



Ethics and Politics of Induced Abortion and the Sanctity of Human Life

Donatus Oluwa Chukwu¹, Joseph Monday Orji²&Albert O.M. Ogoko³

^{1,2,&3}Department of Philosophy, Religion and Peace Studies, Ebonyi University, Abakaliki, Nigeria.

Corresponding Author's E-mail: chukwu.oluwa@ebsu.edu.ng,

Abstract

This research work argues that induced abortion as a means of birth control is morally unacceptable. Although, the question of abortion is being considered as a means of birth control but this position not only has generated much controversy from antiquity to the postmodern era, it has also politicized many democratic societies. Proponents of induced abortion couch it in terms of gender equality and human right of women to choose or what to do in matters that their body. This too has presented us with political and ethical quandary. The problematic as conceptualized in the title is embedded in moral questions implied in these questions, among others, regarding the morality of induced abortion and the politicization of the ethical question. What makes one's choice right or wrong? Is it one's choice that makes an act right? Isn't it first, that an act is judged right according to certain ethical norms that makes the action morally justified? Thus, some ethicists and pro-abortion advocates argue first, that the fetus is mere potency in the act of becoming human, and can be terminated at no moral consequence; secondly, that a woman has the right terminate the fetus as means of birth control. The researchers adopted the qualitative research design and used the expository, critical and analytic methods in the study to bring to the fore the crux of the matter. Major ethical theories are explored, critical questions raised and moral implications of exponents' views exposed. The researchers came up with the conclusion that though human life is inviolable, even that of the unborn child. However, applying the Catholic Church's moral teaching on the principle of double effect, the work avers that there could be extenuating circumstances, when induced abortion can be indirectly willed, such as in the case of treatment of a cancerous uterus, ectopic pregnancy, etc. Contrarily, it is the position of the researchers that politicizing abortion on the ground of the wellbeing of the couple, the human right of the pregnant woman to choose, for political capitals, or for eugenics reasons is intrinsically evil and thus acceptable. Politicizing induced abortion as a means of birth control has far reaching implications on ethics and the dignity of life. The paper strongly recommends that concerted efforts be put in place for educating married couples on the ethical implications of human sexuality. In this direction those in government should synergize with the Catholic Church's magisterium on this issue and enact laws that protect the rights of the unborn child.

Keywords: Ethics; politics; abortion; life; fetus.

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Introduction

Abortion and birth control are age-old issues that have continued to generate controversies in different cultures and religious traditions. Opinions remain polarized on the politics, morality of directly willed abortion as a means of birth control in the face of extenuating circumstances on parents and grave threats to their family. A more disturbing trend is the politicization of abortion as a human right of women – freedom of choice (to terminate or keep the pregnancy) of pregnant women. At the center of this controversy which has become so politicized is the status of the embryo or fetus in the womb. Does life begin at conception? Is the fetus a human person? If the fetus is human, can it be accorded the same rights and dignity as the mother or any other human person? Some of the theories on induced abortion as a means of birth control include Margaret Louisa Higgins popularly known as Margaret Sanger’s theory of birth control that allows direct abortion as a means of birth control (Lotha, 2023). There is also an “abortion on demand theory” (Rovinsky, J. J., Sinai, J., 1984). This work challenges the assumption that even if we admit that induced abortion involves the killing of a human being and invariably robs life of its sacredness and sanctity that the right of the pregnant woman trumps that of the fetus no matter the circumstance. The work accepts the theory of *Humane Vitae*, which holds that life begins at conception and no one has the right to terminate it (Paul VI, 1968).

The work also accepts the Catholic Church’s social teaching theory of the Principle of Double Effect on abortion, which holds that induced abortion can be indirectly permitted in rare and extreme cases as a concomitant result of treating for example, a cancerous womb or ectopic pregnancy. In arriving at the above conclusion, we are conscious of the fact that the problem of induced abortion is compounded by the fact that sacred scripture does not explicitly offer any guidelines on induced abortion. However, one can argue that just as the Scripture forbids the taking of life, it nevertheless makes provisions for some extenuating circumstances in which life could be taken without undermining its sanctity and sacredness such as in a just war, self-defense (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2270).



