight into key notions that crystalize the breath and dimensions of this notion in the scriptures. According to him, “the human person is made in the image and likeness of God, human dignity flows from one’s relationship with God and is not earned or merited, it is inherited, human dignity is grounded in human freedom, the human person is free to accept or reject the on-going communication of God, and, human dignity is realized and protected in community with others.”<sup>2</sup> Based on this insight, several verses in both Old and New testaments of the Holy Bible adduce evidence to the fact that human dignity is intrinsic to human life. The creation narrative as expressed in (Gen. 1: 26-27) makes this point explicit: “Then God said, let us make man in our image after our likeness ...”.<sup>3</sup> This verse is often made reference to by scholars as the fulcrum of the Christian belief that the dignity of the human person is inherent and inalienable and inviolable. God is the author of and the reason for human dignity. Consequently, human dignity is not something that society can bestow or take away from man. Not even the sin of Adam was capable of erasing this dignity.

This dignity bestowed on humanity by God establishes the radical equality of all humans both male, female and the unborn. The sole purpose of enacting human dignity by God is to affirm human freedom. To place man beyond every temporal powers and aspirations. “A situation of freedom affirms and actualizes human dignity while a situation of bondage is a negation of human dignity.”<sup>4</sup> The book Deuteronomy testifies to this sense of human dignity. “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the land of bondage”. (Deut. 5:6). Therefore, the culminating point

of the discourse on the dignity of human life is God's vision of liberty and freedom which characterizes, and, is the actuality of the person. God wishes by human dignity to make human life the crown of creation and glory. Human life makes human beings supreme among all creations. This dignity is assured for all stages of human life. The prophet Jeremiah acknowledged the marvelous handwork of God as follows: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were borne I consecrated you" (1:5). The prophet Isaiah in the same vein exclaimed. "The Lord called me from the womb; from the body of my mother he named me" (49:1). The Psalmist equally declared. "For thou didst form my inward parts, thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb" (139:13). So, at all stages of development, human life is sacred as having its source in God, and as such endowed with sacred dignity. It does not lose this dignity because at no point does it cease to be the work of God.

Because human dignity is best harvested in relationship with God, God wishes in creating man to make his life a vocation that is nurtured and realized in relationships. "Human dignity is inherently relational and as such it is realized in community and in communion with others".<sup>5</sup> In effect the whole human community together with their cultural heritages must exhibit sensitivity and impulse to human dignity of every person. (cf Deut 5:6-11, 5:12-15, 5: 16-20, 5: 21). Hence, God wishes that societies and cultures put in place framework of order that places respect for the dignity of persons in all its aspirations. This will be reflected in socio-political, religious, economic, legal and scientific frameworks. The implication is that society should give accent to the transcendental aspirations of man without which his dignity and freedom is meaningless. This is demanded by justice and should not be violated.

In the New Testament, the incarnation of Christ brings a deeper dimension to God's commitment to ideals of human dignity. Hence, "... the deepest mystery of human dignity is not achieved by human intellect, but is revealed by God's revelation, achieving its fulfillment in Christ's incarnation."<sup>6</sup> Thus, by assuming human form in the person of Jesus, God has brought life and light to the world and augmented human worth and human dignity. By his words, actions, attitudes and behaviours, Jesus raised human dignity to new heights. The New Testament portrays Jesus as the fullness and guarantor of life in abundance. Jesus is thus, the consummation of the dignity of human life. "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10: 10, Jn 8:12). What is implied in the saying of Jesus is that he is the way to that perfect freedom which assures humanity victory over all wickedness's in the world. It also implies an assurance of perfect condition of justice for all cultures.

In this regard, Jesus inaugurated a new socio-cultural paradigm to safeguard the equal dignity of all persons. "The beatitudes and Jesus, own manifesto indicate his own vision of a new and ideal society where everyone would be free from any kind of misery and enjoy fullness of life and fullness of dignity".<sup>6</sup> As an ardent advocate and promoter of human dignity, Jesus grants to humanity right and claim to their fatherhood by God. (Mtt 6:9). Jesus therefore, urges his disciples to become aware of their dignity as sons and daughters of the heavenly father. He consequently, affirms the foundation for human dignity as everyone's status as son or daughter of the father in heaven. Thus Jesus raises the dignity of person to a higher and transcendent plane. This dignity inaugurated by Jesus has universal character. It is not limited by any accidental considerations of age, status, wealth, tribe, color or religion. Therefore, children, infants and the unborn receive equal measure of dignity.

### **Dignity of Human Life in Patristic Tradition**

Human life is sacred because the human person is the most central and clearest reflection of God in creation. Human beings have transcendent worth and value that comes from God. This dignity is not based on any human quality, legal mandate, public position, individual merits or accomplishments. Human life is an inalienable and essential part of every human being. It is an intrinsic quality that can never be separated from other essential aspects of the human person. "Human dignity originates from God and is of God because we are made in God's own image and likeness."<sup>7</sup> Human beings are qualitatively different from any other living being in the world because they are capable of knowing and loving God, unlike any other creature. Belief in the dignity of human life is therefore, the foundation of morality. In this regard, there is a continuity of tradition in the Patristic tradition.

The notion of human dignity can be found as much in Patristic traditions as in the Bible. They applied the term human dignity as a foundational concept in the reading of biblical traditions that pertain to the compelling image of the "imago Dei".<sup>8</sup>

In the tradition of John Chrysostom, humans possess, "dignity of rational natures but this comes to them as a gift, not as something they have earned."<sup>9</sup> For him, human dignity constitutes a gracious gift from the creator-God. Therefore, the rich tradition of the "Imago Dei", the fact of humans being created in the image of God is due to God's activity rather than human ability or achievement.

In the view of St. Augustine, human dignity consists in the life of fulfillment anchored on God. "God is the source of life and happiness, seeking God is seeking happiness."<sup>10</sup> Therefore, "to live well that is to live in affirmation of one's human dignity is to love God with all one's efforts ... and to live in accordance with the eternal law and one's conscience."<sup>11</sup> Augustine's analysis brings out clearly what it means to achieve dignity in human living. The dignity of man as an image of God hence, imposes obligation on humans to reflect that dignity in all temporal affairs.

