

## CULTIVATING THE CULTURE OF LIFE: CHALLENGES IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY GLOBALIZED WORLD

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### **Abstract**

*In the category of existents, life is the highest property; and within the gambit of the highest property of existents, human life is the supreme good. Although most cultures and positive laws affirm this in principle, the reality is that human life has never been so threatened and demeaned as now. This essay highlighted how, by devising multiple ways of extinguishing life, the 21<sup>st</sup> century revels in the culture of death left over by the previous era. It identified the ruins of two World Wars; the spate of genocide, murder and fratricidal strife; the instantiation of policies supporting abortion, infanticide and euthanasia; the exploitation of nature resulting in natural disasters; and the greed of individualism, as blips which have all too often been aided by globalization to universally advance the "culture of death" as the new norm. The essay concluded by making a strong case for the defence of human life, rejection of a culture of death, and the cultivation of the "culture of life."*

**Keywords:** culture of life, left-liberalism, glocalization, humane relationship, diffusion.

### **Introduction**

To be is to exist, and to exist, among others, is to have life. Plants, animals, fungi, bacteria, etc., exist, in the sense of their capacity for biological processes; they can instantiate properties. Using the Aristotelian distinction between accident and essence, we can identify two contrasting categories of properties: contingent and necessary properties. A thing's property is contingent when it could do without such a property, that is, it might as well not have had it (accident). When I mop my room instead of tending to my garden, the act of mopping is my contingent property. It doesn't modify my being if I do not mop. I mop perhaps, due to the premium I place on it within the hierarchy of properties. On the other hand, being human is my necessary property, in the sense that it is impossible for me to be a nonhuman (essence). If it were so, then I would be necessarily excluded from the class of humans. As a rule, all essential properties are attached to their bearers, in the sense that they necessarily

define what the things are in themselves.<sup>1</sup> Life is the highest property of existents; the ultimate good in the scheme of reality.

Within the gambit of the highest property of existents, human life is supreme. It trumps others not just because of its capacity for self-consciousness and volition, but because, in some way, it “transcends” space and time. Mortality is an essential property of life: every living thing, including humans, goes through the process of generation and decay. So, when we say human life is in serious danger, it is not for the normal process of disintegration resulting from the essential property of mortality, but from the loss of humane values; from the growing “culture of death.” Over the centuries, the threats to human lives have exponentially grown. Even though there may have been more wars until the modern era, our own age seems to revel in wanton destruction of life: there are a thousand and one ways by which a person can die today more than ever.

The “culture of death” pervades our society. The 20<sup>th</sup> century bequeathed us the tragedies and ruins of two World Wars, with attendant anti-Semitism; the Rwandan genocide and many fratricidal strife; the instantiation of policies supporting abortion, infanticide and euthanasia; the exploitation of nature; and the profligacy of political elites, have all too often advanced the “culture of death” as the new norm. Having not learned from the ills of past atrocities, the present generation sadly, seems to compete in breaking new negative grounds. In the end, the consequences are extreme poverty, diseases, and death. These multifarious challenges undoubtedly jeopardize the survival of humanity in this twenty-first century. Now, more than ever, there is an urgent need to defend human life, to discard the “culture of death”, and promote the “culture of life.” The task is daunting; the challenges are many, but not insurmountable. In the following paragraphs, we shall look at these challenges and suggest ways out of the quagmire.

### **The Enigma of Human Life**

Life is a beautiful gift bequeathed to organisms that are structured into kingdoms as animals, plants, fungi, protists, archaea, and bacteria. This primary delineation based on the capacity for performing organic processes of signaling and self-sustaining courses, is in contradistinction

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<sup>1</sup> Nelson, M. 2020. “Existence”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum/2020/entries/existence/>

to others without such ability, either for their basic lack (inanimate beings), or for having been deprived of them through death. For the most part, an organism possesses life when it is composed of cells, can grow, reproduce, adapt to situations, respond to stimuli, sustain homeostasis and metabolism, and have the capacity to die. Nonetheless, recent developments show that non-cellular organisms in the likes of viruses, are now included into life forms within some quarters. Presently, scientists are unable to agree on the number of life forms on earth because some species live in places that cannot be accessed, or are very tiny to be seen, or are parasites that inhabit other organisms. In consequence, experts using variant modules have banded different, often outrageous numbers.

