

Marriage and Leadership among Members of Christian Faith Organizations: A Study of their Perception in Selected Churches Within Calabar, Nigeria

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Abstract

Marriage is an important requirement in selection and appointment of Christian leaders. The Bible position on marriage is clear that only death can separate marriage partners and monogamy is seen in the Bible as the only form of marriage approved for a Christian leader and Christian as a whole. Every Christian is qualified for church leadership positions as approved in the scripture provided other scriptural requirements are satisfied. This expository qualitative analysis presented Biblical position on marriage and looked at marriage as one of the basic requirements for leadership in a Christian church. The study revealed that orthodox and Pentecostal churches that are universal respect entirely Biblical views on marriage, while same is not applicable in national and local charismatic churches, where their leaders/ministers may go out of marriage and still preside over churches. Adherence to biblical standard for marriage among Christians foster stability, morality, peace and provide ground for sustainable development. It was recommended that Christian bodies like Christian Association of Nigeria should regulate adherence to strict biblical standard among church leaders and should sponsor legislation, since sound biblical marriage practice promotes church growth, evangelism and inhibits separation.

Keywords: Marriage, Leadership, Scriptural Position, Church Organization, Growth.

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is an important social institution in every society. It involved the coming together of an adult male and female in a manner that is culturally approved by a given society. It is through marriage that sexual relationship is legally approved in most societies. Christian religion considers marriage as an important institution created by God, highly respected and honoured. Leadership is the dynamic process at work in a group whereby one individual, over a particular period of time, and in a particular organizational context, influences the other group members to commit themselves freely to the achievement of group task or goal (Ugwuaja, 2008; Odey & Odey, 2021). Leadership evolved and it is a changing process which stipulates the continuous transfer of the role of a leader in the group (succession) throughout the life span of the group.

The important place of leadership in any organization is to foster the achievement of the group or organization goal through coordinating all members to pursue its objectives, practice its principles and implement approved strategies, norms, rules and regulations guiding the organization. Consequently, it is impossible to achieve set goal in the absent of effective and efficient leadership that itself abide by the rules and preserve such rules and guiding principles. Where such individual that conformed with rules and guiding principles are not found, leadership vacuum is created. This study therefore examined conformity or otherwise of leaders

in Christian church organizations to biblical principles of marriage and the effect on the church and members.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVE

In contemporary Christian churches, marriage is celebrated in a moment and in another moment there is separation or divorce. The Christian belief and requirement for church leadership is clearly spelt out in the New Testament (1 Timothy 3:2, King James Version) which states that:

“A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach”.

The state of being blameless is generic and the first element of blamelessness is being husband of one wife. It therefore means that Christian leaders should be in a state of marriage before they are qualified to be in church leadership position and be sustain in such position. This is further confirmed (Titus 1:5-6, King James Version) thus:

“This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained with order and appoint elders in every town as I directed you, if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination”.

It is imperative that marriage is a primary requirement for leadership in a New Testament Church and church leaders should be married.

Ososanya (2020) reported of three Nigerian pastors who divorced their wives namely: Pastor Chris Oyakhilome of Christ Embassy in 2016, Joshua Igirila of The Champions Royal Assembly in 2019 and Chris Okotie of the Household of God Church International Ministries in 2012. Other ministers include Chris Okafor, founder of Mountain of Liberation and Miracle Ministry in 2012 and Pastor Ituah Ighodalo of The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) who was asked to leave the church for remarrying another woman right after he got divorced from his former wife (Lala, 2020).

The Christian God hates divorce or breaking of marriage in any form. Malachi 2:16, King James Version states that:

“For the Lord, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away, for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the Lord of hosts. Therefore, take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously”.

Divorce and separation are seen by God as treacherous acts and therefore should not be heard among Christians. The problem of divorce and separation as they affect church leaders, also affect members alike. People in church enter into marriage and in less than no time separates.

The main purpose or objective of this investigation is to examine the effect of marital failure in contemporary Christian churches leadership in Nigeria. To look at the ability of the leaders with failed marriages, to preserve the guiding principles of the Christian faith and the pursuit of same by congregants which is the primary route to achieving the goal of the church, making it into the kingdom of God.

CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS AND REVIEW

Marriage: This is defined by Ottong (2011) as the establishment of common residence, and the maintenance of socially approved sexual relationship between the adult male and female, being husband and wife. Marriage is the beginning of family formation and provides legitimacy to the children. There are different types of marriages. Polygamy which includes Polygyny being marriage of one man to two or more women and Polyandry being marriage of one woman to two or more men. Group marriage entails the marriage of two or more men husband to two

or more women as wives. Christian marriage as approved in the scripture is the marriage of one man to one-woman, termed monogamy.

Importance of Marriage:

Marriage plays very important roles in the society. Ottong (2011) noted roles of marriage to include: Perpetuation of family line, survival of the population; preservation of kinship structure, creation of alliance between lineage and kin-groups, basis for distribution of inheritance rights, marriage also provides social and psychological satisfaction. Because of the importance of marriage, the New Testament church adopted monogamy as a form of marriage to be practice by church leaders and members alike (1Timothy 3:2, King James Version).

Leadership in Christian Church

Leadership is seen as a continuous changing process in organization. It is defined by Ugwuha (2008) as a dynamic process at work in a group where by one individual, over a particular period of time, and in a particular organizational context, influences the other group members to commit themselves freely to the achievement of group task or goal. Leaders are those who are able to influence the behavior, actions and attitude of others towards goal attainment. Christian leadership is a legal rational or constitutional type of leadership. It is based on law guiding the Christian faith and belief, which is the bible. Christian leadership acquires legitimacy based on adherence to the scriptural position on marriage requirements where such is violated legitimacy is spiritually withdrawn by God. Attributes of a good leader as noted by Bassey and Ottong (2015) includes: ability to identify with follower's desires and expectations; creativeness and resourceful firmness in principles; and upholding the rules and regulations guiding the group he is leading.

Church leaders: Ephesian 4:11-12, King James Version enumerates those that are saddled with the responsibility of leading the New Testament church thus:

"And he gave some, apostles; and some prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and some teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ".

The bible recognizes elders and deacons as leaders in New Testament local churches, where elders are also called Bishops and female equivalent of a Deacon is the Deaconess. Uma and Abiaziemi (2019) noted the following titled of leaders in Nigerian Christian churches, such as: Bishop, Father, Your Lordship, Your Eminence, Reverend Doctor, Senior Prophet, Most Senior Prophet, which they viewed as acquired to gain more respect and honorarium. Church leaders to conform with the word of God should be husband of one wife and for deaconesses wife of one husband, the very basis to uphold the truth of God, prepare self and followers for the Kingdom of God, which is the primary object of Christian faith.

Anenga (2007) noted that marriage as a legal union for Christians and the church should embrace that couples understand and adheres to the tenets of "for better and for worse". Therefore, divorce should be avoided to conform with scripture, though sanctity of life should be protected to avoid abuse. Marriage is a holy institution to be protected by church leaders in accordance with scriptural injunctions.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND:

Merton (1968) considered society as an organism with many functions performed by its various parts which are both manifest and latent in terms of consequences of the function performed. Manifest where consequences were anticipated and latent where consequences were not

expected. This study also examines the consequences of upholding and not upholding the institution of marriage by leaders and followers in Christian churches, effects on the faith, continuation and growth of church organization, as well as achieving the primary objective of Christian faith, which is making the Kingdom of God.

METHODOLOGY

This is an expository qualitative analysis relying on both secondary and primary data. Secondary data obtained from books, newspaper and magazines. The primary data was gathered through interviews and Focus Group Discussions to ensure empiricism and compare with secondary data for validity of its findings. Four interviews were conducted and four Focus Group discussion. Each focus group discussion comprises 8 participants each excluding the researcher and assistants who assisted in recording, composing of both indepth interview and FGDs were professing Christians leaders from different churches in Calabar, Nigeria. The study spanned between 2009 and 2019, a period of ten years. Calabar in Cross River State, Nigeria is a predominantly Christian state. The study was conducted in Calabar with a predominantly Christian population. It was essentially an expost-facto analysis, where primary data was obtained from 36 participants in both indepth interview and Focus Group discussion being 18 males and 18 females. Library information was extensively used, as the study relates with social development of Christians and their church organizations (Bassey, Bassey & Uzoh, 2021; and Bassey, Bassey, Uzoh & Ushie, 2021).