For St. Peter Chrysologus, the incarnation of Christ is the definitive element in human dignity discourse. "Then in his mercy, God assumed what he made in you, he wanted now to be truly manifest in man, just as he had wished to be revealed in man as in an image."<sup>12</sup>

### **Founding Human Rights on Human Dignity**

Human dignity as a special privilege on human person services the idea of human rights extended to all humans. Sine human dignity is the foundation of social ethics and law, as pertaining to things social and human; it is the basis of human rights. This point of view is extracted from both the biblical and patristic views on human dignity and value. In this regard, L. Claassens affirms that: "The notion of human dignity has the potential to offer a valuable contribution to the discourse about human right."<sup>13</sup> Irudayam emphasizes that, as regards the teachings of early Church fathers, the understanding they brought to bear on the issue of human dignity lays solid foundation for contemporary discourse of human rights especially in matters concerning procured abortion. As he observes, "their insistence on the inalienability of human dignity, displays an awareness of what we nowadays call natural human rights."<sup>14</sup> Their teachings highlights the fact that human beings are essentially relational, mutually connected and in communion with each other.

St. Ignatius of Antioch teaches that the fullness of human dignity is exhibited in authentic life of witness and communion with humanity and God. This implies, "need for compliance with the law of Christ, communion with the saints, compassion for the weak and right relationship with the things of the earth."<sup>15</sup>

St. Irenaeus interprets human dignity from an anthropological ethics. "Man is rational and therefore, like God, he is created with free will is master over his acts."<sup>16</sup>

Lactantius in his "*Divinae institutiones*," organizes all these positions and anchors our understanding of human right on two pillars, "faith in God and compassion with

others.”<sup>17</sup> He explains, that the purpose of faith is unity with God, and the purpose of compassion is unity with fellow men. This relationality of human persons implies rights and obligations. But it will be contradictory to think of these rights and obligations in society without reference to God. “Just as it is true that human beings in their inmost core reflect God’s image no matter whether they are Christians or religious or simply outright atheists, it is also true that they have inalienable natural rights.”<sup>18</sup>

Origen argues that human dignity implies natural rights of man arising as “the ultimate law of nature, God’s law”<sup>19</sup> which must be acknowledged by “the written code of cities.” Every law of social evolution must reflect this responsibility for man without contradicting his transcendental value.

On his own part, Gregory of Nyessa, claims that human person possesses natural right to freedom. Basil of Caesarea points out that societies should be sensitive to the rights of the underprivileged and the vulnerable as matter of necessity. John Chrysostom teaches that we should be compassionate to the needy and the dependant “not because of his virtue but because of his misfortune .... On account of their needs just because they are human beings.”<sup>20</sup>

### **Human Dignity in the Papal Teachings**

We find the same continuity of tradition in the elaborations of the Social Teachings of Catholic Pontiffs. Pope Leo XIII, in his landmark encyclical, “*Rerum Novarum*” of 1891, set the idea of human dignity as the principle that should govern all relations between the state and its citizens. It subsequently became a reference point for successive encyclicals and the precursor of catholic social teachings on human issues for contemporary society. With particular emphasis on the poor conditions of labor of his days, it adumbrated “human dignity as the norm and standard by which the political, social and economic structures are to be judged.”<sup>21</sup> His position on human dignity is consistent with the biblical and patristic positions. He affirms the essential nature of man as the ontologic foundation of his dignity. “Man alone among the animal creation is endowed with reason.”<sup>22</sup> Hence, this dignity is due to man “as a person ennobled by Christian character”,<sup>23</sup> Human dignity commands supremacy and universality in social questions according to Pope Leo XIII precisely, because, “it is the soul which is made after the image and likeness of God. It is in the soul that the sovereignty resides.”<sup>24</sup> Hence, all men are equal by virtue of the same soul, there is no difference, between rich and poor, master and servant, ruler and ruled, born and unborn. He upholds the inviolability of human dignity stating that: No man may with impunity outrage that human dignity which God Himself treats with great reverence.”<sup>25</sup>

In appreciation of Pope Leo XIII'S contribution, Pope Pius XI, points out that, "... with Leo's encyclical pointing the way and furnishing the light, a true Catholic social science has arisen..."<sup>26</sup> It has also been observed that pope Leo's encyclical generated within modern society peoples consciousness of their true dignity, and that, "a new branch of law emerged to protect vigorously the sacred rights that flow from their dignity as men and Christians."<sup>27</sup>

Pope Pius XI, himself, following the insights of Leo XIII, shed light on the negative aspects of emerging economic order of modern society which has become the foundation of the concern for human dignity. In his encyclical "Rerum Novarum", he posits that sensitivity to human dignity within the new socio-economic order demands an awareness of the common good, a sense of social justice, and the need for appropriate structure of government. Without this, he points out, both capitalism and socialism will continue to deepen their assault on human dignity. He deposes that, "human dignity is best defended only in a new structures that can lead economic life back to sound and right order ... that perfect order which the church with great force and power preaches and which human reason itself demands."<sup>28</sup>

Pope John XIII, in the encyclical "Mater et Magistra," Posits that aspirations for human dignity by contemporary society already cut up in the web of socio-political and economic alienation can best be promoted within the purview of " a civilization of love and by fostering a culture of life among people everywhere."<sup>29</sup> He affirms human dignity because it is consistent with the nature and vocation of man. Hence, the church has "always guarded not zealously and held to the highest esteem"<sup>30</sup> propositions for the dignity of man. He argues that an economic or political system is unjust if its structures compromise human dignity by undermining the evolution of culture of life even if wealth is distributed according to justice and equity.

In consideration of the problems confronting poor nations in relation to economic and political development, the pope affirms the irrationality and immorality of creating moral problems as solution to economic ones. Thus, "no statement of the problem and solution to it is acceptable which does violence to man's essential dignity."<sup>31</sup> Solutions to the problem of population growth for instance, should not violate human dignity considered as sacred. On the contrary, he asserts that the human dignity is best safeguarded only by actualizing the human potentials for "those necessary and inviolable relationships which must exist between the creature and the creator."<sup>32</sup> Hence, commitment to human dignity must respect not only the laws of the socio-

economic order, but most importantly, the laws that regard man's relationship to God. The Pope for shadows the current situation in which population control for economic purposes has entailed outright legalization of abortion in much of advanced economics. He accordingly admonishes that it is the obligation of all Christians to work to entrench the culture of love and life. This is to be achieved by preventing "temporal institutions and environment from doing violence to human dignity ... encourage whatever is conducive to honesty and virtue, and strive to eliminate every obstacle to the attainment of this aim."<sup>33</sup>

John XXIII, points out that the value of human dignity implies that every human is a person "endowed with intelligence and free will, as well as universal, inviolable and inalienable rights and obligations."<sup>34</sup> He defines true freedom, as freedom worthy of the sons of God. This sense of freedom is one that, "mostly safeguards the dignity of the human person"<sup>35</sup> against any totalitarian encroachment. The Pope enunciates the political implication of human dignity to amount to minimalist state authority. Hence, "representatives of the state have no power to bind men in conscience."<sup>36</sup> The Pope equally upholds that all humans are equal in natural dignity. He applauds the part women have begun to play in political life as "increasing awareness of their natural dignity."<sup>37</sup> However, he points out that one's awareness of her dignity enables and empowers her to become aware of her rights and duties towards others, especially, the fruit of conception.

