

**THE CATHOLIC CHURCH ON THE INTEGRITY OF THE HUMAN BODY  
AND ITS APPLICATIONS IN NIGERIAN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY**

*Anthony B. C. Chiegboka*

&

*Damian-Mary Chukwunenye Moneke*

*Department of Religion and Human Relations,  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka*

DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.31621.83688

**Abstract**

*In recent years, the domain of theology of the body has seen an increased interest not only in how the state and the church conceive the integrity of the body and sacredness of human life but also in the relation between divine and human dimensions of the human body. The concept of integrity of the human body cuts across the diverse realms of theology, philosophy, ethical thoughts, and psychology. In other words, it is an interdisciplinary subject. It's observable that Nigerians have not appropriated the sacredness of the human body from a Roman Catholic perspective. Hence the thrust of this research is the awakening of the consciousness of Nigerians on the integrity of the human body. The research makes use of oral interviews, survey questionnaires, and both secondary and primary sources of data. Physical and electronic modes of data collection are used to build up the arguments and evidence in this research. The collected data are phenomenologically interpreted and inductively applied. This research uncovered some startling realities, dimensions and implications of this area of scholarship often ignored; such as the interconnectedness of the human body, the human life and the human person; and the theological, ethical and ecological implications of abuse of the human body. John Paul II's theological thoughts gave useful insights and information on the integrity of the body, the sacredness of life, and the dignity of the human person, which are intertwined. The Literature review undertaken reveals the intelligent works of some scholars in this area of scholarship, which demonstrate that the area is researchable. Nevertheless, the originality of this research remains identifiable in the title, content, methodology, logical presentation of data, and critical analysis of collected data. The study concluded that despite the apparent abuse in all ramifications of the body in contemporary Nigerian society a reshaping of the thinking of people in the light of the Roman Catholic Church perspective will contribute to the solution of the problem.*

**Keywords:** Phenomenology, Interconnectedness, Catholic Church

## **Introduction**

God created the human person not just as a corporal sensual being but also as a spiritual being. The human person is therefore a composite of body and soul, corporal and spiritual. Both the latter and the former are intertwined and inseparable here on the planet earth. The human person is therefore not a biological specimen. He/she is a self-conscious person, capable of knowing and conforming freely to the demands of his nature.

To affirm his existence here on earth, the human person must exist in a body. It is an inalienable right that flows from God Himself in the book of Genesis. Having created everything both living and non-living things, God created a human being in His image and likeness as a living being (Gen. 1:26-31). In these verses, it is evident that among all the created things, it is only the human person that God created in His image and likeness. The human person is the only living body that is endowed with the faculty of reason and the soul. The human person exists in the world about his Creator and his fellow creatures. Therefore, any abuse of the human body in the light of the supra argument is offensive to God. Hence excessive and illegitimate bodily pleasure is inappropriate. The body is not to be idolized but should be revered. The human body is therefore undeniably a gift from God (cf. Job 1:21). God gives the body and takes it back when He wants. Life is given to humans in a physical body. Every terrestrial being must necessarily need a material body, which differentiates it from every celestial being. God's mystery of earthly life is revealed in the body. It follows that God remains the author and finisher of our human body and existence. He wields the sole authority to either give or take the physical body. Hence the human body is therefore necessarily sacred and importantly useful.

Life is precious, hence the instinct for self-preservation and survival. To preserve bodily life, the integrity of the human body ought to be maintained. No one has the right to annihilate or mutilate his or her body or even that of another person. Regrettably, however, some people in Nigeria have little or no regard for the body, which explains why they involve themselves in actions that could negate the integrity and the sacredness of the body. The experiential and observable incessant abuse of the body of all sorts, reckless shedding of blood, sexual abuses and other obnoxious acts that undermine the integrity of the body are problems in contemporary Nigerian society that triggered this research. One cannot but ask the question, does the body possess spiritual significance beyond its material importance? In other words, are humans authorized by their Creator to use their bodies the way it pleases them? Barth (1942) avers that the human person is destined to be the covenant partner of God and that this determination characterizes his being as being an encounter with his fellow man. His ordination to be in covenant relation with God has its counterpart in the fact that his humanity, the special mode of his being, is by nature and essence a being in fellow humanity. Unfortunately, it appears that Nigerian

Christians and non-Christians alike have not adequately appropriated this theology of the body from a Roman Catholic perspective. Hence, this work seeks to evaluate this problem within the context of Nigeria, in the light Roman Catholic perspective which John Paul II expounded in his *Theology of the Body*. This theology of the body seems not to have been adequately explored in African institutions, probably as a result of misconception and misinterpretation of its theological claims.

