

MORAL RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOW TO CURB ABORTION PRACTICES IN THYOLO

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Introduction

The paper discusses ways of curbing abortion practices in Thyolo District in Malawi. It achieves this by giving proposals and moral recommendations that may help curb abortion in Thyolo.ⁱ It points out that the Church, government and the society should play a big role in protecting the life of the unborn babies. Therefore, different organs in the society ought to play a role in curbing abortion and bring it to an end eventually. One thing to note is that elimination of abortion cannot be achieved unless the causes that induce women to seek abortion are addressed.

Post Abortion healing Plan

It has been a trend for some women to abort more than once in their lifetime in Thyolo, yet abortion is undesirable practice and a tragedy to a society in Thyolo as evidenced by the physical, psychological and social complications that it brings along. Henceforth, victims of abortion in the district should be helped to recover from the traumatic experience. In this case, pastoral counselling and psychological therapy may help to give them some hope.

Pastoral Counselling and Psychotherapy

This may be offered at least to all parties involved who are the most wounded due to abortion more especially the woman. Going to the sacrament of penance to seek forgiveness from God is also helpful. Such a process is helpful to the victim as it eases pressure and heal her both spiritually and psychologically. Having been healed, the victim may end up becoming an advocate against abortion and help promote pro-life groups in the area.

Mass Media

This is arguably one of the fastest means of spreading information

ⁱ Moral recommendations are virtuous proposals aimed at the best course of action.

in as far as the value of human life is concerned. Through educating the people, the media informs the general public in sensitizing them on the evil of abortion through its three cornerstones, thus informing, educating and entertaining. Televisions, radios, newspapers, among others play a major role in these matters. In helping to curb and stop abortion, the media in Thyolo should design programmes that educate people on the dangers of abortion practices, thus beginning from individual level, family and society at large. Every citizen ought to be involved for the problem associated with abortion does not affect only the mother and the unborn baby but also all members of the society. Hence, the media should educate the people about safe motherhood, abortion issues and post abortion care to save many lives. Influential as media is, its reporters should be conscious of what they report in promoting the good values in society rather than just be interested in profit making without considering how their reporting impacts on the society.

The Church recognises the role that the social media plays if properly used and of how they are of great importance to the people. In line with Vatican II document, *Inter Mirifica* [on the Media of Social Communication], we echo and suggest that “readers, viewers and listener of social media fully favour those presentations that are outstanding for their moral goodness, their knowledge and their artistic or technic merit”.¹ Programmes that do not conform to good moral standards, like those supporting abortion in Thyolo, are not worthy listening to or viewing as they deform human conscience and lead to moral decay in the society. Henceforth, the moral responsibility for good use of social media falls on all people involved right away from production to distribution. As the document puts it, all those involved in social media affairs ought to lead people to doing good by informing them what is morally upright, and this includes the preservation of the life of unborn babies. Additionally, in an effort to ensure a healthy community, public authorities, through censorship of programmes, are obliged to ensure that “special care be taken to safeguard young people from printed matter and performances which may be harmful at their age”.²

Though abortion is illegal in Malawi, the pro-choice groups use the media in advancing their agenda on contraceptives while disregarding good

values like safeguarding human life. The Non -Governmental Organizations also have a propaganda of reducing population growth and often use the media to achieve that goal. We therefore recommend that the main interest of the media should not just be profit made through advertisements that degrade human life and dignity while compromising the right to life of the unborn babies. Human life is more precious than the money they make. Furthermore, reporters should be pro-life to ensure the promotion of human life and dignity. Church radios and Televisions should speak for the right to life of the weakest and defenceless human beings namely the unborn babies.