Conceptual Clarifications

The Concept of Abortion

The controversy over abortion in one way or the other influences the way it is understood by various people. One's position on the abortion debate colours the way they define it. For some people, abortion is the termination of pregnancy which leads to the death of an unborn child in the womb. According to Helm (1987) for those who would not accord the fetus a human status, abortion is viewed as "the expulsion from the womb of an embryo or a fetus, not yet able to sustain life" (p. 1). Commenting on this Robert (1988) avers: "The moral issue of abortion revolves principally around the value and rights accorded to the fetus; whether the value of human dignity, sacredness of life and inalienable rights are possessed by the unborn" (p. 2). This position is further buttressed by the attitude of couples towards a pregnancy. If a couple wants a child, they will go to any length to preserve and care for the unborn child, but if the child is not wanted, the story is different. They would ensure that it is aborted. St. Pope John Paul II (1995) rightly observed that, "in the case of abortion there is a widespread use of ambiguous terminology, such as 'interruption of pregnancy,' which tend to hide abortion's true nature and to attenuate its seriousness in public opinion" (58).

There are basically two types of abortion: spontaneous and induced abortion. Abortion is spontaneous if a woman has a miscarriage or the fetus is expelled from the womb on its own accord or as a result of some natural forces. Here, there is no intention or desire to expel the unborn child from the womb of the mother. On the other hand, induced abortion occurs as a result of the deliberate intention to terminate the pregnancy for some reasons. Induced abortion could be further classified into indirectly willed and directly willed abortion. Directly abortion is an abortion that is directly intended if the end result is to terminate the pregnancy for economic, societal or personal reasons. It could be done in the interest of the mother or as a means of birth control, or in the case of family honour. On the other hand, indirectly willed abortion is the name given by Catholic theologians to a medical procedure, which has a beneficial medical effect and also results in an abortion as a secondary effect (Healy, 2023).

Suffice it to note that in the case of indirectly willed abortion, the expulsion of the fetus is not directly intended though foreseeable but occurs as a result of some other directly willed acts. For example, if a



pregnancy is terminated in the process of the removal of a cancerous womb, because there is no therapeutic alternative, the intention is to cure the diseased womb and not to kill the fetus, this is called indirectly willed abortion (Healy, 2023). An indirectly willed abortion is justifiable as a lesser evil when the objective to preserve the lives of the mother and the child cannot be achieved without diminishing the sacredness of life. Direct abortion, therefore, is “never the objective in these cases; the objective is to preserve both lives and the sacrifice of one of the lives is a tragedy that the whole community mourns” (Schlossberg, Achtemeier, 1995, p. 90). Although there are two types of induced abortion, the focus of this paper, is on induced abortion, which is directly willed as a means of birth control – limiting the number of children a woman/family has. It is instructive that when the unborn child is not wanted, it called a fetus and not accorded the status of person, but if it is wanted, the mother goes to any length to protect it and bring the pregnancy to term. For the purpose of clarity, the following terms fetus, embryo, *conceptus*, and unborn child are used interchangeably to denote the same reality.

Ethics of Induced Abortion

Hardon (1985) defined Ethics as: “The science of human conduct as it is known by natural reason” (p. 132). The purpose of ethics therefore, is to study this fact of human experience, enable people distinguish right from wrong and have an instinctive sense of what they should do” (Hardon, 1985). Ethics seeks to determine the rightness or wrongness of the human action. The action in question is the consideration of how right or wrong it is for one to practice induced abortion. At the heart of this contentious issue is the status accorded the newly conceived life:

There are many difficulties inherent in the ethics of induced abortion. On the one hand, some hold that life begins at conception and therefore the fetus should not be aborted as means of birth control or for whatever reason. Proponents of this view base their argument on the Genesis account of God’s creation of human beings in His image and likeness (Gen 1:26).

For them, a deliberate termination of a pregnancy is not only ethically reprehensible, but also demeans the dignity and sacredness of life. On the other hand, other argue that the fetus is only in potency of becoming human, and in so far as it is not yet human, it can be aborted at any time.