The purpose of this research, therefore, is to examine critically Roman Catholic Church's theological thought on the integrity of the human body with special reference to the "theology of the body" of John Paul II; evaluate her justifications to see if they have any merit when contextualized within the framework of contemporary Nigeria, taking cognizance also of the Roman Catholic's conception of human nature and human life. In other words, this research simply uses the Roman Catholic Church's position on the integrity of the human body to address the incessant abuse of the human body in contemporary Nigeria. Then, this research will bring out logically the implications of the integrity of the human body with particular reference to Nigerian society and the Church in Nigeria, from personal reflection. The major concern of this research is not to investigate and discuss all the abuses of the human body, but it concerns itself with violent physical abuses on the body, such as human trafficking, rape, abortion, war, physical attacks and conflicts, corporal punishment, suicide etc., which violate natural laws and denies the victims the right to a happy living. This research is aware that there are other abuses of the body, such as pornography, nudity, tattoo, fornication, transgender etc. This research aims to reshape the erroneous thinking of some Nigerians, in a bid to curb, if not eradicate, the mayhem prevalent in contemporary Nigerian society and by extension the global community. When this is achieved, the sanctity and integrity of the human body will be prioritized in our society.

### **Theoretical Framework**

To argue for the integrity of the human body, which guarantees a happy bodily life, and to push back against arguments promoting the abuse of the human body; natural law theory is very relevant.

### **Natural Law Theory**

Natural Law Theory proposes that as physical laws of nature exist, so do universal moral laws. These laws disclose themselves to us upon close examination of the world and the nature of humans. Aspects of natural law theory date back to Plato, who posited the existence of transcendental "Forms" (Plato, 1992). Particular instances of these forms –

such as the Good, the True, and the Beautiful – are reflected in human life. To “see” the form of the Good (to have a clear idea of it) and incarnate it in one’s deeds is both a cause and consequence of wisdom. While Plato alluded to what we today refer to as “natural law,” the Stoics developed the theory more fully. The Stoics claim that the order of the universe is fundamentally rational. Human rationality, therefore, is a person’s innate moral compass. To reason and act rationally is to be in harmony with the universe. Violence and vice are consequences of irrationality and not being in harmony with universal laws.

There have been several disagreements among scholars over the meaning of natural law (the notion is distinct from that of the law of nature) and its relation to positive law. It was Aristotle (384–322 BCE) who opined that what was “just by nature” was not always the same as what was “just by law,” that there was a natural justice valid everywhere with the same force and “not existing by people’s thinking this or that,” and that appeal could be made to it from positive law. However, he drew his examples of natural law primarily from his observation of the Greeks in their city-states, who subordinated women to men, slaves to citizens, and “barbarians” to Hellenes. In contrast, the Stoics conceived of an entirely egalitarian law of nature in conformity with the logos (reason) inherent in the human mind. Roman jurists paid lip service to this notion, which was reflected in the writings of St. Paul, who described a law “written in the hearts” of the Gentiles (Romans 2:14–15).

St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430) embraced Paul’s notion and developed the idea of man having lived freely under natural law before his fall and subsequent bondage under sin and positive law. In the 12th century, Gratian, an Italian monk and father of the study of canon law, equated natural law with divine law—that is, with the revealed law of the Old and the New Testament, in particular the Christian version of the Golden Rule.

If natural law is born to the Greeks, it comes of age with the Roman Catholic Church. Perhaps the most famous of natural law theorists are St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274). According to Aquinas’s theology, natural law is integral to divine providence. “Eternal law” is the overarching law, established by God, which gives the order to the chaos of creation. The portion of eternal law about human beings is, to Aquinas, natural law. Unlike other natural bodies (earth and animals for instance), humans are not determined by natural law. Instead, God has instilled in us our sense of rationality. For this reason, we apprehend and participate in His eternal law if we so choose. Like the Stoics, then, Aquinas thinks that lucid reasoning is how to discern universal moral truth and, by acting following it, fulfil our destinies (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2002).

