

Traditional, Church or white Wedding? Conflicting mindsets and the need for synculturation in Igbo Weddings

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Abstract

The issue of wedding is of immense socio-cultural and pastoral concern for the Igbo people. The challenge revolves around the question of which wedding(s) the intending couple should choose. Which wedding is cost effective or more socially acceptable? Which wedding incorporates the extended families or alienates them? These choices are often so interconnected that to choose one is to reject the other. As a result, many young people have started cohabiting as families without wedding, or have had one wedding which is considered incomplete, adversely affecting their sense of belonging and participation in their churches, or in the family and socio-cultural settings. This article intends to expose the origin, causes and consequences of the issue. It does not elucidate the rituals of traditional or church wedding, instead it explicates the nuances of both weddings vying for superiority, and the subtle, yet sophisticated contention over their values in Igboland. Then it suggests solutions to help alleviate it.

Keywords: Catholic Church, Church-White Wedding, Traditional Wedding, Igbo, Synculturation.

Introduction

Igbo people are a heterogeneous ethnic group inhabiting most of the regions, coastal and land territories of the Bight of Biafra, in the present southern part of Nigeria, West Africa. They are a very populous and popular ethnic group, both home and in diaspora, numbering up to 60 million.

For a young man or woman of marriable age to wed and have a family is a normal valued expectation among the Igbo people. This value is being challenged by a number of factors. Once, it was about the financial implications of the flamboyant weddings among the Igbo people (SMITH 2017, 68). Then, it was about the denominational dissonance when the marital partners were from different churches (CHIGERE 2001, 397). Then, it was about the culture of extended families in marriages (DIKE 2001, 59), and so on. Nowadays, it would appear that the contemporary Igbo person is confronted with a combination of all these factors and more. The more serious concern now is that of a wedding choice, and it is not easy to choose between a few options. Every choice is a decision for and against the other. Every choice has its baggage, effects and implications. Every option demands a right of identity, a commitment from the Igbo in the relevance of his/her life.

The traditional wedding is a highly valued choice in Igbo land, gaining more acceptance even when it develops into occasions of extravagance and show of wealth. The church wedding is the popular option for religio-historical reasons, but it is getting challenged by social and theological factors. Court wedding, which seemed dormant before, is becoming more important owing to geo-political factors and global influence. And then there is the contemporary tendency towards the celebrated, media-promoted, sensationalized weddings, which have no relevant bearing within the Nigerian context, except that it is fanciful for the rich and underlines their social distinctions.

How would the contemporary Igbo person manage these diverging expectations? Although no current research has been done, but it would not be an exaggeration to put the percentage of Igbo people who identify as Christians around 80 to 90 (OKEKE 2019, 122). It makes this issue a serious pastoral concern for the Catholic Church, being the dominant denomination in Igbo land. Some people have remained unwedded in the church due to the wedding choices' complications. Some have done one wedding, perhaps the traditional wedding, and would or could no longer do the church wedding. Some are confronted by the consequence of their wedding not being accepted by the church community, or valued enough by the family or community, and so on.

For some, these challenges have enabled them to live a family life without the social/community or church commitments that a wedding carries. But for others, it is about the complexities of choice, of which wedding is expedient enough so they would not need to wed twice or thrice. What would or is the church doing to address this pastoral concern?

Explicating the Problem

Clarifying concepts

The concepts of church and white wedding have led to many misunderstandings. People have given different interpretations and meanings to these concepts, sometimes to promote their ideologies and other times, just to identify and distinguish the wedding type. For a majority of people both church and white wedding mean the same. But as concepts, especially in the context of Nigerian wedding discourse, both can be ideologically weaponized, if not properly identified and differentiated.

Many writers who present the white and church wedding as the same, suppose the difference is superficial and only in nomenclature (IKEDILO 2015; OBI 2010, 110). The 'white' wedding is supposed to be derived from the white wedding garment of the bride. So, the weddings in white gowns take place in the church and are called white or church weddings.

