

## ABUSE OF VALUE AND SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE IN CONTEMPORARY IGBO LAND

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### **Abstract**

Human life is sacred and highly priced in all known cultures of man. Life is precious and a gift from God; as such, life is treated with utmost care to avoid its violation. However, what obtains in recent times in respect to life is the stark opposite of God's injunction concerning life; especially in Igbo land. The value and sanctity of human life is fast eroding in Igbo land today. It is a situation where innocent human blood is being shed without recourse to its worth, essence and God's injunction forbidding man to kill. Man has become an enemy to himself; meting out an unprecedented violence against his fellow man. This research adopted descriptive phenomenological method and the use of secondary sources of data collection to address the problems identified. It was discovered that there has been an alarming increase at the rate of murder in Igbo land as a result of the activities of Fulani herdsmen, ritual killing and the crackdown of pro-Biafran groups by the security operatives in Igbo land. The quest for wealth, power, fame and domination of others has beclouded the sense of many to the point that they can stop at nothing to get what they want, including shedding of human blood. It advised that government agencies entrusted with the security of human life and property be up and doing. The religious leaders should teach the tenets of their religions to the followers and re-orientate them on the importance of respect for and sanctity of human life.

**Keywords:** Value, Sanctity of Human Life, Human Dignity, Religion and Ethics, Igbo Land

### **Introduction**

Human life is precious, expensive and sacred. Iroegbu (1994) averred that “while almost all societies have a respect for life; Africans have a deep reverential deference for life, especially human life” (p.84). It is for this reason that life is being celebrated at every of its stage from conception to departure. Iroegbu (1994) further noted that:

Its beginning is elaborately celebrated in pregnancy, birth, naming and initiation ceremonies. Its growth and continuity is feasted in adulthood, and adolescence rites, family rites and communal festivities. Its end is buoyantly celebrated in death rites, departure rituals and funeral festivities (p.84).

Life is meant to be nurtured, respected and honoured in line with the originator's purpose for creating it. The agents expected to contribute to its preservation are the human parents who are God's instrument for the arrival of human life on earth; the community who welcomes, nourishes and educates life, the family who loves and feeds life, the neighbour and distant relations, specialists like: doctors, teachers and mentors who positively affect life at one stage or the other.

Human beings have right to live, right to preserve, prolong and protect life and right to die; but do not have right to kill or take life (Iroegbu, 1994). To touch human life especially, innocent life/blood is the greatest of all evils. It is a crime against the creator, the earth, and against humanity in general. It has the weightiest sanction in Africa, especially, in Igbo land. This understanding of the value and sanctity of life is ubiquitous. In its original form, this belief is a religious one. The sanctify of life is an indication that life is a gift from God and therefore cannot be ended by human hand without violating God's law or rejecting God's love (Nwankwo, 2017). It is a sacred gift from God and it is not the proper role of human beings to take it away from anyone. Respect for life is a "seamless garment" which covers the entire fabric of living creation.

However, in Igbo land today, Nigeria and other parts of Africa, the respect for life, its value and sanctity have been eroded. Life is becoming meaningless and worthless given its constant abuse and wastage in the society. It is a situation (not to sound ambiguous), where animal life, power, wealth, position, fame, ego and sense of domination of one tribe by the others are taking precedence over human life. The spate of killing and spilling of human blood especially innocent ones in many parts of Igbo land is becoming a culture and it seems little or nothing is being done to ameliorate it. This fact is collaborated by the activities of suspected killer Fulani herdsmen and operative of Nigerian security who are bent on cracking down innocent pro-Biafran protesters (Okonkwo, 2016), among other factors. A few statistical analyses of the killings and abuse of human life in Igbo land will suffice in what follows.