He propounded an influential systematization, maintaining that, though the eternal law of divine reason is unknowable to us in its perfection as it exists in God's mind, it is known to us in part not only by revelation but also by the operations of our reason. The law of nature, which is "nothing else than the participation of the eternal law in the rational creature," thus comprises those precepts that humankind can formulate—namely, the preservation of one's good, the fulfilment of "those inclinations which nature has taught to all animals," and the pursuit of the knowledge of God. Human law must be the particular application of natural law.

On the same subject, other Scholastic thinkers, including the Franciscan philosophers and the Spanish theologian, emphasized divine will instead of divine reason as the source of law. This "voluntarism" influenced the Roman Catholic jurisprudence of the Counter-Reformation in the 16th and early 17th centuries, but the Thomistic doctrine was later revived and reinforced to become the main philosophical ground for the papal exposition of natural right in the social teaching of Pope Leo XIII (1810–1903) and his successors. The confidence in appeals to natural law displayed by 17th- and 18th-century writers such as Locke and the authors of the American Declaration of Independence evaporated in the early 19th century. The philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), as well as the utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), served to weaken the belief that "nature" could be the source of moral or legal norms. In the mid-20th century, however, there was a revival of interest in natural law, sparked by the widespread belief that the Nazi regime of Adolf Hitler, which ruled Germany from 1933 to 1945, had been essentially lawless, even though it also had been the source of a significant amount of positive law. As in previous centuries, the need to challenge the unjust laws of particular states inspired the desire to invoke rules of right and justice held to be natural rather than merely conventional. However, the 19th century's scepticism about invoking nature as a source of moral and legal norms remained powerful, and contemporary writers almost invariably talked of human rights rather than natural rights. This theory is pertinent for the arguments for the integrity of the body and the dignity of the human person because it is the position of the Catholic Church that when natural laws are violated, God's purpose for the human body is not realized but thwarted. Hence, the Roman Catholic Church makes reference to natural law in its moral, ethical and social teachings. It should be noted that human laws: civil and ecclesiastical laws are changing and changeable; while divine laws are unchanging and unchangeable.

### **The Fundamental Right to Integrity of Bodily Life**

Ancient Greek philosophers like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle played key roles in the evolution of human rights in the ancient Greek world. In the list of fundamental Human Rights accepted by the United Nations, article three states that “Everyone has the right to life, Liberty and Security of person” (of United Nations on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights). In the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria with the Amendments 2011, it affirms in 33(1) “Every person has 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 in Nigeria”.

Indeed, the human body is not just a thing one can either manipulate or terminate to suit one’s convenience, whims, and caprices. No one should terminate or bring to expiration his bodily life or that of another person. Unlike what we saw in the ancient Greek and Roman societies, no one has the right to choose bodily life or death, for himself/herself or any other person, not even that of his dependents (slaves, children, or subjects). Therefore, the body is not just a thing that carries the soul, but a treasure of irreplaceable and inestimable value.

The human body has roles that cannot be possible without them. For instance, sexual intercourse, procreation, affirmation of existence, feelings, etc., cannot be possible without the body. The body gives the human person the possibility to exist, relate and procreate. It is a symbol of existence. The body makes cultural symbols like; language, food, dressing, etc., possible. One can communicate with the body either verbally or with bodily signs. According to Bishop Godffery Onah during the Second Aquaviva Conference (2021), the human language is a symbol which transmits ideas. What makes human language and speech possible is the human body. It follows therefore that the human body could be validly said to be the vehicle of ideas and culture.

### **Nigerian Contextual Evaluation of Abuses of the Integrity of the Human Body**

The abuse of the human body in Nigeria leaves one to wonder if the consciousness of the sacredness of the human body has absconded from the mind of many Nigerians. The research undertaken from different parts of Nigeria has revealed that abuse is on the increase. It is appalling to see how the body is mercilessly treated and annihilated by some miscreants.

