

Christo-Islamic Perspectives on Abortion and the Challenges of Globalization

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Abstract

The world is witnessing a tremendous change in every sphere in every facet of its social, political, economic as well as in the religious sphere. These changes have affected the orientation of people towards certain behavioural patterns that were hitherto regarded as sacrosanct and but which has now witnessed and is still witnessing serious changes due to the effect of globalization and this has eroded religious beliefs and practices. One such is the issue of abortion which has been legalized in some nations of the world and there has generated a lot of controversies among different religious groups, individuals and Non-Governmental Organizations. The basis for this lies in the fact that human lives are regarded as sacred and should not be taken at the whims and caprices of people irrespective of the circumstance except when such causes serious danger to the life of the woman. The modern trend of committing abortion and even its legalization is regarded as preposterous and inhuman and urgent steps need to be taken to avert the danger(s) caused by this dastardly act. Also religious groups need to rise to the challenges posed by this dastardly act in order to avert imminent danger to the global community.

Keywords: abortion, Christian and Islamic, challenges of globalization

1. Introduction

It is imperative to note that modernization and globalization have impacted negatively on virtually on every sphere of human life and religion has come under serious threats as those areas which hitherto fall under the auspices of religion has now been seen from the global perspective. One of such areas which have now been seriously underpinned by globalization is abortion.

In our contemporary society, the issue of termination of, or removal of “wanted” or “unwanted” pregnancies is a phenomenon that has generated a lot of interest both within and outside the religious circle. This is due principally to the upsurge in the number of people who are engaged in this dastardly act and the attendant consequences on women in particular and the society in general. Thus, the issue of abortion has generated and still generating a lot of controversies as it provokes a lot of emotional outbursts among a wide variety of people.

In explicating the status of women in the society, it is germane to explore the challenges that women are faced with in achieving global interest and rapprochement for better living and better working relation with the opposite sex with the view to eradicating this menace. This will go a long way in enhancing their potentials and placing them in high pedestal in their activities especially when it comes to the issue of sex.

Abortion is now the order of the day if not the norm in our contemporary society and it is now assuming a wider dimension and permeating every strata of our social life. Therefore, this paper seeks to consider the menace of abortion in our society especially as it affects the women. The paper seeks to consider why people engage in this act and what is the morality behind it? How has globalization impacted on our world view with regard to the issue of abortion? What are the Christian and the Islamic perspective and recipe for its eradication in our society? These will elicit a proper understanding of the issue.

2. The Menace of Abortion

Mwaura (2004) opines that “abortion is a human tragedy that has elicited public outcry in the recent past and become a critical concern. Despite opposition to its legalization by religious organizations and pro-life groups, it has been on the increase in developing countries”. This has been the pathetic case of many African countries whose human wastages through this act is monumental.

However, two schools of thought have consistently offered divergent views on abortion. They are the “conservatives or anti-abortionists”, who condemn abortion in all its ramifications and the “liberalists or the pro-abortionists”, who on the other hand, gives credence to it. Fundamentally, the argument of the conservatives is based on the fact that “life is sacred and that the foetus is a living entity that has the right to live”. To them, life is sacrosanct and should not be taken, even at conception. On the other hand, the liberalists are of the opinion that the foetus is not yet a living being since it lacks consciousness. As such, aborting it is not a crime (Princeton, 1981:6-7). This has therefore, engendered different reactions from people as some are clamouring for its legalization, while others are calling for its prohibition due to its adverse effects on the society and especially on women.

Various definitions of abortion have been proposed. Abortion has been described as the “termination of unwanted pregnancy” or the interruption of pregnancy prior to the time the foetus can live independently (Chandrasekhar, 1974). Winnick (1969) defines it as “the delivery of a foetus before it can become viable human being”. Better still, it could be described as the removal of the “non-viable” human being from the mother’s womb by human intervention, whether by killing it before removal from the womb, or by exposing it to a certain kind of death outside the womb. By “non-viability”, we mean the child’s incapability to live independently of its mother after it has left the womb. In this regard, abortion could be described as the process through which the life of the unborn is terminated without due respect for its sanctity. We define abortion as the “purposeful termination of pregnancy with intention other than to produce a live born infant or to remove a dead foetus.” To some people, abortion is a health service for women while to others; abortion means a funeral service for the preborn baby.