But there are other, not so superficial, angles to these names which require clarifications. With the consciousness to extricate him/herself from the systematic structures that have coined and defined his social and religious worldviews for many decades, the contemporary Igbo interprets and understands the white wedding as the wedding from the Westerners. It is a wedding type brought by Christianity, which, in his/her ideological consciousness, is a white man's religious system to destroy his/her indigenous spirituality. So, when he/she says 'white wedding', he/she is not thinking about a wedding gown in the first instance. He/she is thinking about a Western foreign wedding done in the church.

If the same wedding was to be done wearing *Agbada* or *Ishoke*, it would still be a white wedding.

Another serious angle to the term ‘white wedding’ is that it deflects the essentials of the Christian wedding as something beyond particular era and the Western socio-cultural limitations; something relevant in all Christendom. By this I mean that the term ‘white wedding’ relegates the Christian religious essence of the wedding to the background, while postulating ‘whiteness’ and its variable implications to the front. *Ipsa facto*, it robs other non-Western part of Christendom their right to Christian wedding and their right to bear such identity. Thirdly and importantly, by calling it white, such a wedding has already drawn an ideological battle line between the church wedding (as a white man’s foreign culture) and the traditional wedding (of indigenous culture), thereby exposing the Christian who is to wed to a choice of betrayal. The white wedding (church-Christian wedding) becomes, in this context, a white man’s culture, nothing more. Therefore, if only for this argument, the Igbo traditional wedding should be considered more valuable than the church wedding.

The anti-church-wedding proponents argue thus: “These foreigners came along and told us it is God that joins people in holy matrimony. In that case, in their assumption, our forefathers and mothers have had unholy matrimony (BOND 2010, 678)!” Their claim is that the church manipulates people to live according to the ancient socio-cultural forms of the white people, which the Europeans themselves have discarded many years ago and no longer submit to. If all people are equal creatures before God then the indigenous culture should be as valuable as that of the Westerner. Thus Igbo traditional wedding should equal his/her traditional wedding, which is the church wedding. Moreover, the important thing for a wedding is the consent. So why should the consent taken in front of parents and the community be less valuable than the one taken in the church before a priest? The same God in a church is ubiquitous and is surely present outside the church.

However, to avoid any ambiguity, I will mostly use the term, ‘church wedding’ to describe the Christian wedding in the church. ‘White’ wedding has pejorative connotations.

Exposing the conundrum of the Igbo Christian

Among the various tortuousness about weddings and marriages in which the Igbo Christian is entangled, the pivot of this article is on the current wave of anti-church marriage in favour of traditional marriage. Some people are overtaken by a wave of ‘Igboness’, informing them of how church wedding is a betrayal to their Igbo identity, encouraging them on how only traditional wedding should suffice. This ideology gives no room for compromise. It is either traditional wedding or church wedding. It used to be normal that couples do both traditional and church weddings so they would balance their allegiance to Christianity and their indigenusness. On the contrary, one has to justify and defend oneself for doing both weddings, especially the church wedding.

All along, there have been complaints about the financial burden of this double or triple weddings, especially with the continuous worsening condition of the economy; about the discrepancies between a sacramental monogamous wedding and a traditional wedding, joining the same couple almost at same period

in matrimony; about the theological style and bond in church wedding, and the practical expectations of marriage from a traditional wedding. These and more have busy minds in both cultural and church circles, but total separation of both weddings has not been pursued until recently. Now, the prevalent social consciousness is; church wedding vs traditional wedding.

For a long time the Igbo has lived in a pendulum of variant realities. At one corner of life is his/her indigenoussness. At another corner is Christianity. At the other corner is the socio-political conundrum of Nigeria from which he has not been able to extricate himself yet. At another corner is the Western-orientated secularism and ‘wokeness’. The Igbo grows into subconsciously normalizing his/her experiential reality of swinging his/her life pendulum to these various aspects that have become so integral to his/her being. He/she becomes Igbo when it is needed, Nigerian when he/she must, Christian when it suits, secularized Western- orientated millennial when needed. Like an amoeba, the Igbo assumes whatever form that is expedient to achieve his/her goal. But how long would the Igbo have to live in different worlds and struggle to appease them all?