### **Fulani Herdsmen Attack**

During the course of research on the subtitle many of our respondents expressed their grievances and condemned the actions in strong terms. Many of our respondents opined

that Fulani herdsmen and farmers frequently clash when the former enter community lands with their cattle and allow them to graze unrestrictedly on both cultivated and uncultivated land, destroying vital food and cash crops that are the backbone of the host communities. When villagers try to resist and urge them to leave, the Fulani herders get violent and assault them, often with the help of mercenaries from neighbouring countries such as Chad, Niger, Mali, and Cameroon.

Fulani herdsmen armed with modern weaponry typically attack their target villages at times when they are most vulnerable, like late at night or on Sundays when they are in church, massacring people indiscriminately, especially women and children, burning houses, and stealing property. The north-central region has been the worst impacted in recent months, having seen the terrible attacks by Fulani herdsmen, which have resulted in a high toll of human lives and property, and is still counting its losses. The violence and impunity with which the assailants operate, disregarding the law and the sanctity of life, is particularly concerning. The failure of the Nigerian police and even the military task force to defend the victims who have been ruthlessly slain in their birthplace is disheartening. In the South-east, however, there have been reports of suspected Fulani herdsmen assaults in locations like Enugu state and Ebonyi state.

Tragically this degree of criminal exemption is occurring in a sovereign state with a constitution, which pronounces that the security and government assistance of the residents will be a significant obligation of the state. At present, one has not seen any case given an account of the indictment and likely conviction of any Fulani herder asserted to be behind the brutal killings and annihilation of property in the impacted states and to be sure the nation is over.

### **The brutality of Some Policemen**

Some Policemen brutality, utilization of torment as an inquisitive method and other wanton maltreatments of basic liberties say a portion of the significant imperfections of the Nigerian Police Force which has drawn in open enmity, abuse, and judgment to the Force (Amnesty International, 2014; Ogunode, 2015). Torment, portrayed as one of the most outrageous types of brutality, coming about to both mental and actual results is now and again considered as an essential cross-examination component for social affair key insight (Constanzo and Gerrity, 2009; Justice Project Pakistan, 2014). Experimental examinations have shown that torment and different types of fierce maltreatment can have suffering adverse consequences on survivors and culprits, and are incapable of getting solid data in cross-examination (Egede, 2007).

The exercises of the police as an establishment are intended to be directed at the public and worldwide level by shows, norms and settlements (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966). Despite state preclusions against torment and custodial wrongdoing by the police, torment has been accounted for as being ordinarily utilized in police authorities across Nigeria, which is a significant explanation for the wrong understanding of the integrity of the body (Amnesty International, 2014). As per the Network on Police Reform in Nigeria (NOPRIN, 2010), staff of the Nigeria Police regularly do synopsis executions of people blamed or suspected of wrongdoing; depend on torment as a chief method for examination; perpetrate assault of the two genders, and participate in blackmail at essentially every open door. Fierce treatment of charged people by the police or other policemen is emphatically against Article 5 of the Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials embraced by the General Assembly of the United Nations, goal 34/169 of 17 December 1979:

No law authorization official might cause, prompt or endure any demonstration of torment or other savage, brutal or debasing treatment or discipline, nor may any law requirement official conjure prevalent orders or remarkable conditions like a condition of war or a danger of war, a danger to public safety, inward political shakiness or some other public crisis as a defence of torment or other horrible, barbaric or corrupting treatment or discipline.

A former Inspector-General of Police, Ibrahim Coomasie once blamed the NPF for the "primitive treatment of Nigerians" (Punch, 2016: 38). For example, there were reports from a few female ex-prisoners of sexual maltreatment by cops, including being assaulted and having pepper shower utilized on their private parts. Notwithstanding, in a quick reaction to the Amnesty International report, the NPF dismissed the report wherein the SARS were blamed for tormenting prisoners and requesting pay-offs to free them (Premium Times, 2016). The Police portrayed the report completely as "misdirecting, an unmistakable deception of realities, unconfirmed records and outright bending of the current circumstance in Special Anti-Robbery Squad [SARS] all through the country." The police, in an assertion by its representative, Don Awunah, a Deputy Commissioner of Police, said the report was the trademark outlook and example of Amnesty International to ridicule and chastise public organizations, particularly in agricultural nations like Nigeria. This hence highlights exact examinations coordinated at discovering realities about the treatment of arrestees in police authority the nation over.