Besides, abortion to some people is tantamount to murder, that is, it is the killing of an innocent baby in the womb of the mother. In short, it is the destruction of a living human being. Citing Al-Ghazali, Balogun (1992) is noted to have remarked that “abortion is a crime against an existing being”. Thus, it is an act of injustice on the lives of defenseless human creatures. This is based on the fact that life is sacred at any point in time and to take it is against the will of God. Thus, both Christianity and Islam unequivocally condemn the taking of life in whatever form and more importantly, that of the unborn. The Qur’an emphatically says:

Slay not your children, fearing a fall to poverty...

Lo! The slaying of them is a great sin. (Qur’an, 17: 3)

The Qur’an also says in Qur’an 5: 32 that “whosoever killed a human being... it shall be as if he has killed all mankind”. The Bible is emphatic on this issue. It says “You shall not kill” (Exodus, 20: 13). This shows that both Christianity and Islam regard abortion as an abominable and unlawful act particularly that of the unborn. It is on this note that both religions condemn abortion in its entirety as inhuman and adherents are enjoined not to engage in it due to its adverse consequences on women.

However, two types of abortion could be identified. The first type which is spontaneous or accidental occurs naturally as a result of certain pathological conditions often beyond the control of the pregnant woman and the physician (Chandrasekhar, 1974). In other words, the expulsion of the foetus occurs through natural causes independent of the woman. It occurs involuntarily and unintentionally. This presupposes that this kind of abortion is not willfully induced. It is as a result of certain conditions which are often beyond the control of the woman such as in the case of extreme sickness. The second type which is self induced involves the deliberate interruption of pregnancy by artificially inducing the loss of the foetus (Funk, 1959). It is a deliberately induced expulsion of a living foetus before it becomes viable. It is a voluntary and intentional act and as a result of this, intentional or induced abortion poses a very serious moral problem because human life is involved.

Reason(s) for Abortion: It is imperative to state here that different reasons could be adduced for embarking on abortion. Some of the reasons could be tenable while other may not be tenable. Some of these reasons include:

1. Some types of abortion are procured for health reasons especially in situation where the pregnancy threatens the life of the mother. This could be due to ill health or to the mental and psychological condition of the woman which threatens her life. Such conditions could be due to ectopic pregnancy. This type of abortion is permissible in Islam especially when it is aimed at saving the life of the woman (Walbert & Butler, 1973).
2. In certain situations, there have been reported cases of rape, incest pregnancy in under aged or unmarried women e.t.c. These may occur as a result of the vagaries of life which women are exposed to. In this situation and especially in the case of rape, bringing the foetus to life could lead to some other social and moral problems particularly that of societal acceptability of a child whose paternal bloodline

is in doubt or not known at all. This puts a child born under this circumstance to undergo societal rejection and stigmatization. This will impoverish the child of certain basic human dignity and deprivation. Therefore, rather than have such a child who will be tagged a “bastard”, it will be better for the pregnancy to be aborted. In the case of the under aged or unmarried, women, it could lead to “the loss of educational opportunities, diminished chances for successful marriage, ostracism by family and friends and welfare dependency” (Balogun, 1992). Therefore, to forestall these embarrassing situations, abortion could be resorted to.

3. There are also cases where an addition to the family could lead to further impoverishment of the family due to poverty. In a situation where the woman is poor or she has been divorced and saddled with the responsibility of caring for many mouths, an addition into the family may be a problem. Therefore, abortion may be procured in this situation. This is however, condemned by Islam. The Qur’an states in this regard “... and that you slay not your children because of penury. We provide for you and for them...” (Qur’an, 6: 152). Whatever the reason(s) are, abortion is an odious and murderous act. Thus, there is the need for an urgent solution to this social malaise.

3. Abortion: The Moral Question

Abortion is a moral decision for an individual woman, given her specific situation. This might include consideration of her religious beliefs, age, marital status, health, economic status, available support systems, genetic makeup, etc. According to Mwaura (2004), “abortion is a complex issue that has medical, socio-economic, psychological, moral and even religious implications and dimensions”. This means that it is an issue that bothers on moral dimensions due to its religious underpinnings. In Nigeria as well as in other African nations, abortion constitutes a moral issue as it affects every facet of life. In both Christianity and Islam, abortion is construed as a negation of the life force. In as much as both religions underscore the vital importance of human life and also place premium on human values, the relevance of human interdependence cannot be underestimated. Consequently, the issue of abortion falls within the ambit of morality because human life is being undermined. In this regard, McCommick (1985) opines that:

Abortion is a matter that is morally problematic, pastorally delicate, legislatively thorny, constitutionally insecure, ecumenically decisive, medically norm less, humanly anguishing, racially provocative, journalistically abused, personally biased and widely performed.