As a species within the broad animal kingdom, humans possess a biomass of nearly 9 times (0.06 Gigatons of Carbon [Gt C]) higher than that of all wild mammals (0.007 Gt C) in the biosphere.<sup>2</sup> Even though humans constitute an insignificant fraction of animal biomass, they dominate others with activities such as whaling and exploitation of other marine mammals, logging that has resulted to deforestation, release of incredible amount of carbon that are sequestered by plants, and the consumption of wild land mammal species. All these significantly reduce the biomass of other life forms within the biosphere. This is not surprising, especially to those impelled by the biblical injunction to “be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it.”<sup>3</sup> But to others, the current decline of the earth’s biomass relative to its value before human civilization is a serious source of concern for sustainable development.

Depending on one’s primordial convictions and intellectual bent, the origin of life forms has been ascribed either to abiogenesis or to the creative works of divine powers. Abiogenesis—the natural process by which life arose from non-living matter, such as simple organic compounds<sup>4</sup> is hinged on the hypothesis that life emerged on Earth through physicochemical processes that can be invented, understood, and replicated. The assumption is that billions of years ago, the earliest living cells emerged, and through the process of complex evolution, these cells

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<sup>2</sup> Yonon, M. Bar-On, Rob Phillips, and Ron Milo. 2018. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, PNAS June 19, 2018, 115 (25), <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1711842115>

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 1: 28.

<sup>4</sup> Oparin, A.I. 1953. *The Origin of Life*. Trans. with new introduction by Sergius Morgulis (2nd ed.). Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, p. vi; Originally published 1938, New York: The Macmillan Company.

gave rise to the current diversity of life forms. Charles Darwin popularized this theory with his 1859 publication of *On the Origin of Species*.<sup>5</sup> With him, every species of organisms arises and develops through the natural selection of small, inherited variations that increase the individual's ability to compete, survive, and reproduce. Complex creatures evolve from more simplistic ancestors naturally overtime, as random genetic mutations occur within an organism's genetic code. The mutations which aid survival are preserved and transmitted to future generations. With the passage of time, these beneficial mutations accumulate and ossify into entirely different organisms.<sup>6</sup> The present differentiations in life forms are due to the structure and shape which accumulated genetic mutations acquire. In a sense, abiogenesis precludes the ideas of miraculous creation or spontaneous generations, and suggests that all living organisms are related to each other and have a common ancestry.

In contrast to this, creationism—the religious idea that all aspects of nature such as earth, all life forms including humans, animals, plants and indeed the entire universe emerged through the creative work of God, beckons for recognition. Different cultures and civilizations have developed a pantheon of creation myths along the centuries. Besides Hesiod's *Theogony*—the Greek's oldest and most influential creation account,<sup>7</sup> there were many other accounts of primal events that circulated in ancient Greece and surrounding vicinities. In fact, the vision of three-tier cosmos—Heaven, Earth, and Underworld in Hesiod's *Theogony* was partly a derivation from the ancient Near Eastern traditions. Although there are some identified resemblances between the Genesis account of Judeo-Christian religion and those of Mesopotamian and Babylonian myths, the experience of God's incarnation in Judeo-Christian tradition accentuated and popularized its widespread.

The Christian Bible contains a step by step account of the world's creation. Divided into two separate versions (Gen. 1:1-2:4; and Gen. 2:5-25), the creation stories provide an image of a world diligently crafted and purposefully designed by the supreme Deity—God. Practically all life forms were accounted for in this religious masterpiece, and the details show not just the end to which the universe is directed, but the

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<sup>5</sup> Darwin, C. 1859. *On the Origin of Species*. London: John Murray.