### **The integrity of the Body and Corporeal Punishment in Nigeria**



Corporal punishments in schools are a controversial method of discipline that is still employed in schools across some parts of the world, especially in Africa, and Nigeria in particular. People impose penalties on children without regard for their religious or cultural beliefs. It has become so ingrained in the system that even youngsters who are affected by it accept it as a normal course of action. When it comes to instructors' grasp of the significance of these detrimental activities, there is none. Teachers appear to be unaware of the negative consequences of their actions, whether they are psychological or sociological issues or physical or mental effects on the child.

Corporal punishment is defined by the Committee on the Rights of the Child as "any punishment in which physical force is employed and intended to produce any degree of pain or suffering, however minor." Most include striking (smacking, slapping, or spanking) youngsters with the hand or an item such as a whip, stick, belt, slipper, or wooden spoon. However, it can also include kicking, shaking, or tossing children, scratching, pinching, burning, scorching, or forced ingesting (such as cleaning children's mouths with detergent or forcing them to swallow hot spices).

### **Kidnapping, Armed Robbery, and Ritual killing**

The belief in the existence of supernatural powers and the practice of ritual sacrifices, quick money, yahoo boys and money ritual are major phenomena that have been part of Nigerian society for ages. Nigeria and other sub-Saharan African countries have a long-traditional belief that individuals' successes and accomplishments could be realized with the intervention of a mystical power(s) (Moore and Sanders, 2003). This form of belief is still widespread across all ethnic groups and social classes in Nigeria. A significant number of Nigerians hold the conviction that charms and amulets (tied around the body or hung in houses and cars) can protect them against any misfortune, such as an accident, sickness and diseases, stillbirth, and death (Oyewole, 2016).

In addition, people are confident that ritual sacrifices and magical concoctions prepared with bizarre ingredients will bring financial fortunes, fame, and power (Obineke, 2008). Thus, ritual sacrifices are often performed (to achieve these aims) in various forms using different materials. The kinds of ritual sacrifices performed to induce or enhance financial fortunes are referred to as money or wealth rituals. Money rituals are supposed to make the doer rich or draw fortunes to him or her (Smith, 2001). The kind of materials used in money ritual sacrifices depends on the amount of wealth the doer desires. Some make use of wildlife, while many use human body parts that are believed to be more potent (Jegede, 2014). The various parts of the human body, as Obineke, 2008, has stressed, are understood to produce different results in money rituals. For instance, in an interview

conducted with people caught with human body parts, Usman, 2017, found that human genitals, female breasts, head, tongue, heart, and bones yield powerful outcomes in money rituals.

Moreover, certain categories of humans with different (genetic) conditions such as people with albinism, dwarfism, and hunchbacks are also said to be suitable for money ritual sacrifices (Brilliant, 2015; Nkrumah, 2018). Accordingly, thousands of innocent Nigerians (male and female) of all ages have been killed and their body parts severed for money ritual sacrifices (Usman, 2017). The rate at which people are murdered and incomplete bodies are abandoned in Nigerian cities has been alarming in recent years. Hardly will a week pass by without news (on the media - print and online) of a missing person and an incomplete human body found. In addition, cases of individuals caught with human body parts continuously flood news updates. The actual number of people murdered for money rituals in Nigeria is not known, owing to the lack of systematic data gathering on issues relating to money ritual-related killings in the country. Similarly, academic investigations that explore this area are relatively scanty. Therefore, this current investigation shows the cases of ritual killing cases in Imo State and Anambra State.

### **Human Trafficking**

Human trafficking could be defined as a situation where human victims are forced, defrauded or coerced into labour or sexual exploitation. By implication trafficking in persons means the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, using coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of the person having control over another person, for exploitation. According to United States State Department data, an 'estimated 600,000 to 820,000 men, women and children are trafficked across international borders each year, approximately 80 per cent are minors. The data similarly illustrates that the majority of transnational victims are trafficked into commercial sexual exploitation. Due to the illegal nature of trafficking and differences in methodology, the exact extent is unknown.