The difficulty opponents and proponents of abortion face in appealing to the Scripture is that it does not offer direct and explicit ethical justification for or against induced abortion. Yet, abortion is not ethically neutral. The problem is further compounded by the fact that in the limited places where there are mentions of penalty for anyone who causes a pregnant woman to have miscarriage, the emphasis is not on the loss of the fetus but on the death of the woman (cf. Ex 21:22). Nevertheless, one can attempt an ethical decision on the issue of induced abortion from the attitude of Scripture toward life. In as much as the Bible holds life to be sacred, there are circumstances in which the direct taking of human life is justified: self-defense; just war, carrying out God's command, etc. (Ex. 21:23-25; Lev. 24:19-20; Deut. 19:21).

It is the contention of this paper that regardless of the politics of induced abortion as a right couched in freedom of choice, human life, which begins from the moment of conception is sacred; that the sacredness and sanctity of life stem from the fact that we are created in the image and likeness of God (*Imago Dei*); that induced abortion as a means of birth control is ethically wrong; however, there could be extenuating circumstances that would justify induced abortion as a lesser evil. Hence, the church and all who are opposed to induced abortion should take cognizance of these cases and not to absolutize induced abortion as ethically reprehensible. To accomplish its goals, the paper uses qualitative method; and will first give the nuances of the meaning of and types of abortion; examine the sacredness of life and the Bible; the Bible and the *conceptus*, abortion, politics and the sacredness of life and lastly an evaluation and conclusion.

Politics of Induced Abortion

By politics we mean the desire to woo the electorates and to win their votes at all cost and by all means through partisan campaigns. In our case, 'politics of induced abortion' would refer to those overt arguments that proponents for and against canvass against each side and sell to the public to the point of confusing them about its ethics. As politicians sometimes sell their political ideologies that are "poisons coated with chocolate" so are unsuspecting public beguiled into moral positions based on spurious moral arguments. Reproductive rights and abortion are highly politicized issues both on global and national levels, and are subject to contestations arising from questions about gender and equity, human rights, morality, religion, and cultural norms. Issues related to reproduction mobilize



strong sentiments among social and political groups and carry great symbolic value for governments (Blystad, Haukanes, Tadele, Moland, Karen, 2020, p. 39). Thus, the right to abortion has been used as campaign slogan by some politicians especially in the United States and United Nations that have legalized abortion to woo voters. According to Leonhardt (2022) as more states in the United States have enacted laws restricting abortion in the past few years, support for abortion access has risen. “Employing the right to abortion as political right, Democrats often described abortion access as a matter of women’s equality’ and right” (Leonhardt, 2022).

In the maze of the politicization of abortion, some fundamental questions are often glossed over. Is the unborn fetus/child a human being? If it is not, at what stage of pregnancy can it be accorded the status of a human being? Does the right of the pregnant woman trump the right of the unborn? Does the pregnant woman have the absolute right to do whatsoever she wants with her pregnancy? These questions are more often not addressed by those pro-abortion activists because politicians want to win the minds of both the good, the bad and the ugly, and in the name of political correctness, they demean the right to life of the fetus.

As we pointed out earlier, the abortion debate is often weaved around the politics of human right, autonomy and freedom of choice. According to *Amnesty International*(2023), “Under international human rights law, everyone has a right to life, a right to health, and a right to be free from violence, discrimination, and torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.” *Amnesty International*(2023) goes further to assert that, “Human rights law clearly spells out that decisions about your body are yours alone – this is what is known as bodily autonomy.” Consequently, “forcing someone to carry an unwanted pregnancy, or forcing them to seek out an unsafe abortion, is a violation of their human rights, including the rights to privacy and bodily autonomy.” *Amnesty International* failed to address the question of the status of the unborn child. Is the unborn child human? If in the affirmative, does the unborn child not have the same right as the mother? Is the unborn child not an autonomous individual? Abortion proponents dance around these questions and continue to affirm only the right of the pregnant woman to have access to abortion procedures (*Amnesty International*, 2023).



