

**AN ANALYSIS OF THE MORALITY OF SUICIDE FROM
CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE**

**A Thesis in the Department of Christian Ethics in the
Faculty of Theological Studies,
Submitted to the School of Post Graduate Studies
The Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso,**

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Award of the
Degree of MASTER OF THEOLOGY IN CHRISTIAN ETHICS**

2013-0739

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MATRIC NO. UJ/NBTS/11/0199**

JUNE, 2013

ABSTRACT

This study sets out to analyze the morality of suicide from Yoruba Christian perspective. It attempts to clarify the concept of morality, to analyze the rationale behind suicide, to identify the causes of suicide, to determine the moral implications of suicide for Yoruba Christians and to proffer possible suggestions that can help to curb the incidences of suicide in Yoruba tribes. The consequential ethical theory methodology that measures the worth of an action by their utility or usefulness to the actors is employed for the study. The study pays particular attention to arguments in favour or and against suicide, dignity of human person, sanctity of human life and the people called Yoruba. Among the causes of suicide discovered through the study are loss of property, hopelessness, poverty, debts, barrenness, unemployment, incurable illnesses, failure, disappointment, jilt, diabolical influence and poverty of idea that "*Iku ya j'esin lo*" (death is preferable to shame), which prompt suicide in Yoruba tribe to prefer death to dishonour. The study underscores the fact that in the attempt of the suicide to choose death rather than dishonour or pain, he ends up with both the death and the dishonour. It maintains that "*Iku ko ya j'esin lo*" (death is not preferable to shame and disgrace) because "*Ori bibe ko ni oogun ori fifo*" (cutting off of the head is not the appropriate medication for headache) and that "*Koro aye san ju koro orun lo*" (the earth hidden corner is preferable to heaven's hidden corner). It argues that God, the supreme Being, the Author of life and death, who creates and sustains life is He who can unmake and terminate life. The study concludes by recommending that proper human and moral education be inculcated in children in homes, schools and that government should embark on poverty alleviation programmes and hard drugs eradication programmes to check youth participation in crime, violence and other vices.

5.2 CONCLUSION

This study having established its purpose found out that poverty of idea leads people to the act. The slogans, "*iku ya j'essin lo,*" death is a better substitute to shame and "*kaka ki ile o ku, ile a sa,*" instead for the land to die, it will be impoverished, which drives them to the act have not been proved to be true by their predecessors or the scholars that argued in favour of suicide. It was observed that the primary problem of theorists who wrote in favour of suicide is their poor concept of God. They did not believe in the existence of God and therefore see man as a free agent. From African concept of God, God does exist and man owes his being to Him. The scripture affirms the existence of God. The fool who denies God (Ps. 14:1) does so not from philosophical reason, but from the practical choice to live without considering God (Ps. 10:4). Their ungodly position is a willful act (Saucy, 500). Corroborating the concept of Yoruba in the existence of God, Aquinas in his system of thought claimed there existence of God

and the availability of God's knowledge. Citing Aquila, Reese said, there is motion in the world; and whatever moves is moved by another. At the origin of each series of moved movers there must be an initial mover, which is unmoved. This unmoved mover, men call God (22). He stated further that, there are efficient causes in the world, and to this cause everyone gives the name, God (922).

In addition to their poor concept of God, their concept of human being is also faulty. They refused to see man as a creature of God, who depends on God for everything because he controls his destiny in all areas of life. They do not believe in the further state of man and future judgment and that man is responsible to God. Socrates, according to Holland, though did not go in for theology, in his thought said that mortals are Chattels of the Gods. "Wouldn't you be angry, if one of your chattels should kill itself when you had not indicated that you wanted it to die?" (391). This Socrates' submission affirms Aquinas position that philosophy and religion complement each other (Reese 22). Therefore, no human being is free nor has the moral right to take his own life as suggested by Slater and Satris in favour of suicide.

Also taking one's life in the face of losses and shameful events claimed by Mappes and Bonhoeffer is also found unreasonable. This is because "*ori bibe ko ni oogun ori fifo*", cutting off of head is not the appropriate medication for a headache. Suicide is only a cheap escape from suffering and pain and not necessarily the greatest good for the suicidal person. This is because no one can tell the true state of the dead which the suicide finally assumed or found himself. The Bible says, "for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possession (Lk. 12:15b). Death in the face of losses and shame does not solve the problem but rather creates more problems for the bereaved and the community. The researcher agreed with Kant that suicide degrades human worth. It is an unhealthy response to the problem of life as submitted by Hendin. Suicide offends against the law of self – preservation advocated by Broad (Imaekhai 137).

African concept of suffering also helps Yoruba Christian to endure suffering rather than suicide. Suffering is a universal phenomenon, that cuts across ethnic, age or religious group. An average Yoruba man believes that nothing greater is achieved without endurance. A Yoruba adage says, *b' o ti wu ki'omode o pe l'orun to aiye ni yo ba isoro re*" no matter how long a child stays in heaven, he will come back to meet his problems on earth". Thus, to a Yoruba Christian, problem is inevitable. The scripture also affirms human suffering, if we endure, we will also reign with Him, if we deny Him, He will also deny us" (I Tim 2:12). A Yoruba Christian will, therefore, endure pain and suffering in preference to suicide.