The Vatican II document "Gaudium Spes", affirms the human responsibility to create the social order where human dignity will be best protected. It notes that certain recent ideologies advance visions of the human person that obscure his dignity.

But what is man? About himself he has expressed, and continues to express, many divergent and even contradictory opinions. In these he often exalts himself as the absolute measure of all things or debases himself to the point of despair.<sup>38</sup>

The document however, views the human person as having "an eternal seed which is an added reason for human dignity".<sup>39</sup> Human dignity warrants enjoyment of freedom. But this freedom must facilitate man's communion with God who is the foundation of his dignity. The document laments that this truth has not been fully given recognition by humanity. Regarding the issue of protection and nurturing of new life, the document is emphatic on the role of marriage and family can play in upholding human dignity. Marriage and family are ennobling institutions that have their own dignity in the



promotion of the culture of love and life. This is in their nature as “necessary for continuation of the human race, and for the personal development and eternal destiny of the individual members of the family.”<sup>40</sup>

Therefore, the duty most consonant with our times, especially for Christians, is that of working diligently for fundamental decisions to be taken in economic and political affairs... which will everywhere recognize and satisfy the rights of all to human and social culture in conformity with the dignity of human person without any discrimination.<sup>41</sup>

St. John Paul II, specifically addressing the issue of the dignity of women in relation to their vocation in marriage and family in “*Mulieris Dignitatem*”, underscores the basis of their dignity. His teaching on this issue will present great implications for our discourse on abortion related debate. “Man and woman are human beings to an equal degree and are created in God’s image, which is passed on by the man and woman, as spouses and parents, to their descendants.”<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, he points out that “motherhood implies from the beginning a special openness to the new person .... In conceiving and giving birth to a new child, the woman discovers herself through a sincere gift of self.”<sup>43</sup> A woman’s body the Pope argues, accords her special “sensitivity... characteristic of femininity”<sup>41</sup>... in conception and pregnancy. It is in this regard that the Pope expresses great sympathy for “women trapped in the poverty of single parenthood or in the psychological aftermath of abortion.”<sup>44</sup> The Pope’s idea of the “perfect woman” summarizes his position about the dignity of women in connection with procreation.

Pope Benedict XVI, in “*Caritas in Veritate*” maintains continuity with papal tradition regarding human dignity and its preservation. According to him, “the Christian vision has the particular characteristic of asserting and justifying the unconditional value of the human person and the meaning of its growth.”<sup>43</sup> Focussing attention on the economic and political plundering of human dignity as reflected in contemporary culture , he makes appeal for political responsibility towards human dignity and human rights, especially of the vulnerable.

Pope Francis in “*Evangelii Gaudium*”, points out that our knowledge and appreciation of human dignity is inseparable from our experience of divine love. He thus asserts our total commitment to this human dignity in our encounter. Hence, “no one can strip us of the dignity bestowed upon us by this boundless and unfailing love.”<sup>44</sup> He points out

that certain worrisome developments in areas of science and technology remain disruptive of the dignity of the person in contemporary society. Hence,

The joy of living frequently fades, lack of respect for others and violence are on the rise. It is a struggle to live and often, to live with precious little dignity. This epochal change has been set in motion by the enormous qualitative, quantitative, rapid and cumulative advances occurring in science and technology, and by their instant application in different areas of nature and of life. We are in an age of knowledge and information, which has led to a new and often anonymous kinds of power.<sup>45</sup>

### **Human Life and Human Nature**

We shall at this point examine the ontological and existential dimensions of human nature and human life in the context of its dignity. In the first place, since to be a person means to exist in relationship, the dignity of human life is harvested in community. Hence, we examine in the very structure of human nature, his inherent dimension for sociality and morality. This attribute due to personality pertains to humans as being composed of body and soul in the determination of his rationality in concrete situations of life. As fundamentally, constituted of body and soul in the expression of his rationality, the dignity which is attributed to the human person or human life is due to his body and soul. Thus, "any form of anthropological dualism that separates the person from his or her body or treats the body only as an instrument to be used by the person, ultimately denies a fundamental truth of human existence."<sup>46</sup> Abortionist arguments often fall victim of this anthropological dualism. So the body is something that reveals human personality and shares in the dignity of the human person. Hence, man's fundamental attribute as person in terms of relationship is as well made manifest through the body. The fundamental relationship which persons exhibit between persons, and the world is through the body. Abortion as a moral problem indicates an abrogation of this fundamental relationship, that is an expression of love of one's neighbour. It is therefore, a fundamental form of alienation.

We are not mere individuals whose treatment of others has no effects on us. At the same time we are not so absorbed in the life of the other that we have no unique selfhood. We are neither pure individuals, no pure subordinates, we are persons. As integral persons, we combine in one being our uniqueness and interpersonal and social responsibilities.<sup>47</sup>

Abortion as a moral violation of human body in its essential dimensions is as well a violation of the dignity of the human person. This is because, human life is not exclusively material but most importantly, spiritual. As Antony Chundelikkat points out,

But the human body proclaims and presents the eternal plan and mystery of God. That is to say that everything God wants to tell us on earth about who God is, the meaning of life, the reason God created us, how we human beings are to live as well as our ultimate destiny, is contained somehow in the meaning of the human body. The body, in fact, and it alone, is capable of making visible what is invisible, the spiritual and the divine. It was created to transfer into the visible reality of the world, the invisible mystery hidden in God from time immemorial, and thus to be a sign of it ... the body makes visible the nature of the person.<sup>48</sup>

Abortion as the violation of human body, is a perversion of human action, since, the nature of the person is revealed in action. Hence, it impedes the human action from achieving the moral end which is love, the definitive character of person. According to John Paul II, "Action gives one the best opportunity to appreciate the inherent essence of the person and understand one fully."<sup>49</sup> This includes one's understanding of self as a being whose action is ordained towards love be it through his body. It is therefore, through the body that persons act out the quality of life characteristic of love and intellect, the life of God. As a reflection of God, the human body reflects a bod of communion which the Trinitarian love manifests. It is therefore, through the body, that we live out this communion that is intimate to the nature of God. But it is precisely through human sexuality that this communion is achieved in the generating on a new life. John Paul II, explains this sexuality as: "This capacity of the human body to be a gift to the other, to express love and communion of persons."<sup>50</sup> Abortion is therefore, a radical violation of the love which humanity expresses through the body and its ground of obligation to a new life.