The Role of the Church and other Religious Leaders

Religious leaders in Thyolo society are well known to be very close to their followers even more than politicians who make laws. As a result, they easily become aware of most of the problems that their people encounter. The Clergy and leaders of other denominations, religious men and women all have the duty and moral responsibility to teach the faithful on the immorality of abortion and how this practice impacts negatively on human dignity. They can achieve this in their pastoral activities by teaching and instructing the faithful on abortion issues. In the light of the Church's teaching, the faithful should learn that "the child in her mother's womb is a human life which must be protected. Abortion, which is destructive of an innocent unborn child is contrary to God's will, for the value and dignity of human life must be protected from conception to natural death".³ It is the responsibility of the Church to remind the faithful that every human life has inherent value.

Since the problem of abortion poses a big challenge to the Church's stand on the sanctity of human life, all the pastoral agents must unanimously speak in defence of human life and dignity. They can achieve this goal by including sex education in the catechetical syllabus so that the faithful may learn that sex is a gift from God ordered towards procreation. This understanding may help curb the number of abortions. We also recommend that the Church creates a platform where the small Christian communities become the initial places for moral values. Church groups in schools like

Young Christian Students should discuss more topics related to human sexuality under the guidance from proper animation to raise an awareness on the immorality of abortion. The facilitation of Home-Based Care and Counselling centres for all people in Thyolo may also help provide a platform where people may learn about the evil of abortion.

Moreover, the victims of abortion should be given proper pastoral care. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus*, Benedict XVI urges the Church in Africa to support and care for the victims of abortion and those contemplating of it, thus, “the Church in Africa and neighbouring islands must be committed to offering help and support women and couples tempted to seek abortion while remaining close to those who have had this tragic experience and helping them grow in respect for human life”.⁴ In the light of this, we recommend that the Church continues to care and support the victims of abortion. Women who have aborted before should be supported so that they may not repeat the experience.

Medical Professionals

Medical practitioners ought to be in the forefront in sensitizing people about the effects of abortion rather than serving their own interests by procuring abortion. Their duty is to protect life, not to destroy it. Therefore, “the carrying out of abortion diminishes all parties in their humanity, the woman, the physician and other accomplices. To be a human person is to have for a goal to achieve the fullness of human development”.⁵ Medical practitioners should follow their conscience and respect human life, otherwise, they live most of their life in regret having participated in taking away human life. We recommend that doctors in Thyolo provide a conducive environment for human life and respect it by respecting the ethics of “Hippocratic Oath” which stipulates that “Nor will I give a woman a pessary to procure abortion”.⁶ This suggests that doctors should promote human dignity by not cooperating in taking away life of the unborn babies and this will ensure the continuity of the society.

Responsible Parenthood and Proper Education

Lack of proper parenting skills was noted to be among the leading

causes of abortion in Thyolo. We recommend that sex education be taught formally in schools and informally by parents and elders to their children. This may help curb early and unplanned pregnancies that come as a result of poor parenting skills. Parents should be open enough to their children about their sexual life and the dangers of procuring abortion. For a long time, it has been a taboo for parents to discuss sexual intercourse with their children and this is why parents opt to send their daughters for initiation ceremonies where they learn some immoral acts like Kusasa Fumbi [sexual cleansing] which sometimes leads to unplanned pregnancies and contraction of Sexually Transmitted Diseases.

Moreover, children often receive information about sex from friends, magazines and the internet. In most cases, such information is not supervised hence misleading. They end up engaging in sexual behaviour which results in early pregnancies. Henceforth, sexual education can surely lead to an awareness on the dangers of abortion and women can be equipped with skills and knowledge on how to handle their sexuality. They can learn that abortion is never a solution to unplanned pregnancies.

Government Laws

Abortion is illegal in Malawi except in cases where the life of the mother is in danger. Though this is case, there have been hot debates among law makers on whether to legalize abortion or not. The pro-choice group in Malawi continues to advocate for women's right to choose whether to keep the baby or not. In the light of the Church's teaching against abortion, we argue in support of the assertion that "to be valid, law must be derived from sound principles such as respect for human life".⁷ That is to say, law makers who are the representatives of the people should ensure that any laws that they make should conform to objective norms of justice and such laws should aim at the common good rather than those that favour the strong in the society only. This is achievable through dialogue between the Church and government.