To deliberately attempt to kill the fetus under any guise is unethical. Human life is sacred and life begins at conception. The potentiality of the fetus does not deny it the right of a growing human being. Once conception has taken place, the fetus has all the potentialities of developing into a human being. Nothing is added after conception. Metaphysically, we may add, the fetus *ab initio* received its full ontological powers to unfold in time, *sui generis*. By implication, therefore, what the person is to be in actuality, in full maturation it already received in potency. By this tradition there is no latter time when God infuses His life- giving spirit into the fetus.

The Principle of Double Effect

The Principle of Double Effect is used to determine when an action which has two effects, one good and one evil, may still be chosen without one being in violation of the natural moral law. This principle is attributed to St. Thomas Aquinas, who used it to show that killing in self-defense is justified (*Summa Theologiae* I-II q64 art. 7). With respect to abortion, the Principle of Double Effect would allow certain conditions for the toleration of the unintended evil of aborting a fetus for a proportionate reason. Catholic to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994), the four conditions that must be satisfied are:

- 1). The action must be morally good, or indifferent, as to object, motive and circumstances.
- 2). The bad effect(s) may only be tolerated, not directly willed. 3).

The good effect must be caused at least as directly as the bad. 4). The good effect(s) must be proportionate to compensate for the bad effect(s) (1754 – 1756).

In applying the principle of double effect, let us consider the case of a pregnant woman with uterine cancer to determine its permissibility or otherwise. Following the principle of double effect, Newsome (2006) avers:

The intention is to perform a good – to save the mother's life by removing her cancerous uterus. The evil effect of causing the death of the baby is not desired. It is a very sad and unfortunate result of the good act. The evil effect does not cause the good result. The intention is to remove a diseased organ that is killing the mother, not performing an abortion. The baby will die during or shortly after the operation, but the purpose of the operation is not to kill the child. Two very grave matters must be weighed against each other. Saving one person is better than allowing both to die through inaction, even though it means the death of one.p.1



The criteria used to determine that this rare choice is morally acceptable are the same criteria that tell us that abortions for “the health of the mother,” or as a human right choice, or as a means of birth control are immoral and therefore unacceptable.

Methodology

The methodology of this work is qualitative research method, which deals with the collecting and analyzing of non-numerical data, the use of library, books, Internet materials, audio files, etc. It represents opinions and feelings that cannot be represented in figures (Orji, 2022, p. 25-26). However, the various perspectives and views are carefully exposed, and critically analyzed. Critical implications on these are inferred and stated in the conclusion.

Scriptural confirmation of the Sacredness of Life

The sanctity and sacredness of human life stem from the Christian belief that God is the Creator, Redeemer, Lord and giver of life. This tradition has its authority from the Holy Bible. From the second priestly account of creation found in the book Genesis (2:7) we read: “The Lord God formed man (woman) out of the clay of the ground and blew into his (her) nostrils the breath of life, and so man (woman) became a living being” (All Biblical quotations in this paper are from The New American Bible). From this account one deduces that man or woman is in part from the clay (*adama*) and personally fashioned by God. Some scholars interpret this to mean that they originated from the earth both by the fact that they must continually ingest the minerals of the earth through its produce in order to maintain their existence and by the fact that upon death their bodies once again become part of the earth (Genesis 3:19). The second clause, “and breathed into his (her) nostrils the breath of life and he (she) became a living being (*nephešchayyah*),” reveals that their life is not only from the earth but is derived from the eternally living God. Commenting on this John Paul II (1995) avers that:

Man’s life comes from God; it is his gift, his image and imprint, a sharing in his breath of life. God therefore is the sole Lord of this life: man cannot do with it as he wills. The biblical text is concerned to emphasize how the sacredness of life has its foundation in God and in his creative activity: For God made man in his own image.³⁹

There are many texts from the Hebrew Scripture that portray human beings’ life as emanating from the breath of the spirit of God (*ruah* Yahweh). Isaiah for example, refers to God as the one “Who



created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and its offspring, who gives breath to the people on it and wind to those who walk in it” (Isa 42:5). The equation of life and breath is vividly brought out in the vision of Ezekiel and the dry bones. The dry bones were to be animated when God said “I will put my *ruah*(breath, spirit)in you that you may live” (Ezekiel 37:14). The preacher says “And the dust returns to the earth as it once was, and the life breath returns to God who gave it” (Eccles 12:7). These citations indicate that human beings derive their life and soul from God.

