

SOCIAL CONFLICTS AND CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE: THE REDEEMED CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF GOD (RCCG) ILORIN, AS A CASE STUDY.

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Abstract

We live in a world full of conflicts. The premise of this work is that the church and Nigeria as a nation are currently bedeviled with myriad of problems. Conflict is common to all marriages, some conflicts are good and healthy for the family because they strengthen bonds, while it can be unhealthy when it escalates. Unfortunately, as much as we try to avoid conflict, it is still winding its way into the most intimate relationship, whereby causing divorce and domestic violence in homes. Christian marriage is not an exception in this menace. This work looks at the causes of conflict and solutions to social conflicts in Christian marriage. Historical and phenomenological methods were used. There is no way to avoid conflict in marriage in The Redeemed Christian Church of God, but the question is, how to deal with it. God instituted marriage, so His word reveals how best to conduct it and to resolve marital problems. God's word does not guarantee marital bliss, but it does give guidance and counsel to help couples with serious problems. The findings of the study were that conflicts in marriage were caused through man-generated problems. Therefore, the study recommended that couples must promptly react constructively to early warning signs of marital conflict before they develop into hard signals of cohabitation.

Keywords: Conflicts, Marriage, Christian Marriage and, RCCG.

Introduction

Marriage can be defined as an exclusive state, in which a man and a woman are wholly committed to live with each other in sexual relationship, under conditions normally approved and witnessed to by their social group and society.¹ The Hebrew word *lagah*, literally means "to take" a wife (Gen. 19:14), while Greek, *gumeco* is a common verb that means "to marry," found also in the Septuagint (LXX). From biblical evidence, God established the fundamental institution of marriage from the beginning of creation. Gen. 2:18 says that, "the Lord said, it is not good for a man to be alone, I will make a helper suitable for him". In other words, it was God's intention from the beginning that a man is not complete alone except with a wife, a "suitable helper". And buttressing this relationship further, God said; "for this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). Marriage therefore entails a union of a man and woman which does not involve external (father and mother) interference. The study

Conceptual Meaning(s) of Conflicts

Conflict itself is not evil; often it arises from the process of seeking sustainable progress and satisfaction. We quickly forget our similar positive intentions, dissipating energies on the contradictory ideas of the path to the common end. Among other things, conflict emanates as a result of misunderstanding, man's superiority complex, and failure to compromise and reconcile ideas, beliefs, cultures, and interests. If harnessed, it could serve as a powerful tool for progress. Meanwhile, for this paper, we shall be conceptualizing conflict as it relates to the field of Religion. In a general context, conflict, unlike peace, is a state of inward (intra-personal) or outward (inter-personal) disorder and strife. It is an inevitable feature of nature. However, conflict could be conceptualized from two approaches, namely: the objectivist approach, which suggests that conflict emanates from the social and religious structure of the society; and the subjectivist approach, advancing that apparent differences and incompatibility of goals that cause conflict. The definitions of conflict will be therefore categorized under these two approaches.

Objectivist Approach

Conflict 'emanates from the tugs and pulls of different identities, definitions of what is right, fair, and just'.² It can also be viewed as a 'break-down in the standard mechanism of decision making'.³ Conflict transpires when 'the actions or beliefs of one or more members of a group are unacceptable to and, hence, are resisted by one or more groups or members'. It is a result of a 'mismatch between social values and social structure'.⁴ Summarily, it is a 'clash, confrontation, battle or struggle'.⁵

Subjectivist Approach

Conflict is defined by subjectivists as a 'situation in which two or more human beings desire goals which they perceive as being obtainable by one or the other, but not both; each party is mobilizing energy to obtain a goal; and each party perceives the other as a barrier or threat to that goal'.⁶ Likewise, 'conflict is a social situation in which a minimum of two actors (parties) strike to acquire at the same moment in time an available set of scarce resources'.⁷ Conflict is described as 'the simultaneous occurrence of two or more mutually antagonistic impulses or motives'.⁸ Putting it differently, conflict is the 'struggle involving ideas, values and /or limited resources'.⁹

However, from the above definitions, it is obvious that conflict emanates from contradictions that occur in social interactions. They strengthen the arguments of the Realists that man by nature is chaotic. Innate in man is conflict.¹⁰ The realists went on to argue that because the state is as rational as man, therefore, like man, the state

will seek ways of survival and satisfaction by all means. The international system is moreover, characterized by varieties of state interests which are either contradictory or competitive, and the absence of a world governing body will definitely engender conflict. Also, the definitions support the view by the Marxists insofar that conflict within the international system is primarily conflict between the global north and the global south.

