

AN ETHICAL APPRAISAL OF RELIGION IN BIOMEDICAL PRACTICE

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Abstract

Man have over the years exploited his Environment for the purpose of meeting with his basic need. In realizing this he has concerned himself with the invisible or what we may here call spiritual dimension to address issues that seems to confront him. This spiritual element surrounding man in his life world launches him into the phenomenon called religion. Man submission to the high forces greater than himself made him powerless, therefore surrounded himself to these forces for help intime of peril; warrants his demonstration as a religious being. He has demonstrated a deep o r profound relationship between himself and a supernatural being or deity. This shows the reality of man as a religious being. The need for man to rely on a supreme being for help in times of troubles is not limited only to his economic life, nor political but also in the area of biomedical sense of his existence. There is a turnaround at a tremendous rate in the area of bio-medicine in contemporary society that aid life support, improve in life span, gene therapy, human genomen, clonny birth and death control measures brought about by human advancement in science and technology of but, these improved activities in Bio-tech if not controlled by the initiation of some forms of ethical rules then the supposed benefits from biomedical practice will in turn bring pains and agony upon man as a result of abuses in their practices. Meanwhile, if the ethical rules are not galvanized by religious dos and don'ts we do not see the realization of such intended, peace, harmony and tranquility in the practice of bio-tech for the good of mankind hence, this paper intends to explore the place of Religion in biomedical practice with the motive of instilling some religious principles which are themselves dear to human life, to help boost or impact on biomedical ethics as they are endemic in human nature.

Introduction:

Religion as a phenomena of human concern involves the acknowledgement of a divine reality with a supposed requirement of an obedience to a divine being; with rites and ceremonies to mark the relationship of man to the divine reality.¹ Religion has tremendous impact on the people who believe and practice the said religion. Hence, it is part of their nature and essence which they cannot separate from else there will be crises of great magnitude if they separate from this essence to which they are part of. A people essence is tie to their belief and culture, the separation of the people from such belief and culture admittedly impact on their life, therefore if a people are to experience wellbeing there is the need for them to adhere to their belief and culture by reason of the fact that their essence is couched to their belief and culture.

There exist different religions with their different traditions and histories which make claims to a divine or supreme reality which their followers abide with as the tenet of their religion. This tenet aid, and guild them in whatever they do. Some of these religions believe in exclusionism while others profess inclusionism. The exclusivists are of the opinion that

only one religion is true and only the followers of such religion can receive salvation. On the other hand the inclusivist maintained that one religion is true but members of other religious sect can as well benefit and attain salvation as well. This divergent views on religious claim to belief on the divine reality as brought about conflict of diverse nature among people who profess different religion. Hence, religion while hitherto the vehicle of peace and succor to mankind has turned out to be an instrument of battle, war and colonization among humans of contemporary times. Odey expressing the effect of religion in Nigeria said: we have been split almost into smithereens by what we call religion, where men and women wrangle for religion, fight for it and perhaps even die for it.² This shows how religion has torn Nigerians apart and devastated the country and created instability in the Nigerian project. That notwithstanding, this ill from religion has been corrected by the emergence of ethical monotheism which afforded people to live an independent lifestyle couple with the question of justice and value on an independent basis had led to widespread of ethical revolution on the wide range of life issues which also border on religion and ethics. This was expressed by Onimhwo and Otuh in Sociology of religion thus: ethical monotheism answered society's need for a moral guide and motivation, whilst a unique personal God who was sovereign over all areas of life answered people's feeling of isolation and powerlessness.³

The moral guide and motivation which religion brings to mankind through a unique sovereign God shows that mankind can be directed and find succor from the ethics which this sovereign God could provide in virtually all areas of life especially in those part where man has become powerless such as in bio-medical life. Hitherto, mankind has continually been frustrated in giving solution to comatose health challenges as: infertility problems in Spouses, Genetic surgery, Tissue harvest, Gene splicing and sex selection and many more Health disorders that have thrown man into oblivion have recently become a juicy area with prompt benefits which could help in improving wellbeing of mankind.