Within the pastoral context, this question is very evident and relevant on the issue of wedding. The four conflicting aspects in the life of the Igbo; traditional, Christian, political, and secular, are vying for decisiveness in his/her marital family life. And the contention begins with the wedding.

Wedding is a very important event in the life of an Igbo person. In order to fully grasp that, we should understand what marriage means for the Igbo. In the traditional Igbo setting, marriage is a responsibility of immense importance. Some of the duties are: 1. To reincarnate oneself and to guard against personal obliteration 2. A duty to one’s lineage so that one’s family does not cease to exist. 3. A duty to the community (where one lives) so as to contribute to the community’s manpower and thereby live in accordance with the culture (ACHUNIKE 2017, 52). In this sense, it would appear that the very existence of the Igbo person as a community member revolves around marriage. If he /she is able to fulfil these duties around fecundity and social relevance, not wedded in the church becomes secondary. “The practice of marriage in Ibo culture is viewed as the core of the whole social structure because, until a person is married, he or she is not regarded as a distinct individual” (OKOROIKE 2009, 105). Indeed, marriage is one of the three cardinal points of human life in Igbo cosmology. “The Igbo consider birth, marriage, and death to be the three most important life events” (WILLIAMS 2020, 470). Since wedding is the occasion that initiates the marital family life, it is considered with the same importance and seriousness as marriage. One might even suppose that a good marriage starts with a good wedding.

Wedding is also important for some other reasons. It serves as an opportunity to showcase affluence, which is a social value among the Igbo people. The flamboyancy displayed in Igbo weddings have cultural roots. It was important in the olden days for a man to have the resources to cater for his wives and kids. One important occasion for showing that was the wedding. How rich or even extravagant the wedding looks, exerts conviction on the bride’s family that their in-law is capable of catering for their daughter and by extension, them. It became a thing of pride to have a wealthy in-law. So weddings became an opportunity to display one’s wealth, not only for the conviction of financial stability and provisional security, but also for the interest of social status and class distinction.

And recently, it is also an opportunity of taunting one's enemies and social intimidation.

The Igbo person, in his/her designing nature, now tends towards expediency in his/her choice of wedding. He/she has to consider which wedding would be more acceptable by the larger society, affordable and yet resounding in extravagance, religious and secular, and importantly, which wedding is of valuable relevance to his global consciousness. Navigating through these expectations and consequences of choices has been frustrating and, for some, demoralizing. Officially, there are two types of marriages in Nigeria to wed from: Traditional or statutory weddings. The choices of weddings though are: traditional, church, statutory/court, and/or secular-entertainment weddings.

a) Traditional Wedding

The traditional wedding has been a favourite to many people because of the peculiar proclivity of the Igbo people to their indigenesness. The phenomenon of indigenesness is very essential in understanding the Igbo people. The individual identity is essentially attached to his/her collective origin. The Igbo asks; *where are you from, who is your father*, before asking, *what is your name?* This is why they would travel across the globe on festive periods to come home and identify with their origin and indigenous community. This is why they would erect mansions at their ancestral homes, while living in average or below average apartments in the towns. This is why a foremost achievement of an Igbo man is to build a house in his ancestral home, even when he has no plans of going back to Nigeria. So, his/her affiliation to his/her ancestral roots is also expressed in his recognition of the traditional wedding.

There is also a new attentiveness to it. In the wake of the pro-Igbo consciousness within the socio-political context of Nigeria, the awareness and sometimes desire to uphold the Igbo identity and value it more than other phenomenon has increased. This awareness has become a whirlpool, ready to fuel any form of agitation and uprising in the political, economic, and religious spheres in Nigeria. It hopes to reinstate the pro-Igbo consciousness, and/or destroy the ideological and structural frameworks that suffocate the Igbo consciousness. This explains "the challenges of current struggles in many African countries today, including Nigeria, for a second independence from the domineering ethnic-groups and their foreign sponsors" (OBORJI 2020, 672).