The South-East Coalition of Human Rights Organization (SBCHROs) according to Okonkwo (2016), estimates that about 80 members of pro-Biafra group and their supporters have been killed by Nigerian security operatives under the directives of the Nigerian government between August 2015 and February 2016. Ebirike (2016) reported that in December 2015, about 11 people lost their lives, while 6 people lost their lives in Aba in February, 2016. Accordingly Jonah (2018) noted that at Ezi Nze in Enugu State, Fulani herdsmen killed several young men in July, 2018; and equally demanded N2 million compensation for purported killing of undisclosed number of cows. In the same line of thought the Intersociety Nigeria Report (2018), disclosed that no fewer than 150, mainly supporters of Biafra Indigenous People (IPOB) were killed on 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> of September 2017 in Afara Ukwu, Umuahia, Isiala-Ngwa and Aba, all in Abia State. While over 100 unarmed and defenceless others were also shot and wounded in various place in the State. Aborisade (2019) described the odious and dastardly acts of killing of two people (a man and a woman) in Enugu State, Nigeria by men suspected to be Fulani herdsmen. This is just a tip of the iceberg of what is actually happening in Igbo land and elsewhere in Nigeria in terms of human life abuses. There are other unreported killings by kidnapers, ritual killers, sorcerers and others in Igbo land. These problems and more

caught the attention of the researchers in their efforts to finding solution to the unfortunate menace in the land.

This research adopted descriptive phenomenology. This method of research investigates people's experiences to reveal what lies hidden in them. It has the intention of interpreting such experiences in order to illuminate and educate the minds. This method will be applied in the effort to uncover the menaces of abuse of value and sanctity of human life and how this has impugned the culture that respects and values human life. Secondary sources of data collection will equally be employed to expound the issues raised. This is in the area of use of published and unpublished materials, and online sources that detailed the research topic under consideration.

The major objective of this paper is to underscore the value, sanctity and essence of human life in the light of God's injunction to man: "You shall not kill" (Exodus 20:13). It is also the aim of the paper to unravel the reasons for the rampant killings and neglect of the sanctity of life in Igbo land and elsewhere in Nigeria and Africa. Disclosing the methods and agents of human life abuses is part of the objectives of this research. The paper will equally consider the actions of the government, security agencies, the Church and the community leaders in their bid to ameliorate the menace that portrays human life as worthless in the society. In the next sub-heading attention will be given to discussing the theories origin of life.

### **Theories of Origin of Life**

Several theories have been adduced by scientists on the possible origin of life. Ojiako, (1998) discussed three theories of origin of life in his work namely: Spontaneous Generation by Aristotle, Panspermia by Anaxagoras, and Evolution theory by Darwin.

'Spontaneous Generation' according to him, is one of the earliest theories proposed by Aristotle. He believed that life could originate from decaying organic matter. This theory presupposes that life just emerged spontaneously on earth. (p. 40).

Another theory is that of 'Panspermia.' This was propounded by Anaxagoras. It holds that living creatures on earth are produced from "ethereal germs of life," seeds or germs thrown out of space by celestial winds (p.41).

'Evolution theory' is without doubt the most accepted hypothesis about the origin of life. This was proposed by Charles Darwin in 1859. He held that higher organisms arose from very little organisms in a consistent and hierarchical pattern (p.42).

These theories did not put to rest the question of the origin of life. Many scholars have opposed these theories with latest discoveries and more researches are going on in this regard. The most acceptable of the theories by this paper is that of the creationism.

According to Gunn (2004), creationism is the [religious belief](#) that the [universe](#) and [life](#) originated "from specific acts of [divine creation](#)" as opposed to through natural processes, such as [evolution](#). The basis for many creationists' beliefs is a literal or quasi-literal interpretation of the [Old Testament](#), especially from stories in the [book of Genesis](#): The [Genesis creation narrative](#) (Genesis 1–2) describes how [God](#) brings the Universe into being in a series of creative acts over six days and places the first man and woman ([Adam and Eve](#)) in a divine garden (the [Garden of Eden](#)). This story is the basis of creationist cosmology and biology (Brosseau, ed. 2015). It is equally the basis for existence of all lives on planet earth. The researchers will now consider in what follows, the human life

and person or being.

### **The Genesis of Human Life and Person**

Philosophers have associated life with a vital or energizing principle or phenomenon known as soul, entelechy, élan vital etc. Iroegbu (2000) agreed that, “it is the principle of activity, growth and fulfilment in beings” (p. 79). The more elevated the life, the more efficient the functions of acting, growth, reproduction and other characteristics of life that a given living being will possess.