As good and laudable in wellbeing of mankind are recent development in the biomedical fields such as artificial insemination, surrogate motherhood, invitro fertilization (IVF), sex detection and selection, organ transplants, genetic surgery, organ and tissue harvesting, cryonics, cloning and Gene splicing as biomedical realities are, the serious question now is, no longer whether they can be done and whether they ought to be done but the matter of importance in this paper is that whether the ethics which regulate the conduct of these practices are enough to enable the activities in biomedical practices bring about the requires wellbeing without compromise or prejudice in their practices.

It has been observed that there are lots of abuses in the biomedical practices and biomedical ethics have variously been enunciated to stem these abuses but a curious sight shows that the ethics so far formulated as guide lack the needed element which could aid the needed goals in biomedical practices. Hence in this paper the author advocates some religious creeds which he believes could help biomedical field in articulating ethics to guide the profession. ;

The Reality of Biomedical Practices in Contemporary Time

The advancement in modern science and technology have brought huge gains and benefits to the field of medicine particularly biomedicine as we can now find new techniques and better routine procedures in the practice of medicine in our contemporary time, which

have aided improve health care delivery in areas such as cloning, gene selection and detection, invitro fertilization, genetic surgery, and organ transplant to mention but a few.

There are large harvest of these above practices and many more that have not be mentioned above as a testament to the benefits which advancement in science and technology have brought to biomedical practices. Countless numbers of spouses who were childless are now bolsters of parenthood. Robot are being cloned for industrial jobs in advanced economy to do the jobs which hitherto were done by men; the robot have been found to do the job faster, and more efficient than man. Computerized robots are created to go on espionage, expedition, war as soldiers. In fact there are cloned robots to pick up the job of nurses and surgeon in clinical laboratory setup (organization) to do scientific experiment as man and their results have be proved perfect and correct. There have been successes recorded in organ such as heart, tissues, kidney and liver transplant in various hospitals in the world. There are also many surrogate motherhood cases which have yielded successes and improvement to the wellbeing of mankind, a case in point is that done by a Nigerian celebrity who searches for the fruit of the womb for a very longtime and was almost giving up hope in search of child before she contacted on expert who introduced her to the application of surrogacy; she bye into the idea and now she is no more a barren woman.

How many can we indicate as examples of the fruits of biomedical activity which have yielded success? They are in fact countless numbers. All these examples above show that there is in fact grand breakthrough in biomedical science and techniques which have recorded improvement in human life and wellbeing to humanity. These notwithstanding, the important question which we should be asking ourselves should be those raised by a seasoned researcher in biomedical science among others, Uduigwomen: who in his book entitled. “contemporary issues and problems in biomedical Ethics” raised these below questions as pertaining biomedical practice: as researchers busy themselves in academic exercise and record major breakthrough in the medical profession, the real question being asked is: should the results of these researcher be applied without regard to the moral values of the various publics they serve? He went further to ask should it be allowed to continue? He did not stop at these questions, he surpassed these to ask: is surrogate motherhood gratifying for the simple reason that some women do not want to bothered with problems of child bearing and child care?⁴. Another vital question which Uduigwomen raised in his research work on biomedical ethics that prompt this paper titled “ An Ethical Appraisal of Religion in Biomedical practice” concerned these three last questions raised by him ie Uduigwomen: which are: should there be a consideration of moral responsibility in the practice of medicine? If science in the service of humanity is stressed, what then is humanism? Does humanism share anything with humanness or moral philosophy? These questions in Uduigomen’s book are the very serious questions upon which any work on biomedical inquiry should seek to explore if genuinely the research is to worth its goals. Ours on this paper takes a clue from these above questions and see them as the substructure on which we direct our enquiry about the ethical appraisal of religion in biomedical practice.