In a contextual understanding of this ideology, a non-Igbo framework equals an anti-Igbo structure. This is why a part of its approach is to instil an aversion to non-Igbo elements in the mindset of Igbo people. As such, whether it is in politics or religion, society or culture, cuisine or music, in this new wave of consciousness non-Igbo elements are considered anti-Igbo and inimical to the propagation of Igbo identity. Igbo indigenesness becomes the base, the common denominator, upon which political, economic and social structures should adjust, and not the other way round.

Hence, the traditional wedding enjoys the promotion and propagation of this Igbo consciousness, as opposed to the other types of weddings in Igbo land. It has its peculiarities. It provides the valuable traditional enchantments of marriage an Igbo person expects; the colourful ceremony, music, food, and so on. It initiates a marital style that is broader than the others. It essentially incorporates the extended

families and is open to bi/polygamy. However, its most essential peculiarity is the value it has among the Igbo people. While traditional weddings have legal standings in Nigeria, its major value to the Igbo lies in its cultural value.

b) Church Wedding

With Christianity and its dominant influence in Igbo land, church weddings are very popular. Because there are many different churches, the weddings equally differ in content, style and theological meanings. The Catholic Church considers marriage to be a sacrament if the wedding is between two baptized Christians. This alone, marriage as a sacrament, confuses some Christians, and contradicts the understanding of marriage for some other Christians. Still, in Igbo land, the value of church weddings is not in its theological aspect. Sacrament or not, the relevance of church wedding for many Christians in Igbo land is in the fulfilment of church/social obligation. The best of its theological relevance to the Igbo is the blessings/prayers that the couple will get from the priest, not the sacrament-salvific aspect, or the spiritual-theological richness of being bonded in Jesus Christ. Also, that it fulfils the requirement of belonging completely to one's church family is very important. Hence, the importance of social/community acceptance for the Igbo people cannot be over-emphasized. This confronts one to wonder if, in the Catholic sense, people would still wed in the church if it would not affect any aspect of their church/community life.

Even more, since Christianity among the Igbo people, as evidenced on social media since the pro-Igbo awareness, is losing attractiveness, it would be cogent to understand how acceptable and relevant the Christian marriage would remain, and perhaps undertake serious pastoral and catechetical steps towards addressing it. One must understand the subtlety of this issue for the Catholic Church in Igbo land. Christianity in Igbo land is highly denominational, sensitively church orientated. The non-orthodox Christian denominations do not consider marriage as a sacrament, and the context of mixed marriage is not as trivial as it might seem. It is a challenge if the Catholic partner to whom marriage is a sacrament prepares him/herself accordingly for the wedding, while the non-Catholic understands it at best, as a mere religious occasion where a priest blesses their union. It is not trivial that even in non-sacramental marriages the Catholic partner still has to live out his/her Catholic faith and raise their children accordingly as Catholics (CODE OF CANON LAW, 1055 – 1165).

That, as a sacrament, it is usually indissoluble even with sexual unfaithfulness, is already challenging to some Christians. That monogamy is the only option is also considered culturally *unAfrican*, by those who consider church wedding as an invasion of foreign values. And the Catholic Church is the common anti-thesis to these different standpoints. She has to be sophisticated enough to contend values and ideological relevance with the culturally orientated anti-church consciousness on one side and the secularized-egalitarian Western influenced 'wokeness' on the other side. In the subtle irony of such combined pressures, the church needs sophisticated competence to evolve at the right pace, in the right direction.

c) Statutory/court wedding

With the exposure to globalisation's socio-political demands, especially from the Western world, court marriages are becoming serious decisions for new couples. One of the factors contributing to this is the diaspora phenomenon. The Igbo people highly value travelling and settling in foreign places for greener pastures. In order to deal with the marital and family policies that are involved in the immigration process and life in a foreign land, they have to wed in courts.