In the light of *Gaudium et Spes* "government exists in the realization of the common good, thus to help bring those conditions of social life by which individual, families and groups can achieve their own fulfilment in

a relatively thorough and ready way, for instance the preservation of life”.⁸ We recommend that every law that sabotages the right of the innocent and the defenceless babies should not be tolerated. Abortion, being immoral and evil as it is, every law that the authorities make in Thyolo, thus from the district assembly to national level, should follow morality. Law makers are obliged to speak for the defenceless members of the society namely the unborn babies regarding their fundamental right to life. Every law that contradicts the moral norms like the preservation of human life should be opposed because it never respects the dignity of human person.

Government has a major role in protecting and defending human life from all forms of injuries and injustices and ensure that the right to life is certain. Government must support pregnant women in whatever way possible up until they safely deliver. Providing antenatal Care is among them. The laws in Malawi, where Thyolo is, should be reasonable to achieve this, government should put in place structures that promote human life and dignity through its various ministries like that of Health and Education. They should include sexual education in primary and secondary curriculum and such syllabus should include moral issues like abortion, family planning and their side effects on humanity. Government should invest more in humanity courses like “Life Skills” where students learn how to cope with their sexual life. For a long time in Malawi, government focused more on Empirical sciences while ignoring humanity courses. Through such courses, many people will be made aware of their sexuality and moral issues in general. Additionally, we propose that the Government of Malawi takes a firm stand against Non-Governmental Organizations that advocate for abortion with a view of the campaign against population boom. Instead, government should dialogue with them to channel their money into poverty eradication programmes and the fight against various diseases.

Abortion is illegal in Malawi except when the foetus puts the life of the woman in danger. Though this is the case, most women in Thyolo seek and access abortion from private clinics and traditional healers. We propose that government enforces the already existing law that forbids abortion and ensure that law breakers face punishment so that others may learn.

Conscience Formation

Every normal human person has the capacity to do good. As such he or she can undoubtedly judge that some acts are right while others are wrong. Formation of conscience in people is one of the ways of addressing the problem of abortion in Thyolo. A well-informed conscience in the light of Scripture respects the sacredness of human life in its various stages of development, thus, right away from conception. Such a person will surely respond to natural law principle as the Church teaches, thus, “deep within his conscience, man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. its voice calling him to love and do what is good and avoid evil...for man has in his heart a law inscribed by God...his conscience is man’s most secrete core and his sanctuary. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depth”.⁹ We suggest therefore that everyone involved with the process of human life in the district form his or her conscience properly in conformity with the divine truth. Consequently, knowledgeable people like pastoral agents should help people form their conscience. One way of helping them can be by giving them catechesis on the inviolability of human life to help in their conscience formation. The formation of conscience begins from the early stage of human development and as such, both family and the community are obliged to ensure that their children are supported to grow with the culture of preserving life.

The Virtue of Chastity and Abstinence

Some people think that being chaste in a relationship denotes ignorance and stupidity, but this is not true. In the understanding of Wachira, chastity means “a joyous affirmation of someone who is determined to live a life of self-giving, free from any form of self-centred slavery. it requires sexual self-control in thought, words, actions, the expression of affection for other persons in modest ways that avoid sexual arousal in thought, word and deed”.¹⁰ Chastity is not only limited to desisting from sexual practices, but it is to do with one’s confidence about the self. Certainly, there is a need for education on chastity whereby people in Thyolo may learn how to relate healthily with the opposite sex and this may help bring a positive attitude.

They may acquire knowledge on how to control themselves and be chaste.

Catechesis on Theology of the Body

People in Thyolo should be prepared to appreciate God's gift of sexuality to humanity through catechesis on human sexuality. As noted in chapter two, human beings are privileged in the order of creation because they are made in the image of God. Scripture stipulates that sex is meant for married people, thus, sex outside marriage is condemned.¹¹ Therefore, young people in Thyolo should be helped to grow into full maturity and be helped understand that sex as a gift from God is meant for the married couples. Scripture says, "that is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh."¹² Various experts ought to work collaboratively to arrive at a goal where everyone in Thyolo realizes that their bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit received from God and they do not belong to themselves.¹³ Everyone should desist from acts that profane the body.