Biomedical practice has some goals which it purports to achieve for humanity; one of which is to improve upon the wellbeing of mankind by bringing succor where there were pains hitherto. In realizing the goal therefore, there is need to anchor the practices in the

profession on grand ethics to serve as guide for professional to follow such that we can prevent illicit and unwholesome practices such as monetary gains over benevolence, joy over malevolence, beneficence over harm- these are the very goals upon which the biomedical ethics precipitated; since the desire for surrogacy, invitro fertilization, clone, Gene therapy and organ transplant are all carried out as service to humanity for the improvement of the condition of life of humans; ie, to ease pain and avoid harm.

This belief shows that the dire need for biomedical researches are for humanity and human undertone nothing else. At the base the reason being for human while at the pick it's humanity that is the ground lodge. It expresses the domain of care upon humans and totally and conclusively for humanity sake that practioners of bio-tech are involved in. Then such an enormous, great field should be savaged with a well ordered principles through which members of the group who partake in the act should direct their activities rightly as the activity involves humans-sacred being with rights to life and not to die; for the purpose of proper and orderly operation. All activities involving humans must be properly guided to prevent harm and mishaps. Hence medical ethics are those professional rules which guide the proper operation of the medical system or profession. Anyone involved in the practice should obey the etiquette of the profession, so, as to avoid conflict, harm and disorderliness. This is the very object of morality of human conduct or behaviour. This will prevent clash of interests of persons in the system. Biomedical ethics consist of beliefs, ideals and rules which stipulate what are good and evil concerning human beings as such, by virtue of their being human. It therefore, contains what may be said to be open to human choices, and what may be said to have happened to them by factors beyond human control. These rules that become professional rules which in other words may be called biomedical ethics are couched in human nature not outside of human nature. They are provisions of human nature. Hence, humans can easily abide by them. Within the timeline of practice, mankind can succumb to it naturally without much complain, the reason for this being that: humans have no automatic guidelines through which they can regulate their activities than creating some within this own limits. It affords mankind to make choices between alternatives available. As R.M. Hare averred, the purpose of ethical rules is that of "helping us to think better about moral questions by exposing the logical structure of language in which these thoughts are expressed." ⁵ it helps us to feel human, since only humans have guidelines which they operate with, the lower animals do things by instinct but we humans formulate principles which aid us to act such that we will be properly guided and achieve harmony, peace and joy from our actions.

Some Abuses in the Practice of Bio-Engineering in Contemporary Time

There are some deleterious activities recorded in contemporary time about bio-technology and their by-products against humanity. We may not be able to explore amount of them in this paper singularly. However, we are going to highlight some very important and grievous one among them. These grievous occurrences were expressed by Echekwube in the following words:

The advancement in modern medical sciences, especially in the areas of biomedical studies has further complicated the problems encountered in medical ethics⁶. Echekwube

illustrating the depth of the assortment prevalent in biomedical practice averred: compared to the problems of prenatal screening, fetal experimentation, genetic engineering, predetermination of sex, organ transplantation and cloning, the ethical difficulties presented in abortion and euthanasia are simply a tip on the iceberg. Thus is high propensity to exaggerate the true nature of these new dimensions and create room for commercialization, as is already being experienced.⁷

As noted by Echekwube, that there is profound risk of commercialism in biomedical practices through the buying and sales of human organs such as human tissues, heart, kidney, liver etc to mention but a few. This results to exploration in the nature of monetary gains and other sharp practices that are inimical to human dignity. Besides, there is the tendency that standard measure for experimental procedure will be broken down such as the case which Echekwube expressed thus: “invariably, medical doctors begin to vacillate between the protection of their honorable profession and easy sale out of conscience for sordid money”.⁸

Historical sketch shows that human subject experimentation is filled with so many atrocious activities inimical to human wellbeing. George Annas argued, Many “Breakthrough “procedures which purported to be therapeutic triumphs were in fact blatant, experimental exploitations of desperate people.⁹ There is the case of experiment on embryos made for research purposes, there are lamentations over such Frankensteinian projects; these projects have been detected to spare great human suffering and bring about reduction in human dignity. Jack Kevorkian in his observation on human experimentation stirred up controversy when he advocated for extensive experimentation on anesthetized capital offenders.¹⁰