Therefore, a proper understanding of the natural law of the human nature is required for the correct judgment on the evil which abortion portends as a moral problem. We seek therefore, to understand not only the ontologic constitutions of the person, but as well its orientations and the ends proper to them. In doing so, we seek to understand abortion as cultural aberration opposed to the life of the person. We understand the natural law of human nature as constituted of reason and freedom. In understanding

human nature as such it enables us to put his social and cultural aspirations in correct moral perspectives. The moral and cultural implications of this rationality is that, "man is a being gifted with intelligence and acts with an understanding of what he is doing and with the power to determine for himself the ends which he pursues."<sup>51</sup> This end which he pursues in relation to abortion is his nature. In this regard, Maritain defines the natural law of a thing as, "the normality of its functioning the proper way in which by reason of its specific structure and specific ends, it should achieve fullness of being either in its growth or its behavior."<sup>52</sup> It has become important that the evils of abortion be reflected upon in relation to integral human fulfillment of its victims.

Concerning this issue it is important to note that, neither human freedom or fulfillment is achieved without reference to the transcendent goals of human nature. This is not achieved through reason alone, but through reason bound to its essential inclinations toward the transcendent. With this perspective, one places moral abortion in the context of person's autonomy and freedom and responsibility. We are thus, enabled to reflect on abortion within the context of person's aspirations for freedom according to the dictates of conscience. Schultz, interprets this reason to mean that "... man should now become what he must be in accordance with his own nature and the will of God."<sup>53</sup> It therefore, implies that man's freedom as such entails not unbridled license, but responsible freedom. Thus, the issue of abortion understood as moral and cultural abuse of reason and freedom will be overcome, "through a new theocentric orientation which respects the rational and spiritual dimensions of each human person"<sup>54</sup>, while, asserting at the same time that, "the proclamations of the rights of man is in agreement with God's design, and moral conscience has developed to a point where correct use of reason makes their acceptance inevitable."<sup>55</sup>

### **Freedom of Individuality and Freedom of Personality in Relation to Conscience**

Since human relationship, it presupposes a conscience. To place abortion within the human orientations, we distinguish between freedom of individuality and freedom of personality. This distinction underscores human orientations either towards materiality or spirituality. Then we evaluate these orientations within the requirements of the natural law of human nature. Human nature reveals a bi-polar being. The body and the soul. The one orients him to material aspirations, hence, towards freedom of individuality. The soul orients to spiritual aspirations and freedom of personality. As individual, the person locates his existence in the material world through his bodily organs, and aspires towards the fulfillment of his material nature. Hence, his reason and freedom tends to be expressed in this material context. In its moral and social dimension, individuality designates a situation of singularity as opposed to

communicability and universality. Extreme tendency towards individuality produces egocentrism that is antithetical to social ethos and responsible freedom. Maritain explains the point as follows: "individuality since it is that which excludes from oneself all that other men are, could be described as the narrowness of the ego, forever threatened and forever eager to grasp for itself"<sup>56</sup> Abortion mentality or culture is rooted in the egocentric cravings of the individual, and is an attitude that is opposed to openness, charity, the intellect and true freedom. It is considered as opposed to a share in humanity; hence, it is antagonistic to a new life.

Personality on the other hand, pertains to the spiritual dimensions of the person. This quality enables man to be oriented towards society and relations. It characterizes the social nature of man, and means to achieving his dignity in society. Personality, therefore, fosters the attitude of respect for other human life, the unborn inclusive in a loving and caring relations. Personality, signifies responsible freedom. Hence, according to Maritain personality signifies, "a centre inexhaustible of existence, bounty and action, capable of giving and of giving itself capable of receiving not only this or that gift, bestowed by another self who bestows himself."<sup>57</sup> Personality reflects the spiritual, intellectual and moral aspirations of man. It is the foundation of true freedom of persons, freedom to responsibility. However, it is freedom, "as a reality which subsisting spiritually, constitutes a universe unto itself, a relatively independent whole within the great whole of the universe and facing the transcendent whole which is God."<sup>58</sup>

Personality receives its law of action not only from reason, but reason as ordained towards the will of God. This analogy enables us to locate personality in "God the sovereign personality, since, the very existence of God consists in a pure and absolute super existence of intellection and love."<sup>59</sup> Personality therefore, is the high point of what it means for man to be created in the image of God. Hence, every life born of this image possesses inherent dignity and, must be preserved.

Personality, therefore, presupposes communication in the vertical and horizontal dimensions. Hence, "by the very fact that each of us is a person and expresses himself to himself, each of us requires communication with the other in the order of knowledge and love. Personality of its essence, asks for a dialogue in which souls really communicate."<sup>60</sup> New and unborn lives are not excluded from this order of communication. Because, the person has a direct relation with the absolute, only in the absolute is he able to have his full sufficiency. The value of human freedom therefore, has value only in reference to God, and values that reflect God. Therefore, a true notion

of personality has its secure foundation in religious thought. For, as has been explained, “we find that the deepest value of the persons dignity, consists in his property of resembling God... in a proper way.”<sup>61</sup> Arguably, it is Christianity that teaches that the person is the image of God. “God is spirit, and the human person proceeds from Him having as principle of life a spiritual soul capable of knowing, of loving, and of being uplifted by grace to participation in the life of God ...”.<sup>62</sup> The central focus of our argument is that the realization of the dignity of person within the context of the abortion debacle presuppose a true conscience. This is at least presupposed for society to exist in conformity with reason. This in turn implies that society’s primary tenet for freedom must respect every human being’s transcendent orientation. So man’s need for society is not primarily material but most importantly, “the needs for development of reason and virtue are more important than material needs.”<sup>63</sup> This is what any evolution of culture of life implies. Individuality driven by materialism undermines true freedom of persons in the order of knowledge and love. It disposes society to a culture of death that dispenses with dignity of persons. What individuality achieves for society is the rocking of the bond of social amity and justice.