<sup>6</sup> "Darwinism," accessed 25 June 2020: <http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darwinism>

<sup>7</sup> Stephen, L., Platzner, H. and Platzner, G. 2004. *Classical Mythology*. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, p.59.

overwhelming intelligence of a caring God.<sup>8</sup> Thus, creationism as it were, accepts as true only explanations which rely on the creative accounts of Genesis in the Christian Bible. In the 1920s, it was associated with the anti-evolutionary crusade, and its advocates scoffed every scientific explanation regarding the origins. The underlying motif is that life with its convolutions couldn't be a bi-product of chance; it must have arisen from a grand design with a purpose. The intricately-woven complex reality must owe its existence to a super intelligent being—God.

As both creative and evolutionary accounts jostle for epistemic privilege, the ordinary individual is condemned to a conundrum: admit that the ordered universe is a product of a superlative Order in whom there is no admixture of potentiality, but only actuality; or accept the ascription of origin and functionality of life forms to mechanical fission of atoms, and the consequent dispensation of order and finality. The consequences of either choice are obvious and diverse. In one, the admission of a creator God imposes values which enforcement promote the sanctity of human life, the inviolability of certain rights, and the virtues mitigating actions because of eschatological concerns. On the other, the acceptance of evolutionary theory that dispenses with God, with the attendant rejection of divinely ordained moral order, rejection of belief in cosmic or physical order, denunciation of absolute values, and a denial of objective and universally binding moral laws.<sup>9</sup> The former admission guarantees restraint and order; while the latter is a recipe for nihilism which endangers human lives and brazenly promotes the "culture of death" in our modern societies. Cultivating the "culture of life" has never been harder as it is in this nihilistic 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Diffusion, Dynamism—Springboards to Globalization of Culture**

The term culture has been effusively used to delineate societal underpinnings since the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century. In its much referenced span of history, experts across sociological, anthropological and political fields have sought to synthesize its frames, and thus provide a unified vision of its meaning-content. In their critical review of multifarious notions and descriptions of culture, the American anthropologists—Alfred Kroeber

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<sup>8</sup> Ogbujah, C. and Nkama, U. 2020. "The Origin of Life Forms," in C. Ogbujah (Ed.). *History and Philosophy of Science and Technology: A Reader*. Port Harcourt: Pearl Publishers, p. 150.

<sup>9</sup> Ogbujah, C. (Ed.). 2020. *History and Philosophy of Science and Technology: A Reader*. Port Harcourt: Pearl Publishers, p. vi.

and Clyde Kluckhohn amassed a whopping list of 164 definitions.<sup>10</sup> There is no doubt today, nearly three-quarter of a century afterwards, the number would not have more than doubled. On the whole, it is still possible to synthesize these conceptualizations into four related but distinct strands namely, culture as cultivation; culture as episteme; culture as history and culture as worldview.

Sifting through the rich literature, we are persuaded to acknowledge Geert Hofstede's contribution that "culture is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one category of people from another."<sup>11</sup> Our attraction to Hofstede's position is borne out of its efforts at highlighting the centrality of the mind and its activities in the delineation of peoples. The intellect is at the center of all human activities and volitions, and thus releases its imprints on a people's way of life. But given that there is material component to culture which though implied but not explicit in the above characterization, we might well modify this in saying that culture is a shared apperception in which identified groups relish their physical and nonphysical values, and by which they are stratified from one other. Our culture encompasses whatever we do, our social institutions and our values; it determines who we are. The material aspect of culture consists of tools, artifacts, buildings, written records, and any other objects formed or used by humans; while the non-material aspect includes ideas that people have concerning their culture, such as beliefs, values, rules, norms, morals, language, organizations, etc.

Culture is an abstract and intricate but yet a simple concept. Its abstractness, in the first instance, derives from the nature of its manifestation which can hardly be seen nor touched. This abstruse feature obviously constricts the possibility of contriving a proper measurement for it; the intricacy factor is a logical consequence of the abstractive nature: every obscure reality is *ipso facto* difficult to recognize. Culture shares in the complexity of all theoretical or mental realities. Conversely, culture is a simple concept as it is well understood with regard to the referents in all societies: everyone within a group understands what its elements denote or stand for within the group. As every society has its peculiar ways of doing things, it means that different societies have different cultures.