From the backdrop of the abuses in the medical profession, so many persons have beginning to doubt the genuineness of the medical personnel and judging from the lukewarm attitude to work and propensity for monetary compensation.” One of the most infamous research projects that seriously involved abuses of human dignity is the Tuskegee syphilis experiment. About 400 black men suffering syphilis were deliberately deprived of treatment in order to enable researchers to study the effects of allowing the disease to take its natural course.¹² even though penicillin discovered in 1929, had been found to be an effective treatment for syphilis, the drug was purposely withheld and at least 28 and perhaps as many as 107 men died as a direct result of the disease.¹³ Echekwube had it to say that: an Italian daily, the *Avvenire* of Wednesday 18th February, 1998 makes a startling revelation that some patients of the clinic of Irvine university had discovered that about 60 embryos were transplanted into women different from their rightful biological owners, without their consent or permission.¹⁴ Echekwube also revealed that the same university of Pennsylvania was indicted of using the congealed semen of dead men for artificial fecundity in *Avvenire* by the resident doctors.¹⁵

We cannot overlook the notorious case of human experimentation of the Willowbrook study where live hepatitis virus was injected into institutionalized retarded children in an effort to develop a vaccine, when already treatment for hepatitis had been discovered. We cannot forget in a hurry the case of the Jewish chronic Disease hospital experiment where

researchers were said to have injected twenty two-elderly debilitated patients with live cancer cells without obtaining their voluntary informed consent.¹⁶ to crown it all in our exploration of abuses in biomedical research experiment is the horrendous escaped, of the Nuremberg trials of Nazi Physicians who were accused for conducting unethical research in human being thereby reducing humans to mere experimental tools that are to be used and dumped at will of medical experts for their selfish interest of gaining professional fame.

The Place of Religion in Biomedical Practice

Most persons feel that religion has no contribution it can give to biomedical practice. Their beliefs is that, religion brings controversy to biomedical practice while some if they judge the role of religion in biomedical practice will give a very few credits to religious traditions in the advancement of biomedical practice. The major reason to this position is that, biomedical field is new and its ethics are strongly galvanized in secular reasoning than theological or religious basis while on the other sphere the religious basis of biomedical ethics is profoundly pluralistic such that the beliefs which form the basis of each religion are diverse and they tend to create differences that make actual contributions of religion to biomedical practice in doubt irrespective of the fact that religion plays vital role in the life of a people worldwide. This outlook notwithstanding does not vitiate the dominant role which religion plays in biomedical advancement particularly its contributions to biomedical ethics. The religious approach to bioethics differs from the secular approach. While religious sense of bioethics embraces such elements as the support for the theory of creation that allows for the belief of a sovereign creator as a source of life; it also articulates the enshrinement of the notion of sanctity of life which anchor on allowance for improvement of human life than recreation thesis of the secular humanist prognosis, which bespeak and supports evolutionary theory that reflects the end justifies the means, man is the architect of his own life. Uduigwomen summarizes the differences in the secular (humanist) position from the religious perspective thus:

The summary of it all is that while the secular humanist position upholds the 'playing God' principle, the humanists speak glowingly about the power of technology to do all things and emphatically deny the sovereignty of god. They believe that man is the architect of his fortune and misfortune.¹⁷

From the point elucidated above by Uduigwomen about the believe held by the secularist on biomedical science, it means that the current advancement in human life is solely brought about by science and technology and that in the issue of life wellbeing for mankind the creator's role is not relevant as that of science and technology. Hence, ethics for the secularists is not absolute but autonomous and situational. As such, it does not need theological nor ideological sanctions.¹⁸

This position does not hold waters as such, since we all know that science and technology as we speak are yet to create life. So the sovereignty of the creator in the issues which portend human life is very relevant and so religious beliefs are required in enunciating viable ethics for biomedical practice else biomedical practice and profession will become war

zone for the elimination of human life; hence, the request for the incorporation of theological ideals, ie, beliefs in biomedical ethics promptly.