From the above, it is evident that human trafficking is a highly complex issue that affects potentially thousands of foreign and domestic men, women, and children in the whole world. No one is however certain how many people are trafficked in the whole world every year. The United States government, state agencies, and various governmental and non-governmental organisations throughout the globe are committed to preventing trafficking, protecting victims of trafficking and prosecuting traffickers.

Deductively, it is obvious that human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery. Victims of human trafficking are subjected to force, fraud, or coercion, for sexual exploitation or forced labour. After drug dealing, the trafficking of humans is tied with arms dealing as the second largest criminal industry in the world, and the fastest growing, hence demanding urgent attention. The nature of human trafficking wears different masks. Many victims of human trafficking are forced to work in prostitution or the sex entertainment industry. Trafficking also occurs in forms of labour exploitation, such as domestic servitude, restaurant work, janitorial work, sweatshop factory work and migrant agricultural work. Trafficking victims are kept in bondage through a combination of fear, intimidation, abuse, and psychological controls, while each victim will have a different experience, they share common threads. Trafficking victims live a life characterized by abuse, betrayal of their basic human rights, and control under their traffickers.

Traffickers use different techniques to lure and instil fear in victims and to keep them enslaved, locked and keyed. However, the more frequent practice is to use less obvious techniques. Victims are sometimes tricked and lured by false promises or physically forced. Some traffickers use coercive and manipulative tactics including deception, intimidation, feigned love, isolation, threat and use of physical force, debt bondage, and other abuse or even force-feeding with drugs to control their victims. People who are seeking entry to other countries may be picked up by traffickers and misled into thinking that they will be free after being smuggled across the border. In some cases, they are captured through slave raiding, although this is increasingly rare.

Humanly speaking, human trafficking is a multi-dimensional threat. It deprives people of their human rights and freedom, it is a global health risk, and it fuels the growth of organised crime. Hence the causes of human trafficking are diverse. Human trafficking is a dehumanizing crime, turning people into mere commodities.

Human trafficking has a devastating impact on individual victims, who often suffer physical and emotional abuse, rape, the threat against self and family, passport theft, and even death. The impact of human trafficking goes beyond individual victims; it undermines the health, safety and security of all nations it touches. Most instances of forced labour occur as unscrupulous employers take advantage of gaps in law enforcement to exploit vulnerable workers. These workers are made more vulnerable to forced labour practices because of unemployment, poverty, crime, discrimination, corruption, political conflict, and cultural acceptance of the practice. Immigrants are particularly vulnerable but individuals are also often forced into labour in their own countries.

### **The Catholic Teachings on the Integrity of the Human Body**

The Catholic Church in its social teachings, papal encyclicals and ecclesiastical documents has, at different times dealt with the integrity of the human body which is intertwined and interconnected with the dignity of the human person and sacredness of life. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC, 362) affirms that the human person is a being created by God, with body and soul, created in the image and likeness of God. This affirmation in the CCC unveils the spiritual and material dimensions of the human person. Although the human person is created in the image and likeness of God, he is different from the celestial beings that do not possess a material body. This is because one cannot exist on this planet earth without the body. The human person is different from other created beings because it has a soul while other created beings do not. So we cannot talk of a human person or human life without the body.

As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches, “Man alone is called to share, by knowledge and love, in God’s own life”. This is the fundamental reason for his dignity. Being in the image of God, the human person is a relational and social being, because God is not a solitary Being. This Doctrine of the Dignity of the Human Person so cleanly fits in with the other core dogmas of the Catholic Church. The human person mirrors the eternal love of the Most Blessed *Trinity*; the human person is of such worth that God himself took on our nature at the *Incarnation*; the human person has such dignity that God’s Son died for our *Redemption*. As *Gaudium et Spes* avers:

The truth is that only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of the human person take on light. For Adam, the first man was a figure of him who was to come, Christ the Lord. Christ . . . by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and his love, fully reveals us to ourselves and makes our supreme calling clear. (p. 22)

The Catholic Church proclaims that the human body is sacred and that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. This belief is the foundation of all the principles of the social teaching of the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church has three primary sources of theological discourse, namely: The Sacred Scripture, the Sacred Tradition, and the Magisterium. These sources justify the arguments in support of the Church’s position on the subject at issue. This research accommodates other sources relevant to a support or push back against arguments for or against the integrity of the human body as it is understood from the Church’s perspective. The Catholic Church believes that she received the authority to teach from our Lord Jesus Christ himself when he said in the gospel of Matthew 28:19 “... teach them to observe all the commands I gave you...” The teaching authority of the Church is exercised in different areas, especially in her moral, social and ethical teachings.