Life is that which makes a being the most respectable of creatures. In being self-communication, life is that which most enriches the universe. It makes, creates and issues in progress the reality of being in its various forms and levels. In a most pre-eminent degree, human life is the life that achieves the highest quality of being-with life. Nana & Udom (2024:111), assert that communal life is one unique aspect of our cultural life that promotes peaceful co-existence as emphasis is not on individuals but on community.

The human person is known to be made up, not only of one part, the body, but also the soul and the mind. Obilor (1994) traced the human person from Biblical perspectives. He maintained that:

Man is a “living being” (Gen. 2:7). The breath of life departs and man is left a “dead being.” Here the word “being” equates the Hebrew *nephesh* which is often rendered in English as “soul” but meaning “the person.” In Greek it is known as *psyche* meaning the breath used in breathing (p. 29).

One indispensable point worthy of note here is that human person is an integral being. This goes to mean that man, though with various parts: body, soul and spirit; is an entity. This is what Obilor (1994) described in his anthropological world-view of man. He said, “Man is neither a dichotomy of body and soul nor a trichotomy of body, soul and spirit; rather man is a unity of personality” (p. 29). No part of human body can function properly without the other. The soul without the body remains abstract. The person cannot even think without his or her physical brain (Iroegbu, 2005). Haring agreed to this by saying that:

The consciousness, the deepest insights and expressions of the spiritual person are never possible without the concurrence of the body, most specifically without cerebral-cortical activity (p. 212).

Ezekwonna (2005) accentuated what human life and person entail in Igbo land. He maintained that:

Human person or *Mma-ndu* literally means the beauty of life; so human beings are the beauty of life. Man as *Mma-ndu* (*mmadu*) is made up of life (*Ndu*), intellect (*uche*) and body (*ahu*). It is the sole function of life to hold body and intellect together for others cannot function without it. Keeping to this togetherness, man is said to be a human being (p. 118).

In effect, human life is the highest cherished value in Igbo society. Names such as *Ndu ka aku* – life is greater than wealth, *Ndu bu isi* – life is of supreme importance are common names given to children by the parents. *Ndu*-(life) refers to the human person and these names indicate that no matter the achievements of the individual, if those successes do not lead to the preservation and increase of life, they are meaningless. Therefore, life is not a cheap property but rather what makes man a noble and valuable

being.

Human life is not animal life. Life actually is diverse. The first is the variety of lives in the universe.

There are many types of organisms. These include minute living things like amoeba and spirogyra, plants and animals. These have life but different levels, proportions and for different purposes.

Human life begins immediately at the moment of conception through the fertilization of female egg (ovum) by the male sperm in the womb. The zygote so formed is immediately given a soul by God. The granting of soul (ensoulment) is instantly done at conception. This however, cannot be mathematically, demonstrated (Iroegbu, 2005).

There a human being as a person begins to live and develop. This human person at this stage of development is said to have been actualised through humanisation, socialization and individualization. That is to say the person is fully, substantively and legally person. This is so because there is nothing like half a person. A person is either a person or he or she is not. However, full life begins when the person has developed the essential characteristics of personhood. These include the ensoulment, genetic code, and formation of individual human parts. Fullest life begins when one begins to exercise relevant human dynamic functions of immanent and transient activities. All these will gear toward the purpose for which life is made (Iroegbu, 2005). Hence, the coming into being of human person and life. But has life any value in Igbo land?

#### **Concept of Value and Sanctity of Human Life in Igbo Land**

Every people and society has values that are largely cherished and shared by their members. Fagothey (1959) understood value to mean, “what appeals to us which may supply a need, satisfy a desire, arouse an interest, stimulate an emotion, provoke a response, motivate a deed or merely draw an approval” (p. 72). Obi (2014) agreed that value inspires and promotes harmony in the family, community, society and nation.