Some Fundamental Normative Concepts Underlying Religious Perspectives in Bioethics and Benefits

Some of the basic ideas that are normative in kind underlying religious approach to bioethics are:

- A. Love; love is cardinal to human life existence, without which there will be violence of manifold proportions that will result to untimely death, chaos and lack of peace on planet earth. The concept of love hang on doing to others what you want other to do to you. If harming you is not good for you, then you should desist from harming others. This allows for mutual corporate existence in peace, and harmony. This is a creed in all religions of the world and is cardinal to the ethical principle among all religious of the world. Uduigwomen in appreciation to the power of love as an ethical principle of Christianity averred:

Love is an ethical pole of Christianity. This love is both vertical (God-ward) and horizontal (man-ward). No wonder Jesus taught that the greatest commandment is to love God whole heartedly, and ourselves.¹⁹

This shows that if we have love we will not do harm to either ourselves nor to our neighbors. If this prevails then there will be bound to be peace for the promotion of good health (divine health) where there is divine health disease and infirmities are overcome; hence, the need for the practitioners of biomedicine to embrace the ethical ideal of love.

B. Life Longevity: This bespeak pro-longevity of life existence; in other words mortality of life. Religious beliefs have made mankind to understand that what shortens life is sin. If mankind runs away from sin, ie, evil doings it will be well with man while the opposite bring condemnation and damnation of man. This is well spelt out in Christian ethics thus:

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.²⁰

By one man's sin, death, condemnation and diseases came upon mankind but the scripture recorded yet by the obedience of Jesus, man is brought onto redemption. So to dwell on planet earth and have fulfillment of life one should eschew sin. The Christian ethics again is vital in this direction it speaks expressly thus. "do good avoid evil and dwell well on the land". This admonishment as a religious creed can help us to avoid sin and its eventual death if we as religious people click onto it and eventually we will be bound to life longer life expectancy than waiting for scientific life support which has limitations upon their uses by humans. Some of the technological life supports go with excruciating pains that are unbearable for man. Therefore, which is easier: to obey scriptural precepts and sin not and dwell well on the land or sin, have infirmities, pain and eventual untimely death?

C. Life Sacredness: The life of a man is from the creator, man only borrowed it for use temporarily. He is not the owner because he cannot create it. Life was created by God Almighty; as such it's sacred or Holy. No man has reason to terminate it at will. He the creator has the prerogative (sole) to give it and also to take it at his will. Here God's supremacy over life is fully expressed. Science and technology cannot create life but can only improve and maintain it. So science and technology at most is procured to cultivate what God has graciously given to mankind. No wonder Uduigwomen in his work entitled contemporary issues and problems in Biomedical Ethics said: The task of medicine is to improve life, not to create it.²¹ he went further to say:

God has not made us engineers of life but that maintenance crew of life. Genetic fitness should be our goal, not genetic fabrication. In short, the legitimate role of the Christian in biomedical areas is therapeutic, not eugenic.²²

What this goes to show is that mankind should not over praise scientific and technological innovations over Scriptural precepts of the creator and that the practitioners in Biomedical field should not exaggerate the potency of these innovations because they are neither perfect nor sure. It also takes God's grace for them to work. Some that work they produce effects that are inimical to mankind. So care must be taken in buying into these innovations.

D. God's sovereignty: The creation thesis has shown the supremacy of God over created beings. God is he that was not created yet he created all that has existence. His sovereignty over life is eternal. God exist as the father, son and Holy Spirit. He alone possesses this attributes of the "trinity". The Christian Holy book says: he is our father and we the created beings are his offspring (Gen.1:27; Job 1:21; and Deut 32:39)²³. The sovereignty of God over created beings cannot be doubted. The air, water, life are his divine providence, if they are taken away from man, he will cease to exist the moment they are removed from him. They are the life support which he has given freely. Far better than those scientific and technological life supports provided by scientific innovations that are neither sure nor eternal. Scientific life supports are based on 'Trial and error' and they are limited by time. No one of them can last long. Hence our minds are not to be set on them as if they can provide permanent solution to our problems of life. Only God Almighty has permanent solution to human besetting problem. So God remains sovereign to all problems of life. Science and Technology are good in their own credit but their products are limited in their scope and contents.