It is the absolute sense of freedom that abortionists often invoke in relation to their abuse of human body to rest the justification of abortion. True sense of freedom that is in keeping with human dignity transcends mere freedom of individuality. This is because, “true freedom of autonomy means not merely choosing something as good for me, after a period of deliberation but comprehending the good as such and willing it immediately, as part of my nature.”<sup>64</sup> Freedom of personality is therefore, explained as the ability of a person to act spontaneously in accordance with the will of God. Hence, it requires the progress of moral conscience. Love is indispensable in the expression of authentic freedom of persons. This is because, “A subject that loves is the one capable of giving itself and receiving another self... which subsists and exercises existence for itself ... master of itself or self-possessed.”<sup>65</sup> The value and dignity of human freedom lies in the ability of man to develop a loving intersubjective relation, and with God. Love is therefore, necessary for the development of personality and true culture of life in keeping with dignity of person.

### **Egocentrism and Contemporary Culture of Death**

The phenomena of egocentrism and contemporary culture of death is traced to the humanistic and scientific culture of modernity. This is a development that radically differentiated modernity and mediaeval Christianity. Egocentrism in modern culture signifies, the turning of man into himself. Egocentrism can be understood as an intellectual phenomenon and as a cultural praxis. It engenders man’s self-image that is

at variance with his theocentric orientation as well as socio-political structures in modernity that perverts the freedom and dignity of persons. As a cultural aberration of modernity, one observes hitherto, that,

Western humanism has religious and transcendent sources without which it is incomprehensible to itself. I call transcendent all forms of thought, however diverse ... which find as principle of the world a spirit superior to man, which finds in man a spirit whose destiny goes beyond time, and which find at the centre of moral life a natural or supernatural piety.<sup>66</sup>

The above statement indicates that the original sources of western humanism was not only religious and transcendent, but that western culture, in its concern with man, was oriented towards that which transcends man. This transcendent orientation is sufficiently highlighted in the canonical and papal documents on the basis of human dignity and civilization. However, this transcendent orientation and unity brought about by a certain cultural appropriation of Christianity was shattered during the age which fostered the Renaissance and Protestant Reformation. These two diverse movements shared a common thrust of a new historical period opposed to Christianity. "Renaissance decidedly lacked a transcendent orientation in its humanism and science through a process leading to a progressive secularization or naturizing of the traditional Christian heritage."<sup>67</sup> Rationalism and empiricism became the hallmarks of Renaissance humanism and science. With rationalism, "reason was isolated from faith, and assumed the task of organizing human life, a process of emancipation from the rationalist point of view, a process of disintegration from the point of view of the organic unity of culture."<sup>68</sup> The empiricist element in this process of secularization led to the hardening of the epicurean position. It condemned human reason to materialism and leads to erection of social structures that claimed absolute sovereignty over man. Hence, subordinated man to the temporal things of society and whittled down his dignity.

Renaissance in its humanism and science, engendered the collapsing of the natural man into himself, away from his transcendent orientation by severing reason from faith. Secular humanism became the dominant ideologies of Europe and America. It fostered the political structures of liberalism and totalitarianism that reduced human life to the merely material and economic.

On its own part, Protestant Reformation avails itself as a powerful theological instrument of egocentrism. An interpretation of the reformation in this regard, is

arrived at through a critique of Martin Luther. On this basis, "what first impressed us in Luther's character is egocentrism, something much subtler, much deeper, and much serious, than egoism, a metaphysical egoism"<sup>69</sup> Therefore, if the Renaissance unbridled the human self in the order of the natural and the sensible, the Reformation unbridled the human self in the spiritual and religious order. Renaissance enthroned "natural" and "sensible" individualism, while reformation enthroned "spiritual" and "religious" individualism. This tendency is manifested in Luther's rejection of the ability of grace to transform human nature, by opening it up and transforming it. As a result he resigned man to material individuality, and not his orientation towards the transcendent. The cultural implications of Luther amounts to an inevitable separation of faith and reason, and the association of the human will with the egocentric cravings bound to man's material individuality.

The twin phenomena of Renaissance and Reformation perfected the ground for the perversion of human nature and its cultural alienation following the scientific revolution. The culture of death which attended the denigration of human dignity reached its peak in the first and Second World Wars that threatened the annihilation of the human race. Since, then, contemporary society has not relented in imposing upon itself this culture of death in various aspects of cultural endeavors.

The philosopher Rene Descartes perfected the rational form of modern individualism. Descartes philosophical revolution gave impetus to the evolution of the physical and mathematical sciences which grounded the rationalist optimism of Cartesianism. The rationalist imperialism of Descartes severed philosophy from theology, and fostered the notion of a single science. With Descartes man's reason becomes the means of conquest for individualism. The cultural implications of Cartesian rationalism is summarized in the view point of a critic as follows, "progressivism based upon an optimism concerning the physical and mathematical sciences ... rationalism with .... A sort of anthropocentric optimism of thought. Optimism, because thought is a god who unfolds himself, and because things either conform to it or do not even exist apart from it."<sup>70</sup> At the anthropological level, Descartes reduces the identity of man to pure thought, "Cogito", that is human reason cut off from what can be gleaned through the senses as well as from man's spiritual aspirations. In other words the "cogito" represents a false image of man. It undermines both the true meanings of man's corporeality and spirituality. Consequently, "the dignity of the human body, like any other physical object, can now be tempered with in the name of progress, which, in effect, is the conquest of the world of extension by the egocentric cravings of the individual."<sup>71</sup> With Descartes, human body loses its dignity and becomes a mere object to satisfy the



experimental whims and caprices of the scientist. By extension, "... mans body ceases to be regarded as human by essence. Cartesian physicians, intromechanists or introchemists, treat it as an automation or a retort and, in general way, medicine tends to forget that it is dealing with a being whose life is not only corporeal but moral and spiritual as well".<sup>72</sup> This observation is very critical to the abortion debate. This is because, the denigration of the human body extends to whatever the body yields as its fruit. In the final analysis it gives the abortionist the ground to perpetuate abortion.

The Cartesian principles is also important for the development of technique with great implication for human life in politics and economics. Generally it assumes that whatever is rationally amenable to practice is morally acceptable for man and society.

In the modern world everything which is amenable to any techniques whatsoever in human life tends to resolve itself into a closed world, separate independent. Things like politics and economics in particular will become contrivances removed from the specific regulations of human good, they will cease to be ... subordinated intrinsically and of themselves, to ethics ... will impose on man a law which is not his own.<sup>73</sup>

In moral terms it implies that the laws of the new sciences will determine the curse of human development. Hence, man himself is dominated by the very laws which enable him to control the material world. Several other modern thinkers followed the same path to anthropocentrism and egocentrism in various aspects of cultural initiatives. By pronouncing the supremacy of the material over the spiritual egocentrism perverts the moral order, and perfects the structures for contemporary culture of death.