The fact that human life is derived from God is not sufficient for human beings to claim dignity and sacredness of life. Animals derive their life and spirit from God also. What then makes human life unique and different from other forms of life? Human life is sacred because we embody the image and likeness of God (*Imago Dei*). From the first priestly account of creation, we read: “God created man(woman) in his image; in the divine image he created him (her); male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27). Although the Bible does not explain in what ways human beings are *Imago Dei*, the Hebrew word *selem*(image)“refers to some kind of physical representation, usually designated by a molten image, painted picture, or some other form of material expression”(Bergant, 1996, p.459). The conclusion to be drawn from this is that the basic thrust of this biblical expression means that human beings are distinct from all other creatures because only they have some representation of God. And they are to rule over all creation (Gen 1:26-28). Corroborating this view, Jones opines that

Because humanity is stated expressly to have been created in the image of God (Gen.1:26), unlike any other aspect of creation, the nepheshhayyah is not merely a natural endowment but an active aspect of God's own being. To be a 'living self' or a 'living person' means that, as distinct from all other forms of organic life, human beings possesses an element of deity in their nature that enables reciprocal communication to take place between creature and Creator. p. 236

Some scholars interpret the “image of God” in terms of functionality, that is, ruling and having dominion over the earth as God rules over creation (Simkins, 2000, p. 631).Others interpret it as denoting man’s ability to communicate with and relate to a personal God(Waltke, 1976, p. 9).The *imago Dei* could also be interpreted to mean that humans are spiritual, rational, free and moral beings like God. This point is buttressed by the fact that God revealed himself to Moses not as a corporeal being but as a transcendent, spiritual, moral being by appearing as only a voice. It is in the image of this spiritual, moral being that man is created. In contrast to animals that are said to be created “after



their kind,” that is, who behave instinctively or as essentially mechanistic beings, man is created as a moral being concerned about distinguishing between right and wrong. Whereas animals behave without moral concern, man is concerned with values, meanings and morals (Waltke, 1976, p. 9).

What is obvious from these interpretations is that human beings are distinctively and uniquely different from animals because of the *Imago Dei* they embody. One could say that it is because of the *Imago Dei* that life has intrinsic worth hence one may not take another’s life. The punishment that could appease the killing of another person is death. “If anyone sheds the blood of man (woman), by man (woman) shall his (her) blood be shed; for in the image of God has man (woman) been made” (Gen 9: 6). This prohibition against killing another is also enshrined in the Decalogue: “You shall not kill” (Ex. 20:13) and in the Deuteronomic Code (Deut 5:17).

Jesus, while affirming the law against murder extends it to forbid acts of violence along with hateful and malicious intentions that demean and endanger others. “You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, ‘you shall not kill.’ But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother (her sister) will be liable to judgment, and whoever says to his brother (her sister) *Raqa* will be answerable to the Sanhedrin, and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ will be liable to fiery Ghenna” (Matt 5: 21). Demeaning words are equated with murder and their punishments are the same.

The Scripture and the Status of the Fetus (conceptus)

Having examined how the Bible deals with the issue of the sacredness and sanctity of life, the next step would be to explore the status of the fetus or the conceptus (newly conceived life) in the Bible. Does the Bible accord it the same status, dignity and sacredness as living persons who are created in the image and likeness of God? Put in another way is the fetus a human being? If the fetus is human is there any reason or circumstances that could justify its termination via induced abortion? These questions would help us in arriving at some understanding of the intricacies of the problem of induced abortion as a means of birth control.