In Igbo land, what is of value is usually described as, “*ihe di mma*” (what is good) or, “*ihe oma*” (what is beautiful). Corroborating the above use of the term, Ilogu (1985) explained value as, “the quality of a thing that makes it more or less desirable or useful. It expresses the significance, which is ascribed to a particular experience, activity or life in general” (p. 119).

Onyewuenyi (2002) noted that, “life is the consciousness of being or existing. In a deeper metaphysical note, it is for the Igbo, not understood only in the sense of bodily mortal life or abundant physical prowess but also as existence, being” (p.419). Accordingly, Iroegbu (1995) opined that, “life may be defined as the active principle functioning of a being toward the realization of its full potential for its own good and for the good of the totality of being” (p. 365). In traditional African society, the highest good or the *Sumum Bonum* of everything is life (Nwala, 1985). Among other things, Igbo values life as the most cherished and the centre on which other aspects of life revolve.

*Ndu* (life) is the foundation on which the understanding of the human person (*mma-ndu*) and the community (*umunna*) is built. This important belief in the supremacy of life is reflected both in the cosmological order and in the life and activities of the people. When prayers or sacrifices are offered to God and ancestors it is always for the interest of humanity and preservation of life. Most of the works and purposes of Igbo people circulate around life preservation. Even when they make human sacrifices as in the

primitive era, it was claimed to be of a positive end, which was to appease the gods and protect the human family (Iherue, 2011). African world view is principally anthropocentric. It is for this understanding that the Igbo say *Ndu bu isi*, (life first).

*Mma-ndu* is noble and good; yet, what determines man's nobility and goodness is *Ndu* (life). Survival in a tolerable way is a major concern of the Igbo people and this has in a large measure aided in determining their attitude to life. Life for them is priceless and good health is regarded as the highest value, for it relates to life's sustenance. As a result, ill-health or sickness is seen as a depreciation of the worth and quality of the human person (Okafor, 1992).

The sanctity of life as conceived by the Igbo people borders on their conception of the origin of life. Life to them is a divine given. It originates from God; thus the emphasis on its sacredness. In the light of this view of life by the Igbo, Emenanjo (2001) underscored the great respect the Igbo have for life. He said, "the rural Igbo had very great respect for *ndu* because it comes from God. It is greater than money or wealth. It cannot be founded by a blacksmith. All things are only useful if they have life" (p. 23). Igbo price life above every other thing. Igbo has great respect for the sacredness of life. Human life was held in great esteem. A violation of human life was considered the greatest crime anyone could commit.

Due to the importance and sanctity attached to human life, any action that promotes it is *ihe oma* – a good act; on the contrary, any action that militates against life is *ihe ojoo*, a bad omen, *aru* or *nso ala* - abomination. Following this line of thought, Tempels (1959) noted that "in African societies, life force is a central value. Whatever increases it is good and whatever decreases it is bad. Wrong is anything that destroys or harms one's life-force or the life force of others" (p.45). Accordingly, Okafor (1992) affirmed that, "life is intrinsically valuable and it is everyone's duty to support and nourish one's life as well as that of others. This "sacredness" attached to life is extended even to the life of the unborn; hence, abortion is extremely intolerable in Igbo society" (p. 79).

From the Igbo theological perspective, respect for human life serves as a way of relating and pleasing God. Ethically, it expresses the value and dignity attached to the human person as a being in relationship with others. For this reason anything that affects human life adversely is taken seriously.

### **Right to Life and the Dignity of Human Person**

Rights as defined are a standard or rule of action. It means that which is equitably or morally just, just treatment or justifiable claim. (Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology, 1996). To talk of right, is to talk of what should be irrespective of its absence. Even where one is murdered as adult, youth, child or baby, the right to live is nevertheless not abrogated by that heinous act of murder. Life is a right to all who live. It is an imperative. One may not have the right to exist, that is, to have come to be in the first instance; but once one has been born, such a one should not be denied the right to continue to exist without serious justification (Iroegbu, 1995).

*All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Everybody is entitled to all the rights and freedom set forth in the declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of*

*person. No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms* (Iwe, 1979).