### **Egocentrism and Dilemma of the Individual**

Our concern in the analysis of modernity is to indicate the lack of transcendent orientation. This will enable us to reflect on its implications for the dignity of human life with moral abortion in focus. While mediaeval Christianity is explained by a decidedly transcendent orientation which safeguarded the dignity and sanctity of the human person, modernity is explained by an egocentric or anthropocentric orientation which has created the dilemma of the individual and erosion of human dignity. In the analysis of the Renaissance and reformation we indicated the betrayal of the transcendent orientation. Again Descartes preoccupation with the self in the "Cogito" remains a confirmation of this betrayal in the advancement of contemporary society. This dilemma means that modern man can no longer perceive himself as the creature whose

nature is perfected by the grace of God. Hence, man can no longer hope to open himself up to truth and grace of God through philosophical reasoning. For modern science and technology this means that man hopes to perfect himself through his reason alone. Based on this analysis we are presented with the dilemma of the individual which entails alienation and violence. This dilemma constitutes the basic problem confronting contemporary culture in relation to human dignity. The choice is either to reassert the transcendent orientation that give man spiritual density and claim to his true dignity, or to remain trapped in the paradox of egocentrism, and hence perpetuate himself in a culture of death that impose upon him anguish and despair.

### **Abortion and the Dignity of Human Life.**

The preceding analysis indicates that modern philosophies of materialist egocentrism understand human life as material and mechanistic phenomenon. This view point is anchored on the scientific culture which reduces human life to the vital activities that are susceptible to scientific investigation. Human life constitutes the basis of human dignity. However, this dignity is not the absolute determination of his vital activities. It goes beyond it and points to an ontologic foundation of origin. Hence, inferring to the greatness, the quality, the nobility, and the possibility of man's beings. Human life is essential to his being and cannot be interrupted without putting in crisis or destroying his own being. The study of life has special interest for man "because on his solution depends all of his own "weltanschung", that is, his own image of the world, his own way of seeing things on the philosophical, ethical, religious, political, cultural, and educational levels."<sup>74</sup> Indeed "to conceive life in a mechanicalist way or in a vitalistic way, also means to impose individual existence according to ethical and religious cannons that are diametrically opposite."<sup>75</sup>

A summation of notable views on life is important to articulate its nature generally and determine the basis of the dignity of human life in relation to abortion. Vitalism refers to a view point that equates life with the vital principles of a thing. Hence, it will equate human life with vital activities of the body. That is "as a singular, ordinary phenomenon, irreducible to matter"<sup>76</sup> This implies that the life of a particular body is its principle differentiated from the body itself. According to Barthez, the vital principle of man is the cause which produces all the phenomena of life in human body."<sup>77</sup> By vital phenomena of life is meant the totality of activities that differentiate living body from non-living body. The vitalists support their positions from some kind of evidence bound to the nature of the activities of living bodies. For instance, "in the living organism are found phenomena of self-construction, self-conservation, self-regulation and self-repair."<sup>78</sup> Also, living organism "possesses an enormous capacity of adaptation ...

improvisation, utilization of circumstances.”<sup>79</sup>In their own view these exhibited qualities of living things are attributable to powers other than the body itself like, “the one, the Nous, the logos, God, an Angelic intelligence”.<sup>80</sup> Generally, their arguments come from the background that debunk the mechanicalist position that equates human life with the functioning of a machine.

On their own the mechanicalist view on life is called mechanicism. It arose in the 17<sup>th</sup> century with the triumph of the mathematical and physical sciences. Their position is also meant to replace the vitalist interpretation of life. They apply to biological models of classical mechanics or those of the physical sciences. Generally, “they searched to individuate in the living organisms, and in their parts, systems analogous to those of machines.”<sup>81</sup> John Borelli, a disciple of Galileo and friend of Newton observes that, “animal body is a well-contrived machine with its levers, its pumps, its bellows, ie., bones, heart, and lungs”.<sup>82</sup> The analogy, between living organisms and machines, was also proposed by Descartes and Leibniz. Today, the most popular mechanicalist theory remains that of molecular biology. This position considers life, “as a particularly complex disposition of a certain type of molecule”, the DNA (de oxyribounuclei acid). Mechanicalists debunk vitalism as “devises concealed and mysterious forces which no scientific documentation can verify. Exact knowledge is the enemy of vitalism.”<sup>83</sup> It is obvious from this criticism that mechanicalist view point favors the scientific point interpretation of life as a singular organization of matter. For them, life originates from mater through evolution, and is reducible to matter. On the other hand, though vitalism subscribes to a vital principle irreducible to matter, it does not state the basis for differentiating between different types of lives. So, while mechanicalism is guilty of materialism, vitalism tends to animism. By and large the issue of the dignity of human life remains unsettled, hence, they prove to be inadequate for moral discourse on abortion.

It remains to examine alternative view point, the philosophical understanding of life. Generally, philosophers tend to understand life as a species of movement and activities that presupposes an ultimate cause. That is, they understudy the dynamism of life generally, and in what it constitutes. Then, from these activities, they discern the quality proper to human life as pointer to its purpose and origin. From this position, it becomes easy to determine the value that accords human life special dignity of which abortion is a sacrilegious violation. According to Asimov, “life consists of the capacity to discharge a force.”<sup>84</sup> This capacity is said to be common to all classes of living things. Thomas Aquinas, explores with deeper insight into the meaning of this explanation. For him, the name life is a given to a substance to which self-movement and application of itself to

any kind of operation belong naturally.”<sup>85</sup> The movement which characterizes life as a critical examination of Aquinas shows is not just mere locomotion. This kind of movement has precise properties. Mondin explains the movement proper to life as spontaneous. This simply implies that the movement, “does not come from outside, but from within the living organism.”<sup>86</sup> However, this spontaneity is not to be understood in absolute term because, “vital actions is not an absolute start ... it depends, ... on many external factors, conditions, and causes.”<sup>87</sup> Nevertheless, these factors and external causes, would not suffice to produce movement if the being were not already alive. This means rather, that, “vital movement is immanent. In immanent action, the agent acts on itself, it is the terminus of its action.”<sup>88</sup> This immanent action is opposed to transitive action, “which takes place in a patient different from the agent. But this immanence is also not absolute. It is not absolutely explicable in terms of the active agent. It requires to be understood in terms of a third principle. That is if this is treated as a movement that is not externally, but internally, caused, it is easy to understand how this movement is not explicable if it does not recognize the existence of an intrinsic principle, an internal source which produces it. To this interior principle of vital manifestations... philosophers and common men have given the name of soul”.<sup>89</sup>