This shows that abortion is a very disturbing issue as far as the moral implication is concerned. By virtue of this, it presents itself in manifold ways which ultimately impinges on the socio-religious element of man.

In consequence of the nature of abortion, the question can then be asked, is abortion moral? Is it justifiable? No doubt, abortion as said earlier raises a moral question. The moral dimension could be gleaned from two major perspectives or schools of thought. These two schools are diametrically opposed to each other in their justification of the abortion debate. These schools of thought are represented by the anti-abortionists or pro-lifers and the pro-abortionists or pro-choicers. The anti-abortionists or the conservatives as they are called condemned abortion in its entirety and regard it as immoral, no matter the stage of foetal development and irrespective of alleged justifying reasons (Princeton, 1981). The argument of this school of thought is based on the sanctity of life right from conception. It is believed that life is a gift from God and it should be nourished and sustained by man rather than terminating it. Life is an intrinsic element in the God-ordained world and man is only at the behest of God. This makes life inviolable since it is God-ordained. Therefore, the anti-abortionists place emphasis on the divine aspect of life which is predicated on its sanctity. In view of this, Njai (1982) opines that “human life is of infinite value to God and therefore, human beings are bound to treat it with respect and reverence everywhere and at all times”. In addition to this, in emphasizing the vital importance of human life, he further asserts that:

The sanctity of life does not consist in goodness, age, social importance, weakness or strength, poverty or wealth, health, ignorance, intelligent, stage of development of the individual or an asset to others. It is not something that is acquired or earned. It is something innate in man but one that has been given by God in His creation (Njai, 1982).

The implication of this is that life is God-given and it is tantamount to murder when it is taken by man even when the baby is just forming in the womb. It is on this basis that abortion is perceived as a criminal offence and condemnable. Most pro-lifers base their stance on the belief that human life, in the form of an ovum and spermatozoon, becomes a human person at the time of conception. Thus, a human pre-embryo, embryo and

foetus are all persons entitled to fundamental human rights, including the most basic right: to be allowed to live. The lives of two humans are being considered here: that of the woman *and* her embryo or foetus. To many, if not most, pro-lifers, human personhood begins at the instant of conception. Thus, they view each abortion as a form of murder. They often support this argument by noting that, at conception, a human life with its own unique DNA comes into being. In this respect, many pro-lifers generally view an abortion clinic as a place where babies are murdered. Some pro-life groups and individuals have considered abortion clinics the ethical equivalent of a Nazi death camp.

On the contrary, most pro-choicers or the pro-abortionists base their stance on the belief that human life becomes a human person at some time after conception -- perhaps when the embryo's heart starts beating, or when the foetus first looks human, or it becomes sentient, or it has half emerged from its mother's body, or is born, or is severed from its mother and is functioning independently. They feel that a woman should not be forced to go through a pregnancy and childbirth if she does not choose to do so. She should be allowed to have an abortion if it is done before her embryo or foetus attains personhood. To many pro-choicers, human personhood begins later in gestation or at birth. They note that a pre-embryo -- a just-fertilized ovum -- consists of a simple grouping of undifferentiated cells. The pre-embryo has no human shape, skin, brain, or other organs; it cannot sense the environment; it has no brain; it is not sentient; it is not conscious. Pro-choicers believe that each woman should be relatively free to follow their own ethical beliefs concerning the termination or continuation of a pregnancy. The implication of this is that for this category of people, it is permissible to terminate a pregnancy at the slightest opportunity without any recourse to moral since it is believed that the foetus is not yet a human person. Hence, the pro-choicers are of the view that abortion is morally justified irrespective of the stage of foetal development (Princeton, 1981).

There is no gainsaying the fact that abortion lacks any moral justification as both Christianity and Islam frowns at any move by man to thwart his plans for humanity. In as much as abortion involves the termination of life or a "potential Life", it contradicts God's injunction in Genesis 1:28 to "be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it and have dominion..." Therefore, it is immoral for both the woman and the physician who wants to perform it.

It is however, disheartening to note that abortion has become a social menace in our contemporary societies especially among our teenage girls and women. This is an indication that indiscriminate and illicit sexual gratification is on the increase and this has resulted in cases of unwanted pregnancies which often leads to abortion. Thus, in order to prevent illegitimate and unwanted children, abortion has become a veritable tool.

Suffice to say that the issue of sex is of utmost concern in both Christianity and Islam as they regulate the sexual impulses in man and woman. Hence, both religions legislate that a woman be properly sought out in marriage before any sexual conjugation. However, the reverse is the case in modern societies due to globalization, modernism and feminism.