A critical reading on the Roman Catholic perspective of the integrity of the human body reveals that the Church believes that the human person is a composite of body and soul. The two are intertwined such that one cannot exist in isolation from the other on this planet earth. The human body is not just a worthless entity to be treated under one's guise. Rather it has a spiritual dimension that has God at its origin. The end of earthly existence does not in any way suggest the end of the body, but the transformation of the body from mortality to immortality. This eschatological dimension of the human body is imperative for understanding the dignity and integrity due to the human person. The Church hence believes in the resurrection of the body and eternal life.

Consequently, the Church affirms again and again in strong terms the integrity of the body and by extension the sanctity and sacredness of life and the dignity of the human person. The right to live is a fundamental human right that is inalienable. So, every act that violates the integrity of the body directly or indirectly ought to be jettisoned from all the legitimate practices of every society, such as suicide, abortion, euthanasia, homicide, human- trafficking, kidnapping, war, hunger, violence etc.

Pope John Paul II opines that the human body reveals the mystery of God. This is to say that the body makes visible the invisible reality and being of God. It is a sacramental that reveals a very deep mystery about who God is – three persons in one God. The incarnation of the second person of the Blessed Trinity unveils the dignity of the human body. God who was pleased to share in our humanity through a holy act of condescension also pleased to allow us to share in his divinity. The creation and redemption of the human person through Jesus Christ (cf. Jn 1: 1-3) forms the basis and foundation on which the Catholic Church constructs her theological edifice of the human body. John Paul II (1979) maintains that the Church must follow, following the wisdom of Pope Paul VI, one single way: it is the way that has stood the test of centuries and it is also the way of the future. Christ the lord indicated this way especially, when, as the Council teaches, “by his incarnation, he, the son of God, in a certain way united himself with each man” (p.25).

This section of this research unpacks different aspects of the teaching of the Church concerning the human body and brings to the limelight some controversial aspects of her teaching that disagrees with the thoughts of some mainstream theologians of other Christian denominations and other mainstream religions. However, the Catholic Church remains uncompromising in certain areas of its moral teaching especially when it has to do with the human body, human life and the human person. In various documents, the Second Vatican Council has expressed the Church's fundamental solicitude that life in the world should conform more to man's surpassing dignity in all its aspects, to make that life

ever more human. The Church is at once a sign and a safeguard of the transcendence of the human body.

Christ would not have dwelt among us without the body. He remains a being that has dual nature through the hypostatic union. If he did not experience human nature and made it his own, he would not have participated intimately in the life of man here on earth. He became like us in everything by his incarnation but did not sin. Incarnation is the act through which Jesus Christ the Redeemer fully revealed Himself to humankind. He expressed in his human dimension the mystery of redemption. In this dimension, man finds again the greatness, dignity and value that belong to his humanity. In the mystery of redemption, humanity becomes newly expressed and, in a way, is newly created. He is newly created! The human body reveals the mystery of God in the human nature of Jesus Christ

### **Conclusion**

The Roman Catholic Church has over the centuries taught with authority, the integrity of the human body. The Catholic Church understands the human body to be generally noble and sacred. To the Roman Catholic Church, the human person must use the human body according to divine initiative. The Church teaches that the human body should be used with the consciousness of its sacredness and not just as an ordinary thing or toy. Unfortunately, many people use the body in an abusive way. In other words, they use the body as a thing possessed, of less value, and without spiritual character. This conception has influenced many people in both religious and social spheres. Bryan (2014) adumbrates that a biblical theology of the sexes demands that we pay closer attention to the actual, embodied forms of the relations of men and women, setting up a moral demand that better and more just ways of relations be continually sought and discovered. This implies a continuous and conscious quest for responsible use of the body.