Fundamental Issues in Religious Ethics that Support its Appraisal

Having explored the basic principles of religion in biomedical ethics, it become imperative for us in this part of this paper to examine some issues in biomedical practice which needed religious principles or ideas upon which the role of religion can be appraised. Before we embark on this journey we must be abreast with the ethical desires in biomedicine which are benevolence, no malevolence, prevention of harm and it over all desire is the improvement of human health.

In ensuring that we keep to this principles in biomedical health requirements there is the need to search and weigh on a balance the precepts or creeds that are useful for

biomedicine between the secular and religious principles. Remembering that on the divide the secularist ethical principles hang on such basic ideas as man has power over life, ie he has power to manipulate human health through science and technology; therefore, he can control human life at will. The secular thesis therefore supports the revolutionary theory which holds that human life was not created but rather it came about through chaos in nature. This thereby advocated for the believe that man has supreme control over his life. Whereas the religious version states that God is the creator of life and as such he owns the supreme right on how life should be handled since he knows how he came about life and the secret things about life which no man can know, not even the scientist except him alone allows the secrets to be revealed to man. Religion is in full support of the creation thesis and the ethical rules which go with it in biomedical activities which are: man should be guided and directed by the scriptural principles as laid down by religious creed in making decision over biomedical practices such as artificial insemination, invitro fertilization , sex selection and detection, gene splicing etc.

This is so because man, science and technology are not the author of life. It is only the author of life that knows the nitty-gritty about life and this nitty-gritty will only be known by man, science and technology only when he (ie the author) of life permits it by revelation. The supreme power of creation lies in the hand of the creator, so his will must be respected on issues of life. Man cannot shorten or prolong life willingly. It is only the creator's will that ultimately prevails over the issue of span of human life. Although organ transplantaion is not a violation of the principle of mortality but as a means of prolonging life we must be careful to allow the principle of Godliness to preside over our sense of judgment by allowing the precepts of the scripture to have it course in order to be in tune with respect for human dignity. Man has right over his body but we all know that it will be wrong for human to engage in an unwholesome practices in the sales of human parts and it is unholy for man to facilitate death just for the singular reason of getting fresh organs from a human being-where is the rule of sanctity of life in such act from the religious perspective? So it is very clear that all unwholesome practices in biomedical practices are due in part from the humanist or secular views about bioethics-what informed the secularist ethics on medicine are in contradiction from that of scriptural ie religious basis. ;the religious basis seems to be more humane than the secularists which allows for sharp practices such as monetary gains, exploitation, sales of human part, inordinate affections that guarantees no love for human life.

So, if one is to engage in any of the provisions of biomedicine, we ask ourselves does the practice recognize God's principles that are spelt out in the Holy writs? Does the act promote human dignity? Can it be said: that the biomedical provision like clone, artificial insemination, invitro fertilization and sex detection and selection can promote the greatest human good, are the provisions within the scope of human nature ie do they conform to the nature of man as provided by the creator? So care should be taken not to compound already existing problems because most of these biomedical options are more than what they really seem to be. Most of them are exaggerated by the professional and are just trial and error but polished by the professionals to hoodwink weak subscribers.

Conclusion

There are significant turnaround at a tremendous rate in the area of bio-medicine in contemporary society which aid life, improve life span through gene therapy, human clones, and assured birth and death control through scientific and technological innovations. But, these improved activities in Bio-tech if not controlled by the initiation of some forms of ethical rules then the supposed benefits from biomedical practice will elude mankind and in turn bring pains and agony upon man due in part by the current abuses in their practices.

The above trend of thought informed the need to season biomedical ethics with religious precepts without which the benefits, sublime gains and grand objectives in the biomedical profession will not be realized; if religious precepts in the scriptures as sovereignty of the creator in matter of life, the dignity of human beings in life matter, love for one another as spelt out in the scriptures, not love as in the 'world of man'. And respect for life is to be incorporated into the bioethics for the actualization of sound ethical principles in biomedical practice in order to effect sanctity and orderliness in the profession.

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