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<sup>10</sup> Kroeber, A. and Kluckhohn, C. 1952. *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Museum.

<sup>11</sup> Hofstede, G. 1984. "National cultures and corporate cultures." In L.A. Samovar & R.E. Porter (Eds.), *Communication Between Cultures*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, p. 51.

Second, the abstractness or complexity of culture stems from its dynamism. Culture is a dynamic phenomenon which is fluid and consistently changing in subtle and diverse ways. The fluidity entails that the multiple expressions of a cultural system might make it more difficult to rightly identify the referents. In many cases, referents of cultural expressions have changed within one generation of their emergence. There is apparent symbiotic relationship between culture and society. Culture cannot exist outside the society; and society cannot thrive without a culture. The constant changes of different aspects of culture both material (music, food, clothing, etc.), and nonmaterial (beliefs, values, norms, etc.) show that culture is dynamic, flexible and adaptive. The types of clothing we use today are different from the ones worn by our fathers; so also our hairstyle, music, beliefs and values. Culture continually evolves to meet current state of realities in the society. It is never stagnant.

Cultural dynamism is the capacity of a culture to transmute from one feature to another. This is often done to eliminate negative tendencies and to provide relief to the local community. The abolition of slavery, of killing of twins, and of human sacrifices in some African cultures is very significant here. These cultural changes fostered universally acceptable cultural norms and practices that help to create peace. But sometimes, the outcome of cultural change can be negative, leading to the diminution of life in society. The current liberal penchant for abortion, euthanasia, and the glamorization of violence in social media are sweeping across the world, and are aiding the espousal of a “culture of death”. Thanks to these, it has become increasingly difficult to universally cultivate the “culture of life”.

The change in cultural practices is made possible by the ingrained quality of culture to permeate societies and groups. In the course of history, cultural items—such as music, art, ideas, religion, language, technology, etc., have spread between individuals within a given culture or from one culture to another. Such diffusions as in the use of automobiles in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the social media in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have, to some extent, highlighted the common humanity of all within the global village; the possibility of a culture with a global reach. The capacity for cultural diffusion—the spread of a cultural item over a wide area—complements cultural dynamism in providing catalysts for globalization of cultures. With advancements in transportation and communication, it was only a matter of time for dynamic cultures to diffuse across the globe.

Even though cultural globalization—the standardization of cultural expressions around the world—extends and intensifies social relations, it is viewed as a trend toward homogeneity that will ultimately make human experiences everywhere basically the same.<sup>12</sup> In modern world, it is rife for local cultures to be transformed or absorbed into dominant outside ones. This phenomenon has negatively impacted on national identity and culture of subservient societies, caused a reduction in cultural diversity,<sup>13</sup> and could lead to global assimilation of a single culture.<sup>14</sup> In the past two decades, this has been the target of left-liberal penchant for open borders and a single global government. Cultural globalization is an instrument by which Western affluent cultures dominate and destroy the values of other cultures of developing nations with their value systems. In Nigeria, for instance, this can easily be noticed from the loss of ethical decency. Prior to western influence, the epidemics of rape and premarital sex were not part of her culture. It was a taboo to engage in these. But now, the scale of these incidents cascading into endless abortions is destroying the moral fabric of the nation.

With less competitive capacity, indigenous cultures struggle to cope with cheap Western products like coca cola, confectionaries, etc., and values, such as individualistic, capitalist and left-liberal tendencies, which Western controlled media and outlets use to inundate their spaces. More often than not, these indigenous cultures capitulate under the coercive influence of foreign dominant ones. This somewhat ‘cultural imperialism’, reminiscent of its earlier forms in colonialism, is responsible for the universal assimilation of western cultures, and the global spread of such attendant maladies as abortion, euthanasia, violent dispositions (culture of violence), rape, sexual promiscuity, etc.