In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio* [On the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World], John Paul II states that in addition to the family's role of helping the young people preparing for their future roles, the society and the Church should also take part. Looking at the changes in the modern times, he claims that, "many negative phenomena which are today noted with regret in family life derive from the fact that, in the new situations, young people not only lose sight of the correct hierarchy of values but, since they no longer have certain criteria of behavior, they do not know how to face and deal with the new difficulties".¹⁴ If young people are well prepared for their future roles, there will not be cases of a man refusing responsibility for a pregnancy or a woman seeking an abortion because good ground may have already been laid.

Dialogue between Theologians and Medical Practitioners

Modern theologians and medical professionals hold opposing views regarding the beginning of human life and the use of contraceptives. While most theologians believe that life begins at conception, most medical practitioners hold the view that human life begins at a later stage than that. We recommend that there should be continuous dialogue between

them so that they may find a middle way. This may not just be applicable in Thyolo but countrywide.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed proposals and recommendations that can be used to curb abortion practices in Thyolo. Among others, it argued that the responsibility to defend life of the defenceless unborn babies belongs to everybody in Thyolo District. Henceforth, the Government of Malawi should promote and make laws that aim at the preservation and promotion of human life and dignity. They are also to ensure that they accommodate human sexuality courses in their curriculum so that young people may learn how to handle their sexuality and know the dangers of abortion. The Church ought to speak in defence of human life and dignity through her teachings while the family, being the primary school of moral values, should informally educate their children about sexuality by being open to them about the topic. Medical professionals should adhere to their call values of preserving human life, not destroying it. Furthermore, the youth should be encouraged to live a life of chastity and abstinence and wait until they are mature enough and ready for marriage. Mass media should educate and inform the general public in sensitizing them on the dangers of abortion.

¹ Paul VI. *Inter Mirifica. Decree on the Media of Social Communications*. Rome: St. Publications, 1963. No.9

² Paul VI. *Inter Mirifica. Decree on the Media of Social Communications*. Rome: St. Publications, 1963 p.12

³ Benedict XVI. *Apostolic Exhortation: Africae Munus*. Benin: Word Media SVD, 2011 no. 70

⁴ Benedict XVI. *Apostolic Exhortation: Africae Munus*. Benin: Word Media SVD, 2011 no 70

⁵ Flynn Eileen P. *Issues in Health Care Ethics*. New York: Prentice-Hall Inc., 2000 p.37

⁶ Flynn Eileen P. *Issues in Health Care Ethics*. New York: Prentice-Hall Inc., 2000 p37

⁷ Flynn Eileen P. *Issues in Health Care Ethics*. New York: Prentice-Hall Inc., 2000 p31

⁸ *Gaudium et Spes. Pastoral Teaching on the Church in the Modern World*, in Council II. ed. Austin Flannery. Bombay: St. Paul Press, 1995 no.74

⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. New York: Doubleday, 1994 p. 1777

¹⁰ Wachira R. N. *On Life and Love, What Parents should Know*. Nairobi, Pauline Publications Africa, 2000 p.115

¹¹ Wansbrough, Henry, ed. *The New Jerusalem Bible*. Standard ed. London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 1985 cf. Mt 15:19.

- ¹² Wansbrough, Henry, ed. *The New Jerusalem Bible*. Standard ed. London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 1985 cf. Gen 2:24.
- ¹³ Wansbrough, Henry, ed. *The New Jerusalem Bible*. Standard ed. London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 1985 cf. 1 Cor 6:19
- ¹⁴ John Paul II. *Familiaris Consortio: Apostolic Exhortation on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World*. Rome, November 22, 1981 p.66