Iwe (1979) further enumerated all the sets of fundamental human rights enshrined in the constitution for the good of human person. He itemized them thus:

Right to life, right to dignity of human person, right to personal liberty, right to fair hearing, right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, right to freedom of expression and the press, right to peaceful assembly and association, right to freedom of movement. Right to freedom of discrimination and right to property (p. 252).

Peschke (1978) noted that, “respect for a person's life, his bodily and mental integrity and health belongs to the fundamental rights of man. To this right corresponds the duty of respecting the health and life of others as well as one's own person” (p. 307). According to Nana, 2019, it is true that the traditional religion practices of the African are anthropocentric in the sense that all the religions invariably points to one objective namely, human life and it's preservation.

The Igbo notion of 'right' according to Okafor (1992) can only be understood with reference to concrete social realities. For the Igbo, rights are not abstract concepts outlined in a constitutional preamble but concrete social phenomenon understood and exercised by all and sundry.

Okafor (1992) affirmed that “in Igbo land, individual rights are highly respected. The basic rights and the ones that are held as natural and sacred are the right to life and property” (p.77). Right to life is natural and inalienable because it is conferred on the individual by *Ala*- the mother earth. No individual or group of people has right to interfere with his/her own life or the lives of others, without incurring the anger of the gods. To this end all forms of killings are forbidden in Igbo land as already been mentioned. Thus, life must be preserved at all cost, except one: life itself. Therefore, nothing lower than life can be exchanged for it. It has no alternative, no substitute. The man in the street puts it this simply: life has no duplicate (Iroegbu, 1995).

The emphasis here is that every person has a right to life and no one shall be deprived intentionally of his life, save in execution of the sentence of a court in respect of a criminal offence of which he has been found guilty (Iwe, 1979).

Correa, and Segreccia, eds. (2002), affirmed that “human dignity indicates an expression of appreciation of the importance of the individual which as an attribute is meant to be inherent in every human person, and in essence, a fundamental value of every human being” (p. 87). This concept has general acceptability as a basic ethical and legal principle drawing upon the universal experience of the dynamics of recognitions. It is clearly in everyone's interest to be respected as having human dignity.

The inalienability of human dignity in the life of the human person lies on the fact that it is an essential part of their being, an intrinsic quality that can never be separated from other essential aspects of their existence. As a result of this natural awareness of the sense of dignity, its abuse is normally met with resistance, whether intended or as a reflex action. Corroborating this idea of the inalienability of human dignity, the Virginia Bill of Rights (1776) asserts that, “all people are born equal, free and have certain inborn rights that, as soon as individuals accept the status of society, may not be taken away by any later

agreements made by their descendants” (Vol. 1). The respect for human dignity can in no way be separated from obedience to this principle. It is therefore pertinent to “consider each neighbour without exception as another self, taking into account first of all his life and the means necessary for living it with dignity” (Vatican 11 Document: *Gaudium et Spes*, Art., 26).

From this perspective then the respect for human dignity cannot be realized in a vacuum as it is all about the basic good of collective and individual life which involves people and a system of doing things. This way of doing things has to do with the norms and patterns of living where human dignity and value are expressed in a system which is found in the culture of the people.

#### **Abuses and Threats to Life and Human Existence in Igbo Land: Why?**

The value and sanctity of human life as already noted in the introduction, have been under serious threat and constantly abused in recent times. The number of human deaths recorded on daily basis in Igbo land, Nigeria and Africa in general is alarming. According to the latest World Health Organization, (WHO), data published for 2018 life expectancy in Nigeria; a male given birth to in Nigeria in 2018 is expected to live approximately 54.7 years while a female is expected to live approximately 55.7 years in good health. The data shows Nigeria has a World life expectancy ranking of 178 out of 192 ranked countries (WHO, 2018). If this rating is anything to go by, then it presupposes an alteration on what the original plan of God for man is. God purposed that man should live longer than this on earth (Psalms 90:10).