### **Overcoming hurdles to Cultivating the Culture of life**

Events of the last century show the twists and turns in human values, as well as the scope of human depravity. The preponderance of violent conflicts, enactment of positive laws that promote abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, etc., and the illicit exposure of small markets to the hegemonic influence of globalized economies—all lead to diminution in the quality of human lives and the eventual creation of a “culture of

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<sup>12</sup> Watson, J. L. 2020. “Cultural globalization”, in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, [website], <https://www.britannica.com/science/cultural-globalization>, (accessed 30 June 2020).

<sup>13</sup> Barker, B. 2008. *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*. SAGE, pp. 159–162.

<sup>14</sup> Jennings, J. 2010. *Globalizations and the Ancient World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 132.

death.” It is ironic that precisely when the inviolable value and rights of the person are overtly trumpeted, the very right to life is being crushed, especially at its very important moments: birth and death.<sup>15</sup> Through the influence of globalization, this culture of death has fast diffused across the world. To counteract these, we urgently need to engage in actions that defend lives, rewrite the story and promote the “culture of life.”

The first major challenge to cultivating the ‘culture of life’ arises from the global glamorization of violent conflict. Ever since “Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him” (Gen 4:8), accounts of violence and murder are rewritten daily in our history, with inexorable and degrading frequency. Human history is replete with humongous details of fatalities from ‘state-based’ conflicts, ‘non-state’ conflicts (where two or more organizations are fighting but no state is involved), and also ‘one-sided conflicts’—that is, where there is only one organized aggressor, such as in murder, suicidal or genocidal violence. The provocative dress-up of violence by film industries and the social media seems to glamorize the culture of death as the new norm. As in the first fratricide committed by Cain, the kinship of “flesh and blood” is frequently violated within the context of family bonds, as is seen in abortion or euthanasia; and within the broader context of the human family, as we witness from wars, genocides, homicides and all forms of violent conflicts. As all humans share equally in essential dignity and grace arising from their nature, every murder therefore, violates the ‘mystical kinship’ that bonds humanity, and complicates the efforts at cultivating the culture of life.

The situation is much more intricate when there are economic, ethnic or religious dimensions to it. Religion and ethnicity have been major sources of violence and deaths in the world, but the existence of conflict entrepreneurs—those, who profit from conflict, means eliminating violence is much more challenging. Ranging from companies that manufacture arms and ammunitions, to those that hire mercenaries for illicit businesses, there is great impetus for killing and violence. The current spate of insecurity in Nigeria resulting from armed robbery, kidnapping and political assassination can be pinned to financial incentives of the agents. The unabated massacre in the North east by Boko Haram, and in the Middle belt by Fulani herders, are apparently part of this economic scheme. Politicians and high military commands exploit the weak institutions for economic and political gains. A quick resolution of the conflict means an end to huge monetary appropriations in their

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<sup>15</sup> John Paul II. 1995. *Evangelium Vitae*, 17, Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

offices. With unfettered access to national treasury, unscrupulous leaders are incentivized to endlessly engage with insurgents, notwithstanding the human costs.

Another significant hurdle is the neo-liberal (left-liberal) individualistic tendency and its potential for relativization of reality. Being a civil and moral idea that was hinged on liberty and equality, classical liberalism underlined inclusivity in an era that was fractured by classism, and gave rise to scientific-technological breakthroughs which, led to increase in living standards and social progress. These are giant feats worthy of commendation. But the neo-liberal construal of liberty for license, and the subsequent denunciation of objective values, places in every individual's hands the sole powers of ascription: reality assumes whatever meaning man assigns to it. Having thus, relativized reality, the age-long sublime universal ideals of truth, good, beauty, etc., are emptied of every vestige of objective content. Truth, for instance, becomes that which works for and/or that which is accepted by an individual or group. This renaissance of Heraclitan mantra—"man is the measure of all things..." in neo-liberal projects meant that otherwise objectively condemned acts like abortion, euthanasia, suicide, etc., must now be evaluated through the prism of individual agents. This form of ethical relativism demands that the State should not interfere in moral issues, but limit itself to creating enabling space for individuals to flourish in their private choices. The implication is that not only are humans expected to deal with moral issues as private matters, they are now required to challenge any positive law that prohibits such.