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Both in-depth interview and focus group discussion were conducted in four clusters. Each cluster consist of a Christian denomination representing a category namely: Catholic Church, representing orthodox universal denominations, The Apostolic Church, representing Universal Pentecostal churches; Living Faith Church representing national charismatic churches and Christian Central Chapel representing indigenous charismatic churches. The study population was the total member strength of four churches under study being 111, 286 (Catholics – 47, 118; The Apostolic – 52, 468; Living faith Church – 6700; and Christian Central Chapel - 500). The population indicates that Calabar Town in Nigeria is higher populated by universal orthodox and universal Pentecostal Christians, more than National Charismatic/Indigenous charismatic Christian.

Interview – Schedule

Interview I refers to Catholics interview

Interview II refers to The Apostolic Church interview

Interview III refers to Living Faith interview

Interview IV refers to Christian Central Chapel interview

Focus Group Discussion Schedule

Focus Group Discussion I – Catholic Church

Focus Group Discussion II – The Apostolic church

Focus Group Discussion III – Living Faith church

Focus Group Discussion IV – Christian Central Chapel.

Analysis of findings on scriptural position

From the interviewers and Focus Group discussions above, the following findings were obtained:

No place for divorce and separation: Bible permits divorce only on the grounds of unfaithfulness of either of the couples in terms of adultery (Matthew 3:16; King James Version), which Jesus clearly maintains that forgiveness should be granted and couple should remain in marriage. This position is in line with Malachi 2:16 King James Version, in which it is clearly stated that God hates divorce or separation of any form. Consequently, true believers have no place for divorce or separation in their marriages, which enhances leadership requirement of the New Testament church. This position was embraced by participants in both interviews and focus group discussions.

Not part of God's plan and intention: Participants generally noted that divorce and separation in marriage is not part of God's plan for mankind and His church. As Jesus Christ in Matthew 19:7-8, King James version further maintains that Old Testament law of separation was to satisfy the Jews that hardened their hearts against forgiving one another. Consequently, Christians lay emphasis on the need for forgiveness as the task of every believer which is an important ingredient of unity and togetherness in marriage. This position was generally accepted by participants in interviews and focus group discussions.

The need for reconciliation among believers: Participants also noted the need for couples to reconcile their differences whenever there is any. If a Christian leader cannot practice reconciliation, he or she will not be able to teach others the Christian virtue of reconciliation (Luke 17:3-4, 1Cor. 7:10-11, King James Version).

Avoidance of Sin: Failure by Christians to forgive one another and come together in unity is seen as a great sin in the scripture. Participants also encourage the practice of reconciliation by leaders and members in order to preserve the faith once delivered (Matthew 6:15, King James Version).

Need to avoid adultery: Any believer who separate or divorce his or her partner and go into a new marriage with a different partner is seen in Luke 6:18, King James Version to have committed adultery and such should not be given a leadership position in the Christian church. The primary goal of a believer is to go to Heaven and be a citizen in the eternal Kingdom of God which excludes all adulterers.

DISCUSSION ON MARRIAGE AND CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP:

This section presents the impact of marital failure in terms of separation and divorces on leadership in Christian churches.

Continuation of leadership role after failed marriage: Participants in interview and FGDs were asked: "is it scriptural for a Pastor to continue serving after failed marriage?"

Out of four interviews, three indepth interviews (II, III and IV) accepted that it is not scriptural for any pastor to continue ministration after failed marriage. This according to them is because marriage is a cardinal requirement for ministerial call in a New Testament church. The only exception was from indepth interview I which represented Catholic Church where the priest is celibate. Focus Group Discussion II which is The Apostolic church representing global Pentecostal churches, it was stated that:

“Any minister that divorces or separate with his wife should voluntarily relinquish the pastorate, as he does not live in line with the tenet of the scripture, which he was called to protect (FGD II)”.

This position was supported by participant in FGD III and IV. Participants of FGD I (Catholic) expressed their opinions that any person who accepts a work condition, must abide by that condition, though not applicable to the catholic church, they were in favour of ministers in churches applicable doing what the scripture demands, which is not to separate or divorce. This is not the practice by ministers in Nigeria who separated or divorced their former wives like Pastor Chris Oyakhilome, Joshua Iginla and Ituah Ighodalo who all continue playing their ministerial role in their various ministries (Osoganya, 2020).