Man's, wickedness and inhumanity to fellow man, murder in all forms: herdsmen killing and kidnapping, ritual killing, sorcery, abortion, suicide and war have been attributed to as the causes and means through which human life abuses and threat to human existence on earth are perpetrated today (WHO, 2018). The researchers, in what follows, have summarized few of these ugly trends that keep posing threats to the value and sanctity of human life in Igbo land. However, the researchers' major thrust shall be the activities of killer Fulani herdsmen and ritual killings in Igbo land; among others.

Nkwopara, Okoli, eds. (2015) detailed the menace of killer Fulani herdsmen in Igbo land. They observed that “in Igbo land today, incidents of killing, robbery, rape, maiming and kidnapping by the cattle herdsmen have inflicted pains on most farmers, even as farm produce have been drastically affected.” Farmers in most parts, are leaving in fear; and have scampered to safety in desperate bids to avoid being hacked down by the rampaging herdsmen. Nana (2025:111) enthuse that the moral values are reflected in various aspects of life, including family relationships, social conduct, and communal duties.

It is not in doubt that there is hardly any community in the South-East geo-political zone where you will not find Fulani herdsmen. What is however most disturbing to farmers and land owners is the way they forcefully colonize, kill, maim and allow their cattle to destroy farm crops wherever they set their feet.

The stories trailing the rampage of Fulani herdsmen and their cattle in the South-East are therefore as ugly as they are most discomfiting. The activities of these herdsmen in some communities in Enugu and Abia States, for example, have become a source of great worry to the people. They are always armed to the teeth with dangerous weapons, including AK47, charms and deadly sharp daggers and machetes and are often ready to attack the farm owners at the least confrontation.

and similar incidents prompted a peaceful protest by women in Ishiagu community against rampant abduction of children for rituals.

Onyejiuwa in Owerri (2015), reports that in Imo State, there were pockets of ritual killings and cases of missing persons, who were either found days later, with their vital organs missing or simply disappeared without trace. Recently, there were reported cases of suspected ritual killings especially in Owerri, the state capital. Among them was the discovery of the lifeless bodies of two female students of the Imo State University, with some of their organs missing. The bodies fished out from the Nworie River on old Nekede road in Owerri metropolis, were suspected to have been dumped in the river by suspected ritual killers. Also, there was a reported case of the body of an unidentified young man with missing organs found floating in the Okitankwo stream in Umuchu Uratta village in Owerri North council area.

Onuoha and Sampson (2015) accounted the activities of ritual killers in Abia State. They noted that ritual killing seemed to have become a regular occurrence in some parts of the state to the extent that many have become apprehensive when travelling in the state. Not long ago, a newly born baby was snatched from the labour room while the mother was battling for survival from post-delivery bleeding. The baby was yet to be found as at the time of this report and the suspicion is that it must have been used for ritual.

Few days after the tot was snatched, the body of a woman without breasts, eyes, and other vital organs was found in a bush path. Before that incident, a young man, residing in a village in Ohuhu sliced the throat of another young man who passed a night with him in his apartment and fled the village. He was later caught in far away Port Harcourt, River State, where he had run to for safety. He was quoted as saying that a highly placed son of a notable personality within the community had commissioned him to kill the young man and bring some parts of his body. Two years ago, a woman that went to her farm in Ohuhu near Umuahia in the evening was killed and some of her vital organs removed by unknown persons (Onuoha and Sampson, 2015).

These vampires hide under different covers to get their victims. For some, they kidnap their victims from various points, while others who pretend to be commercial bus drivers, pick unsuspecting commuters at bus-stop only to take them to their slaughter slabs to carry out what they know how to do best.

The spate of human killing in Igbo land and Nigeria generally could be attributed to human degeneration to bestiality. It is as a result the erosion of moral virtues and value for human life. Man today in many respects, behaves like animals in the jungle: killing, eating, dominating and making merchandise of fellow man in order to make wealth and live big in the society. Another factor for this desecration of human life is man's neglect and disobedience to God's law. God's injunction to man not to kill, in Exodus 20: 13 has been flagrantly neglected and abused; thus man's inhumanity to man.