The Bible does not offer explicit position on this important issue that is central to our question. Nevertheless, some biblical texts offer insights in this regard. We will examine a few of these texts. The first priestly account of creation maintains that God created Adam “in his own image” (Gen



1:26). At the birth of Adam's first child, he exclaimed, "I have produced a man with the help of the lord" (Gen. 4:1). In 5: 3, we read "Adam begot (*yolid*) son in his likeness, after his image; and he named him Seth." The Hebrew verb *yolid* essentially means to father a child through sexual intercourse (Waltke, 1976,p. 13).It seems clear that Adam created in the image of God, was able to transmit the same *Imago Dei* to his progeny reiterates the fact that it is really God who forms the human being from the depths of the earth (a figurative language for the womb):

You formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother's womb. I praise you, so wonderfully you made me; wonderful are your works! My very self you knew; my bones were hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, fashioned as in the depths of the earth. Your eyes foresaw my actions; in your book all are written down; my days were shaped, before one came to be(Psalms 138:13-18).

Similarly, King David in his plea to God to show mercy says, "True, I was born guilty, a sinner even as my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:7).

Davis J. (2002) in his authoritative commentary on this verse opines that "The psalmist is relating his sinfulness to the very inception of life; he traces his development beyond his birth to the genesis of his being in his mother's womb – even to the very hour of conception" (2002, p. 43). In the same vein, the Word of the Lord to the prophet Jeremiah reiterates the fact that the unborn is a human being with a mission. "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, before you were born, I dedicated you, a prophet to nations I appointed you" (Jer. 1:5).

In the New Testament, one notices a high interest in the status of infants and the unborn. The infancy narrative of the Gospel of Luke reveals the author's thought on infants and the conceptus:

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant (*brephos*) leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth filled with the Holy Spirit cried out in a loud voice, most blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy (Luke 1:41-44).

A point worth noting here is that Luke uses the Greek word *brephos* infant to designate an unborn child responding to emotions and sounds, as would an adult. Commenting on the significance of this event, John Noonan opines that:

The interest in the behaviour of this holy but not miraculous child of Elizabeth and the interest in the life in Mary's womb reflected the valuations of a community sensitive to the living character of the embryo, and the Gospel accounts must in turn have



enhanced that sensitivity. What was unspoken was in its way as important as what was said in reflecting community valuations, attitudes, and expectations (1970, p.8). From the foregoing, one could argue that though the Scripture does not make sweeping statements concerning the status of the fetus, its language indicates an understood continuity between prenatal and postnatal existence (Davis, 2002, p. 43). It is obvious also that there are some forms of relationship between God, human beings and the unborn. God already knows one's life, assigns functions and responsibility to humans even before they are conceived. God said to Jeremiah, "before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born, I set you apart and appointed you as a prophet to the nations" (Jer. 1:5). In view of this, we argue that the *conceptus* has the *Imago Dei*, from where its sacredness is derived.

Abortion and sacredness of life.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that humans (the fetus *conceptus* included) images God and bears some form of relationship with and to God, consequently procuring induced abortion would tantamount to demeaning and dis-valuing the sacredness of life. But is the sacredness of human life so sacrosanct or inviolable that it must never be terminated for whatever reason? There is no doubt that induced abortion was widely practiced in the ancient world despite the high premium placed on the sacredness and sanctity of life, yet it is curious that there is no legislation in the Scripture even in the criminal code against it. Commenting on this, Davis observes that one reason why this is the case is that: "It was so unthinkable that an Israelite woman should desire an abortion that there was no need to mention this offense in the criminal code" (2002, p. 49). This argument is not tenable because if induced abortion is such a heinous crime that would be the more reason why it would be prohibited especially as it was highly practiced in antiquity and thereafter.

The Mosaic Law that came close to condemning induced abortion is found in Exodus "When men fight and hurt a pregnant woman, so that she suffers a miscarriage but no further injury, the guilty one shall be fined as much as the woman's husband demands of him. But if injury ensues, you shall give life for life" (21:22-23). Again, this text does not help in arriving at a moral judgment about induced abortion. These verses present numerous exegetical difficulties that have resulted in widely differing interpretations. For some scholars, the "harm" (*ason*) refers to an injury done to the woman (Ricks,



1992, p. 31). Such interpretation has led some to conclude that the Bible does not regard an unborn child as human, but only as a potential human being with some values that however could not be equiparated with a living person. The woman and the fetus are perceived quite differently. While the fetus has monetary value to the husband of the woman, hence the fine, its value is not regarded as a living person.