On the basis of this understanding, one can differentiate between vital activities that belongs to the soul, and the one that belongs to the organism in its parts. To this Aquinas posits that, “it is manifest that not every principle of vital action is a soul, for then the eye would be a soul, as it is a principle of vision, and the same might be applicable to the instruments of the soul, but it is the first principle of life, which we call the soul.”<sup>90</sup> Hence, “the soul, which is the first principle of life, is not a body, but the act of a body”<sup>91</sup> Since, there are profoundly different vital movement, in plants, animals and man, the soul enables us to characterize human life and its inherent dignity. Hence, Aquinas explains that, the reason, “lies in the fact that the souls are distinguished according to the different ways in which the vital operations surpass the operations of corporeal things, the bodies. There is an operation of the soul which so transcends corporeal reality that its does not have the least need of a material organ to express it. This is the operation of their rational soul.”<sup>92</sup> This is the human soul. It is spiritual, subsistence and intellective. This quality of human soul radically differentiates it from other forms of life. Hence, the sensitive soul belongs to animals, while the vegetative soul belongs to plants. In these organism, the operations of their souls do not transcend the body. Herein, lies the dignity of human life. As for its origin, it is the principle of God in many by which man is “the image of God.”

### **Abortion as the Violation of Human Dignity**

We have to determine the nature of abortion in relation to human life and the fifth commandment to determine how it constitutes their violation. "Abortion is the deliberate and direct killing, by whatever means it is carried out of a human being in the initial phase of his or her existence, extending from conception to birth"<sup>93</sup> The key issue in the definition of abortion is that it is a deliberate human act with the sole aim of achieving the termination of a new life or a new human being. This new human life in its formative stage of development is variously referred to as, "Foetus", "Embrayo", or, "Zygote". Abortion may be spontaneous this is called miscarriage, and has no moral relevance. "If a human foetus is estranged from the womb before the sixth month after its conception it is unable to survive, that is, not viable"<sup>94</sup>, this is miscarriage. On the contrary, this is different from induced abortion described as, "the ejection of human life from the uterus brought about intentionally by the patient herself, by an accomplice or physician. Here, action is placed or omitted, the primary and natural result of which is to bring about death."<sup>95</sup> Our definition of abortion here makes assumption that what is destroyed in abortion is human life. We have our reason for making this assumption. This is because its denial is critically central in the abortion debate.

A foetus exhibits every features of a living organism. "It can transform energy, grow, reproduce, and interact with its environment ... carries out all the basic functions of life, assimilation, excretion, growth."<sup>96</sup> Again, the foetus has necessary information, necessary for the complete process of its development, both in endo-uterine life before birth, and after birth. This genetic code contained in the "DNA" remains unchanged and marks the individual for a whole life. Scientific evidence shows that these tendencies exist in the foetus right from conception and gradually develops. Though the foetus depends on the mother for its nourishment, it is not mere part of the mother's body it is genetically a different human being. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith declares, that, "From the time that the ovum is fertilized, a new life is begun which is neither that of the father nor that of the mother. It is rather the life of a new human being with its growth. It would never be made human if it were not human already. To this perpetual evidence modern genetic gamete science bring valuable confirmation."<sup>97</sup> The foetus is therefore, not a potential human life but a human life with potentials. Re-in-forcing the above position, W. Beuche, authoritatively confirms that,

Each human life constituted at the time of fertilization is a human being, it exists as human. Each human being is a person, a being of personal worth whether or not he or she ever actualizes the capacities or faculties we ordinarily associate with the self-actualizing human being. If we ask: when is a human person not a

human being? The answer is never. If we ask the converse: when is a human being not a person? I think the answer is the same: never.<sup>98</sup>

Based on the above insight, the foetus as new form of human life is accorded the fundamental right to life. It is therefore, safeguarded against all forms of discriminations. These discriminations against the foetus is at least now shown to be motivations bothering on grave error. With regard to viewpoints opposed of this position, it must be clearly stated that, “those who would locate the beginning of personhood at various stages of the development of the embrayo, have all fallen into the same fundamental error”.<sup>99</sup>

What is therefore, implied as an absolute truth concerning the dignity of human life is, that, from conception, the foetus possesses all the spiritual quality that mark it out as a person with dignity. It possesses the divine vital principle of life, the soul. To this, it must emphatically be stated that,

From the moment of fertilization this new human life is endowed with meaning, a meaning instilled by the creator, meaning which is infinite, eternal, and shrouded in mystery. The embrayo will actualize that meaning over time. The scientist who chooses to end the life of an embrayo ... is taking on a grave, unjustified responsibility to his creator, and to the human being he has destroyed.<sup>100</sup>

Hence, the consequences of our position amounts to the following, that, form the moment of conception,

1. We must attribute to the human embrayo the unconditional respect due to each human being
2. We must treat the human being as a person
3. We must recognize the embrayo’s right as a person, the fore-most of which is the inviolable right of every innocent human being to life.

Abortion is therefore, unquestionably a violation of human life and dignity.

### **Abortion as a Violation of the Fifth Commandment of God: The Moral Implications**

The catechism of the Catholic Church explains the fifth commandment of God as follows, “You shall not kill. 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 judgement.”<sup>101</sup> This commandment specifically expresses God’s appreciation of the dignity of human life. It is a command made with the expectation that it be kept by humanity. It is a command that has the protection and preservation of human life in focus. Hence, its violation has attendant repercussion for man and society. It expresses God’s authority and dominion over human life. In the final analysis the violation of this commandment is a sin and rebellion against God the author of life. The catechism of the catholic church sums up the situation as follows:

Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves the creative act of God and it remains forever in a special relationship with the creator, who is the 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 directly to destroy an innocent being.<sup>102</sup>

The interpretation which favours the above statement is that abortion remains a sacrilege, a grievous moral evil. In the context of commandment of God and human nature, it is an indefensible evil. It offends the love of God for man, and destroys the natural basis of the moral responsibility which man owes to God and to himself. For this reason, Pope Paul VI affirms that, “what is sacred is put beyond the reach of man’s power, and protected by an authority superior to that of man and defended by the law of God. Human life as such is beyond the reach of man’s authority.”<sup>103</sup> Man has the obligation only to nurture and preserve life especially, a new life. The violation of this command to preserve life brings down God’s wrath and judgment, condemnation and suffering for man. God in the same manner, will demand an account for every single act of human blood spilled through abortion. Therefore, it is made clear that the prohibition of the fifth commandment covers every innocent life including the foetus.