Power, fame and ethnic dominance, injustice and corruption are other reasons why human lives have been relegated to the background. It is a situation where for show of power, fame, the desire by one ethnic group to wipe out others in Nigeria, lack of justice and corruption; many lives have been wasted. There is no sign of this menace abating in the near future, unless drastic measures are taken.

Life is sacrosanct and must not be treated with levity. Africans and especially, the Igbo

The menace of Fulani herdsmen in Nigeria especially, Igbo land calls for serious concern by all and sundry. It has become almost a daily dismal. They invade, ravage, abuse and destroy human lives, property and displace communities at any slightest provocation. These set of human life abusers and desecrators have become a threat to Igbo land and Nigeria as a whole (Nkwopara, Okoli, eds., 2015). The statistics of human deaths occasioned by the activities of this deadly sect have noted in the introduction, including that of the crackdown by the Nigerian security operatives of the pro-Biafran groups in Igbo land.

Another major inhuman activity resulting in the abuse and desecration of human life in Igbo land and Nigeria is the ritual killing. Human parts for sale have become a lucrative business in Nigeria. The rate of killings for ritual purposes is gradually assuming an alarming dimension in Nigeria with little or no effort by concerned government agencies to checkmate the trend.

It is also shocking to know that some acclaimed high and mighty indulge in ritual killings. For instance, some politicians and government officials have been accused by arrested suspects and herbalists who allege that they use human beings for rituals in order to sustain their affluence as well as remain in positions of power. Investigations revealed that cases of ritual killings and disappearance of persons are usually high whenever elections are around the corner (Nwafor, 2017).

In ancient times, ritual killing was alien to Igbo land except those carried out to appease the gods. But with the passage of time and development of new habits, especially the get-rich-quick attitude and consequent obscene show of affluence, ritual murder became widespread in the South East zone of the country. Sunday News, (2015) captured series of activities of ritual killing in Igbo land that took place in recent times

Obi (2015) reported of the existence of an evil forest in Enugu State where suspected ritual killers dismember their victims recently. Fresh and decomposing human parts were found in the forest located at Inyi, Enugu Ezike in the Igboeze North Local Government of the State. It was suspected that victims were taken to the forest and butchered by their assailants who in turn removed vital parts needed for money-spinning rituals.

In Anambra State, Ekpunobi and Uzor (2015) report that ritual killings seldom occur in the commercial city of Onitsha, because the area is dominated by businessmen, who believe in utilizing their time and talent to create wealth instead of engaging in diabolical means of making it in life. The fact, however, remains that those who found it difficult to remain afloat through hard work resorted to violent crimes such as armed robbery and kidnapping.

Osuji (2015) reports that cases of ritual murder abound in Ebonyi State and that several cases were yet to be resolved by the police. One of the most agonizing was the abduction of seven under-aged children at Ishiagu community. Among them, was a nine-month old baby snatched from its mother, while she was breast-feeding the baby. The hoodlums later moved into the family's bedroom and abducted two other children aged between two and three years. Also, a 32-year-old nursing mother, watched helplessly as some hoodlums forcibly took away her two children, eight months old and three-year-old in 2012. This

love their lives and value it. Killing in all its forms is an offence not just for the offender or offended but to the entire community. It is an abomination. The sanctity of life makes it an abomination for anyone under any circumstances to take his/her own life or that of others. The Igbo saying "*Nduka*"- life is supreme - is expressive of the Igbo regard for life." Any form of materialism which ultimately leads to the destruction of life is alien and destructive in Igbo culture (Onwubiko, 1991). To put ameliorate this ugly trend; there is need to restore the values and sanctity of human life.

### **Restoring the Values and Sanctity of Human Life: The Way Out**

Nwankwo (2017) said that "mores require that human life be kept sacred" (p. 64). The sacredness attached to human life as already noted, has a lot to do with the Igbo understanding that life comes from God (*Chukwu-okike*). Consequently, no one has right over the life of the other for every life belongs to God. The need to emphasis this theological undercurrent for social mutuality has become very imperative. This is to maintain among the people and the entire humanity the desired value, dignity and sanctity of human life. To this end, all hands must be on deck.