The question of harm obviously does not refer to the fetus but to the woman. Had the law regarded the fetus as a human life, there would be no need to list all the possible injuries. The fetus would no longer be living; therefore, the man causing the miscarriage would be killed (Baughman, 1996, p. 33). The problem of interpreting Exodus 21:22-23 is further compounded by the fact that the Septuagint has a different rendition. Where the Masoretic (Hebrew) text has “when a man accidentally causes a woman to miscarriage, life is given for life only if the mother dies,” the Septuagint (Greek) reads “life is given for life if the embryo is formed.” From all indications, it is clear that the Septuagint version is a later addition by translators and redactors, which represents progressive hermeneutics that tries to synchronize the text with the new way of life of the people of God.

It would be wrong for one to conclude that because induced abortion is not explicitly condemned in the Bible therefore, one would be free to procure it and that there are no moral consequences for such acts. The disposition of the Bible towards human life as imaging God and as sacred lends credence to the unborn being accorded the status of human life. Returning to our earlier question on whether the sacredness of life entails that it must be preserved at all cost and may never be terminated for whatever reason, we would argue that the Scripture does not teach that because human life is sacred, nothing must be done to terminate it or that it must be preserved at all cost. There are many instances from the Bible where life has to be given for life. Murder is prohibited (Ex 20:13; Deut 5:17), but whoever is guilty of murder has to be punished by execution only on the strict condition of “life for life” (Jones 1987, 233). In applying the principle of *lex talionis* the sacredness of human life is not questioned or trivialized. Life remains sacred even when terminated.



Similarly, an indirectly willed abortion is justifiable as a lesser evil when the objective to preserve the lives of the mother and the child cannot be achieved without diminishing the sacredness of life. “Abortion is never the objective in these cases; the objective is to preserve both lives and the sacrifice of one of the lives is a tragedy that the whole community mourns” (Schlossberg, 1995,p. 90). Thus, the direct killing of an innocent life is a grave evil and is never allowed, but when the mother’s life is in danger, medical ethics have always recognized the principle of double effect.

Conclusion

The study set out to examine the ethics and politics of induced abortion as a means of birth control with a view to dissuading pregnant women from engaging in induced abortion. Human life from the moment of conception to death is sacred. The sacredness of human life is rooted on the fact that human beings are distinctive from other animals; made in the Image and likeness of God. Human beings embody the *Imago Dei*, which elevates them to a higher status and dignity. Both biblical and extra-biblical sources of morality attest to this reality. Consequently, all human life should be accorded due respect and dignity. It is ethically reprehensible to politicize human life at the altar of political right of the pregnant woman to choose, or to use abortion as a means of birth control.

The study contends that the unborn child is fully human in active potency and therefore, has the same right to life as the mother. The fetus should not be treated as an unjust aggressor and consequently terminated. Thus, induced abortion that is directly willed either as an end or a means, is gravely contrary to the natural moral law: You shall not kill the embryo by abortion and shall not cause the newborn to perish (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2270). Hence, induced abortion as a means of regulating births is morally wrong and reprehensible. Our research work found out that abortion as a means of birth control has been so politicized and made a campaign issue in many democratic societies. The life of the unborn child must be sacrificed at the altar of political gains. It ends up devaluing and demeaning the sacredness of life. Nevertheless, this work argues that there could be some extenuating circumstances that could warrant the choice of an indirectly willed abortion as lesser evil. In the case of a cancerous uterus, the death of the fetus is treated as lesser evil.



Our study, aligning itself to the position of St. John Paul II who while recognizing the difficult and painful decision a woman/family may have to make often not out of selfish reasons or out of convenience, to procure an abortion, maintains that such can never justify directly willed abortion as a means of birth control or for eugenic reasons (1995, 58). Our study strongly recommends that concerted efforts be put in place for educating married couples on the ethical implications of human sexuality. In this direction those in government should synergize with the Catholic Church's magisterium on this issue and enact laws that protect the rights of the unborn child.

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