In today's world, the practice of jurisprudence has taken a new dimension. Owing to the rigour involved in constitutional amendments in most countries, neo-liberals now resort to the use of courtrooms as a short-cut for the advancement of left-liberal ideals. Practices which hitherto were prohibited in virtually all positive laws, and for which society held agents with disdain, are today being glamorized because jurists have given them legal force. Through the 'packing of the courts,' politicians are able to widen the elasticity of constitutional provisions to accommodate their neo-liberal ideals, and in the process endanger and harass faith-based groups that had worked for the promotion of human lives over the centuries. Under the cover of inclusivity, these groups are now prohibited from enforcing rules that promoted the culture of life. In some cases (as in Obamacare), they are coerced into providing medical insurance that guarantees free birth control (abortion) to their employees. In others, there is a revival of capital punishment and a support for

somewhat Promethean attitude in assisted suicide (euthanasia). These legislations sneakily empower governments across the world to use taxpayer's funds in promoting the culture of death. To facilitate the spread of abortion, for instance, huge sums of money are being invested in the production of pharmaceuticals that enable mothers to eliminate fetuses in their wombs without recourse to medical assistance. It is ironic that in an age bogged with debilitating infections, scientific research is absorbed in developing products that make it easy to suppress life, and thus remove abortion from social control or responsibility.<sup>16</sup>

Sequel to the global promotion of left-liberal individualistic values is the illicit exposure of small markets to the hegemonic influence of globalized economies. In its search for cheap labour, raw materials and markets for finished products, globalization opened the frontiers for companies to outsource labour to foreign lands. In this way, China and many developing nations have profited from Western companies, especially in the areas of employment, and the provision of basic amenities for their citizens. But, at the same time, analyses show many of these developing nations have sunk deeper into economic chaos due to globalization. Apart from the havoc of paying unjust wages to local labour force, indigenous firms are often grounded because they cannot withstand stiff competition from the multinationals. This usually leads to job losses, increase in poverty rate, and the attendant spread of diseases and death. In their quest for profit maximization, conglomerates deny poor indigenous companies access to development, or make such access dependent on arbitrary prohibitions that ultimately aggravate injustice and violence that degrade human lives.

For the most part, the foregoing has exposed the extent at which the "culture of death" is entrenched in our societies, and by extension, the enormity of the challenge to cultivating a "culture of life." No doubt the hurdles are many, but the key to prevailing lies in our hands—in developing the ethics of human affection; of humane relationships. As living organisms, humans possess qualities for which they are inextricably strung together under humanity. By virtue of intelligence and free will, they are able to coordinate their activities; through introspection, they transcend other beings and are open to each other in convivial relationships. Whether in the sense of Aristotelian "social being" or Heideggerian "being-with", no human being can exist and thrive in isolation of others. Our lives are always entwined with each other. My

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<sup>16</sup> John Paul II. 1995. *Evangelium Vitae*, 13, Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

humanity is intricately caught up with those of others; 'we belong to a bundle of life,' as Desmond Tutu<sup>17</sup> would say. Since we belong to a greater whole and are enhanced or diminished when others' lives are enhanced or diminished, we must then cultivate a culture of life by developing humane relationships.

A humane relationship sprouts from humane people. A humane person is an individual with great affection and care for others; one who especially tries to alleviate another's suffering. The myriad promoters of the culture of death nay murder, violent conflicts, greed, selfishness, and wickedness are all antithetical to the ethics of human affection. To cultivate the culture of life, we must use love to conquer hatred; affection for racial prejudice; contentment for greed and selfishness; and dialogue for violent conflicts. This task must begin by reinventing education to forms consciences that appreciate the common heritage of humanity, and the inviolable worth of every human life.