One of the major thrusts of government is the security of lives and property of her citizens. Any government that fails in this respect has failed in all. In order to protect the lives of people, government should strive to provide enough and sophisticated security personnel in order to tackle security challenges, such as robbery, kidnapping, and killing by herdsmen and others threats to human lives in the land. Obi and Iwuoha (2015) noted that Nigerians need to absolutely cultivate the habit of security consciousness and rapidly report any equivocal security situation to the appropriate authority immediately.

Government should endeavour to create wealth in the land by creating jobs and reducing poverty. The saying that 'an idle person is the devils workshop' is true here. The reason why most youths engage in robbery, kidnapping, ritual killing is because of lack of job in the land. Achibong (1987) succinctly remarks,

"The general peace and stability of this country has been further threatened by other societal problems such as unemployment, especially of young qualified people, mass retrenchment of workers owing to the miserable state of the economy, inflation, scarcity of essential commodities, etc. Thus, they pollute the atmosphere under which the modern youth lives and grows" (p. 3).

The problem of the ravaging herdsmen should be addressed headlong by experts to avoid constant clash and loss of live between them and other Nigerians. The menace of these herders is becoming a serious threat to communities in Nigeria, where some risk ethnic cleansing.

The stand of the Church on the issues under discussion is very clear and explicit. The Church condemns in its entirety any form of killing, because it holds human life sacred and as gift from God. St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas form the major foundation on which the Church bases her stand on matters concerning suicide, abortion and other forms of killing. The condemnation of killing by these men, stem from the biblical concept of "thou shall not kill" which stands generally against all forms of homicide (Nwankwo, 2017).

The Council Fathers emphasized during the Vatican Council II, observed that:

The varieties of crime are numerous: all offenses against life itself, such as murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia and willful suicide; all violation of integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, physical and mental torture, undue psychological pressures; all offenses against human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children, degrading working condition where men are treated as mere tools for profit rather than free and responsible persons. All these and the like are criminal act. They poison civilization, and they debase the perpetrators more than the victims and militate against the honor of the creator.

It is the responsibility of the Church and other religious institutions in Nigeria teach, preach and re-orientate their followers on the need to respect human life and dignity.

The traditional rulers, parents and leaders of thought in various Igbo land should ensure that the value and sanctity of life is restored in their communities. Offenders should be adequately sanctioned according to both the traditional and modern system of punishment. This way, people will learn how to value and respect the sacredness of human life.

### **Conclusion**

Life is the ultimate value, the super-value that gives worth to all other values. It has supreme worth and must be made to be so. Man has right to life, preserve and elongate live but not to terminate life. It is a divine gift to man. All efforts should be geared toward making the most out of life to enable the possessors attain the ultimate goal of coming into existence. Human life is not animal life or any other form of sub-human life and as such must be dignified and sanctified.

All those who engage in the nefarious act of shedding human blood in Igbo land and Nigeria (the Fulani herdsmen, security operatives who fail in their duties by cracking down the innocent protesters in Igbo land, kidnappers, ritual killers, and others) must embrace God's injunction and be re-orientated through teachings of the Church and other religions to have value and respect for human life.

In fact the activities of Fulani herdsmen in Igbo land must be checked by all concerned. Solution to their constant desecration of Igbo land by killing, maiming, kidnapping, raping and all manner of atrocities committed by them must be addressed headlong. Communities in Igbo land should form local vigilante and other forms of security measure to tackle this menace. Also, the security operatives in the South East should cease from killing innocent, harmless and armless protesters in any part of Igbo land. They should find a better and more intelligent way of handing this matter.

The church condemns and sees killing at any stage both born and unborn as very sacrilegious both in the eyes of God and His children. In the Ten Commandments given to Moses which has been, and is still one of the tools that guides the Church, it is stated clearly at the sixth point that- "Thou shall not kill" (Exodus 20: 13).

The government, security agencies and traditional rulers should step up action to ensure that lives of people under their watch are protected. All hands must be on deck to ensure that the values, dignity and sanctity of human life are maintained in a society where

human life is becoming almost worthless.

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