The wide spread and prevalence of abortion and contraceptive culture in contemporary society is a complete violation of the absolute code of moral life. It also signals a negative state of moral conscience that must be urgently redeemed. Obi Oguejiofor articulates this scenario of cultural alienation within the context of a cultural loss of sense of outrage. Based on this understanding he proposes and evaluative basis for positive Christian response to the pervading culture of death.

### **The Abortion Debate and Political Perversity**

The ugly phenomenon of legalization of abortion and its wide spread support has become a concern with modernity. This has generated great moral discussion accompanied almost everywhere by serious juridical debates. It is pertinent at this juncture that this practice amounts to a novel legacy of political perversion. This is an indication of humanity's movement towards an epochal event of cultural alienation. Hitherto, mankind had been accustomed to legislations which forbid and punish a whole range of homicidal offences often, extended to abortion. Today, this system of legislative accomplishment has become anachronistic. As far as historical records attests, the contemporary madness favoring liberalization of abortion points to the horrendous land mark judgement of the supreme court of the United States of America in Roe Vs Wade 1973, as, justification. It is a disturbing situation of human irrationality in which extra human economic points of view are put forward in justifying murder.

Prior to the triumph of the great modern economic and political order, civilized societies of Europe and America had regarded abortion as great moral and legal aberration. Laws of these nations made explicit renunciation of abortion in recognition of the metaphysical and religious profoundness of the dignity and value of the person. This singular fact based on incontrovertible philosophical and religious truths sustained the authentic socio-cultural milieu that ushered in the age of democracy that propagated the ideals of human rights and dignity in contemporary history. This democratic ideal predicated human freedom and man's intellectual capacities within the frame work of a moral order and transcendence. Hence, it enabled modernity to evolve a socio-political order within the supervision of some absolute values that guaranteed the human person his profound dignity within the socio-economic, political, legal and religious realms. In essence, the coming of age of man signaled by the democratic evolution remained one in agreement with the supernatural which guaranteed man's true freedom and dignity that is consistent with reason.

This great achievement of modernity has become perverted by the negative phenomenon of egocentrism which empties contemporary society and culture of its metaphysical content, hence, opening the floodgate of cultural alienation, dehumanization and annihilation. Placed in this histo-cultural disperspective contemporary discourses on the abortion issue tends more towards a political perversion of the socio-cultural order. It becomes a deliberate design affronting the dignity of the human person, and prompting a political order which is at variance with the common good and justice.



Emmett Barcalow points out that prior to 1973, "... all the states in the United States had laws prohibiting abortion except when it was necessary to save the mother's life".<sup>104</sup> Even in the United Kingdom before now, the unborn was known to be accorded right of heritage. These seem to express the sentiments of a political culture which recognized the absolute value of human life irrespective of its formative stage. This culture which once gave assurance of the dignity and sanctity of human life as an integral component of a political culture was shattered in 1973 with a unilateral declaration by the supreme court of the United States of America which upholds that, " the right of privacy ... as embedded in the United States constitution, is broad enough to cover a woman's decision whether, or not to terminate her pregnancy."<sup>105</sup> The implications of this judicial rascality have had far reaching consequences in the form of culture of death that has engulfed contemporary American society. The judgment was a very careless one and tends to be anchored on anthropocentric assumptions which overlooked certain basic truths intrinsic to human sociality. In the first place, the judgment overlooked the fact that social life demands recognition for a hierarchy of values. Hence, it assumed that a fundamental value can be overridden by a subsidiary value. Therefore, a derivative right of privacy can override a fundamental right to life of a person. In the second place, the judgment hastily places absolute right on the woman in the abortion decision, hence, undermining all conjugal and social obligations in the matter.

Consequently, justice Blackmun became guilty of the great error of metaphysical fallacy. The judgment erroneously assumed that the fetus is not person, hence, abortion has not violated the constitutional rights of a person. Justice Blackman denies that the fetus is a person. According to him, "... the word 'person' as that word is used in the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment to the constitution, of the United States of America, does not include the unborn."<sup>106</sup> This denial hits at the foundation of the moral perversity ravaging contemporary society. On the contrary, an appropriate legal discourse on abortion must not dispense with the moral or metaphysical point of view about the fetus. From the moral point of view it is affirmed that because " human life begins at conception, the state has a compelling interest in protecting that life from and after conception."<sup>107</sup> The Supreme Court judgment therefore, separated law and morality. This scenario tends to create for contemporary society a cultural domain that is insensitive to spiritual values.

### **Conclusion: Christian Response: A Political Task**

An appropriate Christian response to the prevailing culture of death ravaging contemporary society is defined by the social nature of man. The realization of contemporary man's true sense of being and dignity demands a social order imbued

with culture of respect for freedoms and dignity of persons. Therefore, the work of culture has become a political task. The aim should be to address those cultural issues that undermine the dignity and autonomy of persons. This implies evolving a framework of order that is demanded by man's authentic development as rational being.

According to the document of the second Vatican council, Christians have a duty to foster a human and social culture that is favourable to and consonant with human dignity. Consequently, it is affirmed that,

... the duty most consonant with our times, especially for Christians, is that of working diligently for fundamental decisions to be taken in economic and political affairs, both on the national and international level which will everywhere recognize and satisfy the right of all to a human and social culture in conformity with the dignity of the human person without any discrimination.<sup>108</sup>

This in the light of the position of the council must include the dignity and responsibility to all vulnerable humans viz; the unborn, weak and the aged. The realization of this social order which reflects the temporal aspirations of Christianity places a heavy burden on the Christian conscience. The sense of social development that will indicate the triumph of Christian conscience will imply the promotion of the common good and social justice. To neglect this point by the Christian, leads to, "... the general condition oppressive of the spirit and conscience, that practical contempt for the human person and his dignity"<sup>109</sup> Therefore, the vision for a cultural milieu that is responsive to human dignity, belongs to true conquest of freedom. Christians have to struggle, "to transform civilization by making it actually Christian... of making the world a place of a truly and fully human earthly life."<sup>110</sup> In summation the task of Christian conscience in politics requires that the entire social temporal affairs be animated by the spiritual initiatives of Christianity. In this regard, every political activity becomes subject to the supreme law of the spirit which enables it to positively influence the course of things in the temporal order.

However, the greatest challenges to this Christian order as it pertains to the global issue of abortion remains the international political conspiracy aimed at using abortion as tool for the economic and moral annihilation of poor countries of the world.

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