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THE NIGERIAN TRADITIONAL CONCEPT OF THE SANCTITY
OF HUMAN LIFE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS
FOR BIOETHICAL DECISION MAKING

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ABSTRACT

One of the issues the society has to wrestle with today is the question of abortion-on-demand in relation to the sanctity of human life. Despite different measures applied by individuals and groups to overcome the practice of abortion, it continues to escalate against the societal moral value systems. While some approve abortion as a way out of an unwanted pregnancy, others see it as an alternative to contraception. Not only that, others welcome abortion as a method of birth and population control or rather accept it on the ground that the unborn is not an actual human being until birth. As a result, confusion here and there abound in the mind of many in the society, as to how to protect the life of the unborn from being aborted at will or for convenience sake. The confusion over the practice of abortion is not a surprise. Even Hippocrates, the father of medicine was confused at one time. He is said to have supported abortion at one time and at another time to be against abortion.

Therefore this study, "The Nigerian Traditional Concept of the Sanctity of Human Life and Its Implication for Bioethical Decision Making", is an attempt to examine and harmonize the traditional concept of the sanctity of life to the issue of abortion and the response to the question of abortion traditionally. When does human life begin? Is the unborn a human being? What are the implications of the traditional concept of the sanctity of human life for abortion? Do Nigerians respect and value human life? What are the basic foundation to be considered for effective decision making bioethically? What can Christians do to uphold the sanctity of human life?

The above questions is the task of this study. And the argument in the study is this, if the Gospel must be meaningful to a given people

in a given culture, then, it must be interpreted in a way that it will be relevant to the people within that given traditional set up. With this, the first chapter calls attention to the problem of abortion in the society by defining the goal and the nature of the study. Chapter two deals with the arguments for the various positions taken on abortion after the identification of each position. Chapter three argues from different available data that human life is highly valued by Africans, especially among the Yoruba and the Igbo of Nigeria. Chapter four prepares the foundation on which effective decision making concerning bioethical issues can be built upon.

But chapter five discusses the meaning of the sanctity of life, the Nigerian traditional view, and it ends drawing out some implication of this for abortion today. The conclusion and suggestions for action is Chapter six. The suggested solutions are for an American context. However, these solutions are equally applicable to Nigeria although the resources for implementation are limited for now. And this is due to the lack of awareness of the opportunities available to the church to minister effectively to **its** community within her cultural background. Therefore, this final chapter centres on what Christians can do in recognition of the fact that abortion is a serious moral problem in the society whether it is legalized or not.