### **Primordially of the Culture of life in a Glocalised World.**

There is no doubt globalization has opened the frontiers for companies to outsource businesses, create jobs in remote places, and bring the world together in one universal village. There is no doubt also that indigenous communities and developing nations have borne the greater burden of this adventure. Globalization, as Tomlinson argues, leads to homogenization,<sup>18</sup> and cultural homogenization is the recipe for attenuation of indigenous cultures and the reduction of cultural diversity. To diminish friction and allow for ethnic cultures to thrive within the spectrum of the globalized village, what is needed is glocalization—adoption of elements of global culture to suit local ones. Glocalization or 'cultural heterogenization' is a process in acculturation that grants no epistemic privilege to any culture, but allows native cultures to indigenize relevant elements of the global culture.

The "culture of life" as often contrasted to the "culture of death", is a catch phrase in moral theology which can be traced to the first century writing, the *Didache*. The *Didache*—an anonymous early Christian treatise that first presents the genre of Church Orders—proclaims the existence of two paths: one of life and the other of death. The path to life deals with the love of God, and love of neighbour as oneself, which among other

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<sup>17</sup> Tutu, D. 1999. *No Future Without Forgiveness*. London: Rider.

<sup>18</sup> Tomlinson, J. *Cultural Imperialism: A Critical Introduction*. London: Continuum. pp. 45–50.

things, forbids acts of anger, murder, killing of a child by abortion, etc. Over the years, these prescriptions ossified into what today we call the “Golden Rule”. The path to death is evil and is taken by those who indulge in acts prohibited by the good.<sup>19</sup> The paths to life and death are what today we term the “culture of life” and the “culture of death.”

In his influential encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*—“*The Gospel of Life*,” the Polish (Karol Wojtyła) Pope John Paul II vigorously decried the crimes and attacks against human life, and railed on its widespread backing from a broad section of the society, the jurists and certain sectors of healthcare personnel. Drawing inspiration from the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World—*Gaudium et Spes*, he labeled as promoting the culture of death:

Whatever is opposed to life itself, such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, or willful self-destruction, whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, torments inflicted on body or mind, attempts to coerce the will itself; whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where people are treated as mere instruments of gain rather than as free and responsible persons; all these things and others like them are criminal: they poison human society....<sup>20</sup>

In opposition to these ‘criminal actions that poison human society’, Pope John Paul II developed an ethic that is hinged on the promotion of life and wellbeing of every human being. His creation of the concept of the “culture of life” illumined Catholic social teachings on abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment and what he termed the ancient scourges of poverty, hunger, endemic diseases, violence and war, thus:

In our present social context, marked by a dramatic struggle between the culture of life and the culture of death, there is the need to develop a deep critical sense capable of discerning true values and authentic needs. What is urgently called for is a general mobilization of consciences and a united ethical effort to

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<sup>19</sup> Cross, F. L. (Ed.). 2005. “Didache”, in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>20</sup> Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World—*Gaudium et Spes*, 27.

activate a great campaign in support of life. All together, we must build a new culture of life.<sup>21</sup>

The new culture of life is one that gives everyone the opportunity to live and thrive from conception to natural death; it is one which, recognizing every human being as the living image of God, accords them inviolable rights under the law. The new culture of life adapts principles of the global culture into local situations to preserve and care for life according to the law of reciprocity: giving and receiving, self-giving and the acceptance of others. The culture of life values each person as a person, and not for what they own, do, or produce nor for their intelligence, beauty or health; and must defend every human life, especially the weak and those at great risks.<sup>22</sup> As social beings, our lives are entwined with each other in interdependent manner such that the infliction of pain or dishonour to one results in the diminution of the lives of others. In nutshell, activating the culture of life implies living out the imports of “being our brother’s / sister’s keeper.” By the same token, it forbids individuals, governments and healthcare providers from arbitrary manipulation of life, or from even becoming agents of death. It cautions against the loss of intrinsic ethics in our actions, especially in today’s world seeped in secularist culture.