Impact on Church Growth and Evangelism

Participants in both indepth interview and Focus Group Discussion were also asked “what are the effects of Pastor’s marital instability on church growth and evangelism?”. Respondents in both interview and discussion revealed that once information on minister’s marriage instability get to members, many people that are sound in the scripture and are true to their faith stop coming to church. Some will not be committed again. In indepth interview III, it was stated that:

“Whenever pastor have marital problem and separate from his wife, members will take side, causing factions to be in the church. Those in factions that are against the conduct of the minister will start backsliding, if their views and opinions are not respected in terms of adherence to the scripture” (IDI III).

General opinion by participants indicates that the church in different times splited because of this situation which participants from The Apostolic Church in both indepth interview and focus group discussion make references to the separation in the Apostolic Church Idang Assembly which lead to the formation of God’s People Church, which involved elders in the assembly who metamorphosed into the president of a new church.

Impact on General Morality of Members, Adherence to Scriptural Truth and Goal

Leaders inspires the attitude and lifestyle of followers. It is often assumed that where leaders are prudent, those that are under them shall be prudent and vice versa. Consequently. Where leaders in church adhere strictly to biblical injunctions in administering and directing affairs in the church, so will members also adhere to biblical injunctions. The scripture revealed the eternal truth of God and the goal of Christians is to be with Jesus Christ in his father’s Kingdom (Heaven).

Participants in Focus Group Discussion I, II, III and IV all attested to the goal of making heaven by abiding in the Word of God. Same position was taken by those interviewed in indepth interviews. This implies that marriage should be honoured by all believers including church leaders in order to show good example and ensure moral discipline in the church. Anyone who violates the scripture on marriage is acting against God and he or she is not a Kingdom driven candidate, despite the position he or she is occupying in any church. Adhering to scriptural position build morality and leaders of the church are seen generally as custodian of morality or ethical value. Where leaders ignore scriptural injunctions, support and promote separation and divorce under any disguise their action threatens the ethical foundation of the church and society at large. This position is in line with functional theory that marriage practice has consequences on Christian leadership.

Implications of Findings

The findings of the study have the following implications:

1. Non adherence by indigenous charismatic and national charismatic churches than in orthodox and international Pentecostal churches, as the former are controlled by individual leaders that suit their personal interest than scriptural truth and the later follows laid down biblical truth.
2. Continuous separation, splitting and establishment of new churches are a times a function of disagreement over conflict associating with deviation from biblical truth, thereby leading to proliferation of churches.
3. Indigenous churches are viewed as business enterprises operating on business growth models, as against scriptural truth.
4. Ministers conformity to scriptural standard is greater in orthodox and universal Pentecostal churches that adhered to well established traditions rooted in the scripture, than personal business plan.
5. Failure to adhere to biblical truth diverts people from the kingdom of God and undermined Christian goal of attaining heaven.
6. Views and practices regarding marriage as a cardinal factor in New Testament church is a key determinant of church growth and evangelical spread.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended among other things that:

1. Christian bodies in Nigeria, like Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), Council of Christian Churches in Nigeria (CCCN) etc. should ensure adherence to biblical truth by leaders of member churches, in order to bring about uniformity of practices and integrations among church doctrines regarding marriage.
2. Legislation should be put in place to regulate activities of churches, to ensure that their practices comply with the bible.
3. Church leaders should follow strictly Jesus Christ teaching on marriage in order to avoid leading members to eternal destruction.

CONCLUSION

Marriage is an important element of the scripture, an institution created by God and prevailing in every society. Marriage is a critical unit of which affects social life, and order in society, which cannot be ignored when stability of society is considered. This is why prevailing religious view of Calabar people who are predominantly Christians was considered. This is because when leadership of church organizations are in order, society as a whole will be in order, as society is controlled and guided by religious views of its members. Though some leaders engaged in divorce and separation, majority of Christian hold tenaciously to biblical truth that a church leader must be a husband of one wife, who cannot put away his wife. This position provides the leader stability to maintain and teach others biblical truth which guarantees peace and stability in society, both basic requirements for sustainable development and growth.

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