4. Effects of Abortion

The effects of Abortion not only on the women but on the society at large are phenomenal. The procurement of abortion has certain negative impacts on the woman who willfully performs it depicting such as loose person who cannot control herself as far as sex is concerned. Therefore, it makes a woman to loose credibility and dignity in the society. The first and perhaps the most fundamental effect it has on women is the health hazard which they go they are prone to and this can lead to certain physical and psychological problems in women. Walbert (1973:3) opines in this regard that "the mental health of a pregnant woman is put into consideration for access to an abortion could lead to irreparable psychological harm to the woman".

This shows that the woman who opts for abortion run the risk of undergoing changes which might lead to an upset in her body chemistry. In addition to this, the procurement of an abortion can also endanger the life of the pregnant woman and she runs the risk of not being able to get pregnant again since her womb could be damaged in the process (Glover, 1977).

As earlier stated, the credibility and dignity of the woman involved in abortion is questionable. This is because the moral standard required of her is lacking. This shows that the woman is involved in illicit sexual affairs and this is an indication of moral irresponsibility and degeneracy on the part of the woman.

Socially, abortion affects the maternal affection a mother should have for her child. In addition to this, the society loses so much in terms of human wastages to abortion. Many women get killed in the process of procuring an abortion from a quack doctor or from people who are inexperienced. Many innocent souls especially, those of the infants that could have grown into responsible adults in the society, have been

prematurely terminated through abortion.

5. Christo-Islamic Perspectives

At this juncture, it will be apposite to examine the Christian and the Islamic viewpoints on the subject of abortion. It will suffice to state that both Christianity and Islam lay the foundation for the ethical, social, economic, mental and spiritual developments of man. In this regard, both religions aim at integrating men and women and uniting them in a relationship of love which is based on mutual dependency and indispensability. This is achieved through legislation and moral precepts which are aimed at regulating the conducts of the people and guard against acts of indecencies. It is important to note the both religions have a strong moral code which adherents are enjoined hold tenaciously to.

More importantly abortion is contrary to the will and purpose of God who enjoins the growth and development of the human race through procreation. This presupposes that abortion is a flagrant disobedience to the will of God. Genesis 1:28 emphasizes this fact when it says “Be fruitful, multiply and replenish the earth...” The Qur’an says “Allah has given you wives of your own kind, and given you from your wives, sons and grandsons, and has made provisions of good things for you” (Qur’an, 16: 72). Therefore, abortion contradicts God’s plan for humanity.

Generally, both Christianity and Islam condemn abortion either as a means of birth control or population control. This is why both religions perceive abortion as crime against humanity. The consensus of Islamic jurists jettisoned abortion and regard it as a crime. Thus citing Imam Al-Ghazali, Balogun (1992) opines that:

Abortion is a crime against an existing being. Now existence has stages. The first stage of existence is the settling of the semen in the womb and its mixing with the secretion of the woman. It is then ready to receive life. Disturbing it is a crime. When it develops further and becomes a lump, abortion becomes a greater crime. When completed, the crime becomes grievous. The crime reaches a maximum seriousness when it is committed after it (the foetus) is separated (from the mother) alive.

In similar perspective, Pope John Paul II surmises that:

All human beings (those in the womb, too)...are called to be brother and sister by Christ by reason of the incarnation and the universal redemption.

Pope Pius XII (1951) also lends credence to this fact when he asserts inter alia that:

Innocent human life, in whatever condition it may be is from the first instant of its existence to be preserved from any direct attack, equally against the causing of abortion and the direct killing of the child before, during and after birth.

The implication of this is that both religions condemn any act that could be injurious to the child in the womb and see it as an act against the command of God. Both religions are life affirming rather than the destruction of life. God is the giver of life and to take it by any other means is contrary to the behest of the Almighty. It is in this regard that Christianity and Islam view abortion as murder.

In addition to this, Christianity and Islam provide guidance in all spheres of human endeavour including the sexual relationship between man and woman. Thus, in providing a panacea for illicit sexual affairs which lead to abortion, both religions legislate that man should follow the path of dignity in satisfying his sexual desire. All kinds of indecent acts is forbidden. The Qur’an exhort in this regard thus:

And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and be modest, and do draw their veils over their bosoms and not to reveal their adornment...

And let them not stamp their feet so as to reveal what they hide of their adornment (Qur’an, 24: 31).

The same is also said in the 1 Peter 3:3 that “Do not let your adornment be merely outward – arranging of hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparels – rather let it be the hidden person of the heart...” By implication therefore, both religions lay emphasis on human development.