The Meaning of Marriage

Marriage can be said to be a ceremony which allows one to open the door of a palace of happiness and enter into it. It is said that marriages are made in heaven and celebrated on earth. The popular belief is true to many extents because, it is a special bond shared between two souls, who tie the wedding knot after promising to be companions for a lifetime. It is the physical, mental and spiritual union of two souls. It brings significant stability and substance to human relationships, which is otherwise incomplete. It plays a crucial role in transferring the culture and civilization from one generation to the other, so that the human race is prospered. The institution of marriage is beneficial to the society as a whole, because it is the foundation of the family, which in turn is the fundamental building block of the society. While the concept of marriage remains the same across the globe, the way of solemnization it differs extensively.

In Christianity, marriage is a covenant in which one is not fit to look back after dipping bones hand because a commitment has been established and it is in one's position to make sure that there is no difficulty that will tear it apart. Although it cannot be smooth for life, there will be difficulty (ies). When it occurs, the priest will always refer the couple to the marital vows which they took before they were joined "... till death do us apart".¹¹ In the bible God made their togetherness an everlasting one when He said in Matthew 19:16, "What therefore God has joined together let no man put asunder".

Marriage helps to erode and eradicate fornication and adultery. It makes the couple to be faithful to each other, sharing their opinions and expression of love to each other. Fornication and adultery are among the offences that depreciates man's spirituality with God in Hebrew 13:4 "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the immoral and adulterous". The union of couple in marriage makes procreation possible and it helps in fulfilling God's intention or plan of fruitfulness and multiplication.

Christian Marriage

Marriage in Christianity is a God-ordained institution. It was instituted by God in the Garden of Eden. The union was between Adam and Eve, the first couple indwelling the earth. It was a union between a man and a woman not a union of man and women. After the creation of the universe, God felt it was necessary to place it

under man for the work to be complete. Adam was created and then He realized a missing link and He saw the need to provide a companion for Adam. "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make a helper fit for him". "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh." (Genesis 2: 18,24) Again God said: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it". (Genesis 1:28)

From the above biblical statements, Christian marriage can be explained to be the actual unification of a man and a woman. Two persons who after "leaving" and "cleaving" become "one flesh". The idea of "one flesh" is mystery on the part of Christian marriage, it is later shown by St. Paul as a sexual union in the book of Corinthians when he says, "Do you not know that he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, the two shall become one flesh." (1Cor 6:16) Even the idea of helper shows that a man must look for a woman that is really fit for him, and such a woman must not be a prostitute. Therefore, the idea of Christian marriage that we get here can be summed in three ways, that is, companionship, helpfulness and procreation.

The word of God also declares in Ecclesiastes 4: 9-10 that: "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward in labor, for if one person falls, the other will lift the fallen one, but woe to him that is alone, when he falleth for he hath not another to help him up."¹⁷ This is the plain teaching from the Bible. Two people should be happier together. The principle of two being better than one is found in the Bible. "... Have you not read that he that made them at the beginning made them male and female, ... for this cause shall a man leave father and mother and shall cleave to his wife, and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore what God hath joined together let no man put asunder." (Matthew 19: 4-6)

The idea of marriage given in both the New and Old Testaments is more than the union of man and woman, it carries other symbolic meanings. Marriage between man and woman is parallel with the sort of relationship that exists between God and Israelites. In that, God and Israel's relation is regarded as a husband-wife relation in which the wife must be seen as faithful.⁵

Similarly, Christian marriage requires all faithfulness, for marriage is honorable. Whoever defiles it through unfaithfulness shall be punished by God. Let the marriage bed be undefiled, but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge. (Hebrews 13:4)

In the New Testament, a parallel is also drawn between Jesus and the church. Just as the wife must submit to her husband who is the head of the family, so also Christians must submit to Christ who is the head of the church. Similarly, just as Christ love, cherish and take proper care of the church, so also the husband must do to the wife (cf. Eph. 5:23-33).