The position of Slater and Szasz that suicide is a natural cure of all incurable suffering is wrong. The right to live is not opposite to the right to die as they claim (Imaekhai 137). The moral right to commit suicide due to terminal illness or shameful events advocated for by some scholars in favour of suicide is a highly emotive issue. Acceptance of feelings or emotions as the standard of morality for issue like suicide will lead to confusion because of the competing feelings from every member of the society

This study, however, established that suicide; willful self-killing aimed at relieving pain, depressed condition or to avoid dishonour, is never morally right. The arguments of self-justification and meaninglessness of life, man as a free agent and death control are emotivistic. Onimhawo covers that:

Whichever of the aforementioned moral systems one adopts, it would be discovered that human values are being calculated quantitatively, without taking adequate account of the unified, hierarchical interdependent structure of the human person, it's relation to a community and sharing higher values, or its openness to Transcendence (75).

Accordingly, God has reserved to himself the right to determine the end of life, because He alone knows the goal to which it is His will to lead it--- Even if his earthly life has become a torment for him, he must commit it intact into God's hand, from which it came

(Bonhoeffer 168,170). Therefore the ethical; model on which scholars who argued in favour of suicide based their arguments lacked the interdependent nature of the human person and therefore inadequate. Thus, Suicide is never morally right.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has motivated the researcher to make the underlisted recommendations as follows:.

Public / Society

Deliberate efforts should be made to resuscitate cherished Yoruba traditional values that will enable people to have regard for life and hold life as sacred. For instance, a Yoruba philosophical thought says, “*emi o l’aaro*” (life has no duplicate) another says, “*iku ko lopin eda*” (death is not the end of man). The resuscitation of such philosophical thought is expected to help people to hold life sacred and to know that there is life after death and that they are accountable to God.

Proper human and moral education for children in the homes, at school and general public. This is the expected duty of the families, religious institutions and other agencies of socialization. The society needs to be taught that “*iku ko ya j’esin lo*” (death is not preferred to shame), and that “*ori bibe, ko ni oogun ori fifo*” (cutting off of head is not the medication for headache). Education is power and freedom.

The society should recognize a profound role of social disconnection in the suicide risk of men in mid-life, and therefore support men to build social relationships (Hoodell 8).

The availability, accessibility, and attractiveness of the means for suicidal behaviour should be reduced or resumed.

Government

Government should promote public awareness of suicide with regard to issue of mental well being, suicidal behaviours, the consequences of stress and effective crises management.

Government should enhance increase in public and professional access to information about all aspects of preventing suicidal behaviour.

Government should promote increased access to comprehensive services for those at risk for, or affected by, suicidal behaviour and provide supportive and rehabilitative services to persons affected by suicide or suicidal behaviour.

Poverty eradication programmes at all levels of government should be embarked upon with an attempt to reduce unemployment, frustration and depression from the citizenry.

Productive sector of the economy should be encouraged and assisted by the government for employment generation. This is necessary because “*ise loogun ise*” (good work / job is the antidote for poverty).

All tiers of government are encouraged to intensify their activities at eradication of hard and dangerous drugs. The effort will help to check drug abuse which leads to numerous lives which includes suicide.

The government is encouraged also to embark on programmes that will channel the energy and creativity of the youths towards improving themselves and their communities in order to prevent their participation in crime, violence, drug abuse and suicide.

Church

The church should take an absolute stand against every form of suicide. The church in her teachings must relate Christian faith and biblical understandings of God and humanity to the issue of suicide. Here, God should be affirmed as the ultimate giver of life and the source of freedom for all humanity (Gal. 5:1).

The pastor through education, teachings, preaching, seminars and counselling should seek to dissuade persons from killing themselves. Such teaching should be aimed at altering negative behaviour and negative responses to suicide problems. Such teachings should promote team spirit, avoidance of loneliness and checks depressions.

It is advanced that suicide is a sign of emotional and mental distress and that suicidal communication by word or act is always a cry for help (Pretzel 1234). Therefore, a pastor must endeavour to stop suicidal acts already in progress. It is ethical too to enforce his will upon them during such time (1234).

In all high risk situations, professional consultations or referral is always necessary.

When suicidal crisis occurs, the pastor must intervene and recognize that the family of the suicide is in crisis. His presence is needed as a ministry to the family because at that time, the family needs encouragement and support.

The pastor must be present with the survivors to support their faith in God because during the crisis their faith is affected. At that time, the family, relations church members and others may be searching for a meaning or what happens. Their question may be why should God allow this to happen to us? Why must this person kill himself? What does this mean? An enemy has done this. The pastor must be there to correct all these feelings. The pastor must mobilize church members to support and encourage the family. The women missionary union especially will be of much to help to the wife and the children. This is necessary because the death is a sudden one.