6. Globalization and Its Effects

It will suffice to say that Christianity and Islam are now being sandwiched within the framework of a globalized world. This implies that the effects of globalization is taking its toll on both religions as the domain of these

religions are being influenced by the influx of global trends which affect the moral hold on mankind. The onslaught of globalization is enormous with particular reference to the eroding of our cultural and moral lives. Consequently, man is now confronted with the aberrations and challenges of modernity which impinges on his/her status as a member of the community.

Aina (1997) surmises that “globalization ceaselessly confronts us today...” This shows the preponderance of globalization and its effect on every stratum of our lives. Ake (1995) posits that:

Globalization is the growing structural differentiation and functional integration in the world economy. It is about the growing independence across the globe; it is about nation-state coming under pressure from the surge of transnational phenomenon, about the emergence of a global mass culture...

This presupposes that globalization does not only affect the economy, but culture as well.

In another perspective, globalization is perceived as “the inevitable march of Western imperialism for global hegemony, politically, economically and socio-culturally” (Fadahunsi, 2000). Ajayi (2003) expresses the opinion that:

Globalization is the growing economic interdependence of countries worldwide through the increasing volume and variety of cross-border transactions in goods and services and of international capital flows and also through the more rapid and widespread diffusion and technology.

This definition shares similar orientation with that expressed by Ake who also sees globalization from the perspective of global economy. More than this, globalization assumes a wider application than being limited to the economy. It covers a whole lot of other facet of life which have now been influenced negatively. This is because social, moral and spiritual values are mostly hit by the influence of globalization which has attenuated these values which served as the bedrock of the society.

According to Akintola (2004) globalization engenders economic corruption, indecent and sexy dresses by women, prostitution, adultery and fornication, secularism, homosexualism and other vices. The implication of this is that globalization has brought about materialistic tendencies and diminished spirituality among the people. It promotes worldliness at the expense of spirituality.

The global world in which we live in has brought about taking things on their face value thereby diminishing spirituality and eroding morality. It is this moral erosion that has led to the high incidence of abortion cases among women who now claim that they are free to do anything with their bodies. It is this that has led to feminism as an ideological position which supports women emancipation and liberation. This has now been abused to mean that women have the right to take charge of their bodies by engaging in immoral acts such as abortion. Globalization has dealt a terrible blow with our moral values. This is because there has been an invasion of our moral lives which has now been substituted with individualistic tendencies. It in this regard that Akintola (2004:47) opines that:

Globalization has the tendency to sacrifice divinity on the altar of Western imperialism, while moral is exchanged for licentiousness. Globalization poses a serious threat to spiritual values as mankind goes in the euphoria of technological breakthroughs and communication revolution.

This shows that the essential gamut of social hegemony (morality) has been washed away by the influence of globalization and this has led to increase in all manners of anti-social behaviours which have now bedeviled our societies. This shows that religion has lost its fervor as most of its tenets are now brandished as superstitious and anachronistic. In fact, in most cultures in the world today, religion is playing the role of the second fiddle. This is particularly so in Europe and America and this is finding inroads into Africa. The European culture is sweeping across many African countries and blowing away the essential fabric of our existence due to the effects of globalization. The global culture of nudity which pervades Europe has found landing site in Africa, particularly among our women who now go about in skimpy clothes that exposes the vital parts of their bodies. This has engendered a lot of promiscuous intermingling which brings about high rate in the sexual liaisons among people. The end result of this kind of attitude is the termination of the unwanted pregnancy that may occur in the process. People are now enmeshed in *laissez faire* attitude as far as spirituality is concerned. This has impacted negatively on our social lives and curtailed the advancement of national development.

7. Conclusion

It will be apposite to state categorically that in this global village that will have found ourselves, the onus lies on Christianity and Islam to affirm the God-given mandate among their adherents with a view to re-envisioning and re-assuring the people that God is the giver of life and that it should not be taken indiscriminately particularly through abortion. The pro-choicer's view that a woman has the right to determine whether to keep a pregnancy or not should be discouraged. Both religions must emphasize and articulate their moral teachings as exemplified in their Holy writs as the basis for human life and conduct. Both religions should de-emphasize materialism which is the bait of globalization and put premium on the essential aspect of faith. It will therefore, be important to heed the advice of Akintola (2004) who remarks *inter alia* that:

But since...the ultimate goal of globalization is the extirpation of religion and the emergence of a God-less society, the world's religionists particularly, Muslims and Christians need to close ranks with a view to stemming the tide of a God-less globalization.

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