Conclusively, marriage is characterized by monogamy that is one man and one wife. Marriage in Christian understanding can be said to mean the joining together of one man and one woman for life, thus bringing about a relationship that only death could terminate. This is a relationship where love (agape) expresses itself more through the attitude of consideration, trust, mutual helpfulness, justice and forgiveness.

Social Conflicts in Christian Marriage

Marriage and the family are of fundamental importance for the church and for the society. They are put under unprecedented pressure at present. Even the very understanding of marriage is being threatened today in many countries by the growing occurrence of breakdown in marriage and by the spread of divorce, which most countries have adopted as a response to marriage breakdown. The pressures on marriage are particularly potent in the earliest years of marriage, and these earliest years are the critical years for the future of marriage. By far, the greatest number of marriages breakdowns occurs either in the first five years, or as a delayed result of difficulties arising in those years.

Crises in marriage are not, of course, inevitable in the early years of marriage. Modern married couples will generally be facing a longer period of life together. Nowadays, children tend to be born in the earlier years of marriage, and will frequently have left home while the parents are still quite young. People retire from work at an earlier age than formerly. For these reasons, the couple can expect to be spending many of their married years in one another's company, without the presence of children. These factors create a new challenge for marriage.

Economic and social conditions also create stresses for marriage. Newly married couples are sometimes obliged to live with their in-laws, and this increases the strain for couples, who need privacy and peace to adjust to each other in the deprived areas there is still a scandalous amount of substandard accommodation. There is exploitation by some landlords in the area of flat-letting. For those who secure accommodation, the payment of rent or mortgages is a recurrent burden and problem. Unemployment is a demoralizing experience, for men and also for women. Indeed, unemployment is among the greatest sources of marital stress at the present time. All forms of social deprivation create strains for marriage. Marriages suffer also when couples are unable to manage the family budget or are lacking in basic housekeeping skills.

A feature common to too many problems in marriage is lack of communication between the parents. The transition from the joy and affection and mutual concern of courtship to the realities of marriage can sometimes be traumatic. In some homes, words are rarely exchanged except in anger, in nagging or in demand sometimes the main; if not the sole communication between married couples is through their children. When the children leave home, the couples live in chilly, or perhaps frosty, silence.

Abuse of alcohol is a cause of much strain in marriage and much misery in homes. Excessive drinking wastes housekeeping money; it keeps the spouse away from home; it is often associated with quarrelling between husband and wife and with wife-beating or child-battering. Violence in the home, often associated with drinking, is an all too common scourge. Some of these reasons together with their experience of unhappy or broken marriages among their friends or in their parent's generation may help to explain why some young people now choose to "live together" without marriage. This is also a result of the trend towards secularism in society.

Short History of RCCG, Ilorin

The Redeemed Christian Church of God came into Ilorin, the capital of Kwara State in the latter part of 1965. This church was established by late Pastor S. A. Olaniyan then a staff of G. B. Olivant Services. RCCG in Ilorin metropolis started as a House Fellowship in the house of this man of God opposite the present Central Bank of Nigeria, Ilorin behind Nigeria Telecommunications (NITEL) Ilorin.

Few months later, in his residence, the church grew with a population of about twenty-two (22) and later moved to Gbabiabidun lane, Opo-Malu, Ilorin. In the early 1967, the church had grown to about one hundred in number. They received quit notice from Opo-Malu and they moved to its present permanent site now the Regional Headquarters, Oke Ayo Sabo-Oke Ilorin. Due to the establishment of higher institutions like the University, Kwara State Polytechnic, College of Education, Federal Training Centers, School of Nursing and Midwifery, United Missionary Theological College to mention a few. The population of Ilorin was estimated to be 512,560 – 877,940 between 1971 and 1988 respectively.

From 1967, the church has grown in size with about fifteen area headquarters, sixty-eight parishes, and many zonal divisions. The increase in population birthed the zeal of evangelization in Ilorin and accounts for some of the progress that the Church has made. With new converts among the indigenes, the church grew in size. This has been the case till this day.

Social Conflicts in The Redeemed Christian Church of God in Ilorin

Some members explained frequent causes of social conflicts in marriage as domestic violence, unfaithfulness, alcoholism, and in-law interference. Lack of love in marriage, money issues, character differences, infidelity, and 'blame game' in marriage contribute to social conflict in marriage according to some couples interviewed in the church.

- **Character differences**
In society, acceptable reasons are based on differences among couples, negligence by one or both couples based on alcoholism, extra marital affairs,