In Nigerian contemporary society, in particular, many conceptions about the human body are very erroneous. For instance, “it is my body, I can do whatever I want with it”, “our body is dust it will return to dust”, and what have you. Some people, especially the youths see the body as an object that can be used, abused, mutilated and molested. They believe the body to be their possession and they are not accountable to anyone. They seem to undermine the sanctity, sacredness and integrity of the human body, thereby failing to perceive and understand the spiritual dimension of the body. Hence, according to Oguejiofor (1996) “the spirit of a person is not thought of as a separate living entity that inhabits the body in the platonic sense. Nor is it thought of in the Aristotelian sense of the form of the body” (p.22). In other words, the human person is a composite of body and spirit. The bodily and spiritual dimensions of the human person are intertwined. But most

Nigerians have not grasped the interconnectedness of the human body, human life and human person. This research, therefore, does not agree with the thought of some people who believe that there is a major disconnect between them. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church has made and continues to make a tremendous contribution to human thought, and to the possibility of human happiness through its insistence on the integrity of the human body.

## References

- Amnesty International (2014) *Welcome to Hell Fire: Torture and Other Ill-Treatment in Nigeria*. London: AmnestyInternationalLimited.
- Barth, K. (1942). *Church Dogmatics*. Bk IV. 3.1.
- Egede, E. (2007) Bringing Human Rights Home: An Examination of the Domestication of Human Rights Treaties in Nigeria. *Journal of African Law*, 51(2):249-284.
- Enuke, P. (2010), Ezillo: History and Cultural Heritage, Unpublished Historical Document of Ezillo.
- Jegede, C. O. (2014). African indigenous religious rituals and magic in Ibadan politics: Issues for the democratisation process in Nigeria. *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, 6(2), 42-48.
- John Paul II. (2005). *Mémoire et identité*, Paris: Flammarion.
- John Paull II. (2006). *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*. Boston: Pauline
- Justice Project Pakistan (2014) *Policing as Torture: A Report on Systematic Brutality and Torture by the Police in Faisalabad, Pakistan*. Yale LawSchool.Faisalabad: AllardK. Lowenstein in International Human Rights Clinic.
- N.P.C (2006), Provisional Census figures. Abakaliki: National Population Census Office.
- Nigeria Institute of Advance Legal Studies. NIALS (2011), Policy Dialogue on Citizenship, Indigene-ship and Nationality, Lagos NIALS
- Nigerian Constitution. (1999). Nigeria Constitution with the amendment of 2011. 33(1).
- Nkrumah, B. (2018). Hunted like animals: The conundrums of countering crimes against albinistic persons in the era of the UDHR. *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice*, 55, 52-59. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijlcj.2018.09.002>
- Obineke, S. L. (2008). The implications of ritual killing and security in Nigeria. Term paper for the course GSP 104. Enugu, Nigeria.
- Obo, U. B., Coker, M. A., & Omenka, J. I. (2014). The state as an instrument of primitive accumulation: The Nigerian example, 1999-2013. *Journal of Law Policy and Globalization*, 26, 67.
- Ogunode, S. (2015) Criminal Justice System in Nigeria: For the rich or the poor? *HumanitiesandSocialSciencesReview*, 4(1):27-39.
- Oyewole, Samuel. 2016a. "The Fate of Hostages: Nigeria's Conflict Theatres in Comparative Perspective," *African Security Review*, 25(2), 193-207.
- Smith, D. J. (2001). Ritual killing, 419, and fast wealth: Inequality and the popular imagination in southeastern Nigeria. *American Ethnologist*, 28(4), 803-826. <https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.2001.28.4.803>

Anthony B. C. Chiegboka & Damian-Mary Chukwunenye Moneke

The *Punch* (2016, September 23) You are not authorised to kill, IG tells SARS. *The Punch Newspapers*. Retrieved September 23, 2016, from <http://punch-ng.com/ai-report-ig-warns-sars-operatives-suspects-torture/>.

Usman, E. (2017). Why killing for rituals is on the increase in Nigeria. Retrieved May 27, 2018, from <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/09/killings-ritualsincrease-nigeria>