Since its coinage, the term “culture of life” has gained popularity among theologians and politicians, and has turned out into a movement against policies and practices that threaten human existence. Much as we earlier admitted that ‘life is a beautiful gift bestowed on organisms’, there is no denying that human life is the most precious gift nature could ever receive, and as such must be jealously protected. Perhaps, there isn’t a more forceful support to this from secular world leaders than the sentiments expressed in George W. Bush’s Presidential debate at Boston, October 3, 2000:

Surely this nation can come together to promote the value of life. Surely we can fight off these laws that will encourage doctors or allow doctors to take the lives of our seniors. Surely, we can work together to create a culture of life so some of these youngsters who feel like they can take a neighbour’s life with a gun will think otherwise.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>John Paul II. 1995. *Evangelium Vitae*, 95. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

<sup>22</sup> John Paul II. 1995. *Evangelium Vitae*, 23, 77, Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

<sup>23</sup> “Presidential Candidate Debate: Presidential Debate in Boston”, October 03, 2000. *The American Presidency Project*. [website],

The goal of the “culture of life” movement is to see that values that promote life are enshrined in societal laws and policies. The intent is, by educational and political policies, to inscribe these sacred values into art, literature, media and music, which over time will transform the attitudes and behaviours of the citizenry. This culture of life—the fruit of the culture of truth and of love,<sup>24</sup> has the potential to engender courageous cultural dialogue among different nations and thus help to adopt the elements of global culture to suit local needs.

### **Conclusion**

It is obvious today, as in the time of biblical Moses,<sup>25</sup> we are beset by two choices: life and death, prosperity and disaster. Like the Israelites, we must choose and promote the “culture of life” over the “culture of death.” A society that promotes the Culture of Life will gear all efforts towards the protection of human life in all stages: from conception to natural death. This will entail, at the social level, repeal of unjust laws that encourage behaviours that oppress or diminish life; and at the individual level, a personal rejection of abortion, euthanasia, suicide and other violent behaviours that endanger human lives<sup>26</sup>. Freedom must not be construed as license, but a condition that liberates us to pursue what is truly good, just and sublime, in rejection of what is evil.

To cultivate the culture of life in this globalized world, we must use the instruments of technology to reinvent education on the values and worth of life. Arts and literature must capture the intrinsic dignity of human life by displaying fetuses, the elderly, handicapped, and the ill as full and worthy members of society; while the often sensational left-liberal media reportage should rather focus on creating a new awareness that is ever more opposed to war as a means of conflict resolution. To cultivate the culture of life, we must encourage initiatives that support people who are weak and defenceless; discover ever more effective remedies for the unborn, the suffering and the terminally ill; develop a more equitable

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<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/presidential-debate-boston>, (accessed 4 July 2020).

<sup>24</sup> John Paul II. 1995. *Evangelium Vitae*, 77, Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

<sup>25</sup> Deuteronomy 30: 15.

<sup>26</sup> Kanu, Ikechukwu A., “Igbo Philosophy Of Life Vis-À-Vis the Proliferation Of Prayer Houses In Southeast Nigeria: A Phenomenological Study”. *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development*. Vol. 2. No. 2, 2020; Kanu, Ikechukwu A. & B. A. C. Obiefuna, “The Value of Life in African Ontology and Global Bio-ethical Discourse”. Published in the *Nigerian Journal of Theology*. June, Vol. 27. pp. 126-146, 2013.

means of wealth distribution to cater for the needy; and bring quick relief to those affected by natural disasters, epidemics or wars. It will entail finding means to suppress crime without denying criminals the opportunity to reform; paying attention to ecological problems, and the willful refusal to take part in crimes and acts of injustice.<sup>27</sup> To defend and promote a culture of life is a service of love which we must all be committed to, if humanity is to survive this 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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<sup>27</sup>John Paul II. 1995. *Evangelium Vitae*, 77, 97. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.