There is yet another deeper aspect to modern court weddings. This aspect is not peculiar to weddings but could be found on various issues concerning legal courts in the Igbo society. There is a sense in which the legal court system has overtaken some cultural settings and overridden their socio-cultural interpretations. The court system often thwarts the ordinance or cultural interpretation of certain situations, rendering the socio-cultural system ineffective, obsolete and meaningless. This is the case with property acquisitions, rights of inheritance, or relationship issues. It is not surprising that some Igbo people would distrust or even detest legal court system on matters that already have socio-cultural underpinnings to them. Court weddings is one of those issues where the legal system easily override the cultural interpretation.

Nonetheless, the Igbo traditional marriage setting before Christianity has no strict ethical demand on monogamy or extra-marital affairs, physical or emotional hurts. Marriage was not principally a romantic affair between two people, rather a social contract of affinity and togetherness for the two families and communities. Within the right contexts, men married more than one woman and had concubines, women had extra affairs and even have children, men assumed the sexual and provisional responsibility of their brothers' wives, men abused women physically and emotionally, women abused men sometimes physically and often emotionally. When the British Christian-orientated court system was set up, it collided with the traditional marriage on variety of issues. Extra-marital affairs, for example, became adultery, with its judgmental moral undertone (NZEKWU 2006, 87). The flexible traditional marriage was rigidified in the Christian marriage.

Through the provisions of court marriage in addressing the family and social problems of marriage and mitigate on issues between marital partners, another series of complications have been enabled. Nowadays, a partner can seek for a divorce on a number of issues, from attempted murder to 'irreconcilable differences'. Marital issues like divorce, which occurred sparingly and unceremoniously for non-profitable interests (NZEKWU 2006, 87), have become sometimes sensationalized and ideologically weaponized for financial gains and dominance. While court marriages intend to protect partners from abuses, especially in cases where the church and traditional marriages seem slow to react, yet, a motivation for court weddings now is the cultural infiltration into the Igbo concept of marriage/family from 'wokeness' and progressive idealism. The mantras of 'you do not need a man' or 'all men are scum', thrown around by women in Nollywood and social media expresses an ideology that asseverate the protection of women, but equally disavow marriage as good and safe for women. The popularity of court weddings increases by the desire of more women to wed in courts. This is because of the awareness of the social security, of finance and provisions, to which she is entitled, if the marriage was to collapse. Some of the

legal benefits of such weddings are to ensure that the woman remains the responsibility of the man after divorce, having a right to the proceeds of his hard toils, and enabling punitive advantages against the man especially when children are involved.

The other style of wedding, which I call the secular-entertainment wedding is not yet part of the social order. But among the wealthy class, it is becoming a wedding choice of signalling how westernized and affluent one is.

Synculturation and the Catholic Church

The efforts of the Catholic Church in Nigeria to integrate the church and traditional weddings into one was part of the inculturation project, which took a more serious momentum after the papal visit of Pope John Paul II in 1982. It was part of the effort to make Christianity less a foreign religion, but more a religion of the local people. One of the challenges, I would argue, is that the process of inculturation seems to concentrate more on cultural conformity. True to its concept, inculturation focuses on integrating different cultures into oneness. But in order to focus, it blurs out some essential human cultural tendencies like self-preservation and self-identity. Thus, one can see a weakness in the inculturation process on weddings in Igbo land; the indigenous elements were not, from the onset, addressed with high value and sensitivity. Instead of a balanced process where the tendency of indigenous self-identity of the people was respectfully valued, it was more like Christianity kindly assuming some aspects of the traditional wedding. With the new consciousness on 'Igboness', which has enabled the people's natural tendency towards identity politics, the weakness of inculturation has shown that there was no proper assimilation. It is the propaganda of threat and fear over the loss of cultural self-identity that causes the people's reaction of dismissing church wedding for traditional wedding. This is why I suggest synculturation.

Synculturation is the process by which two or more cultures relate with equitable balance for mutual benefits of the cultures. It takes cognizance of the importance of indigenusness in the process of inter-culturation. It is a concept where cultures engage and indulge with each other in mutual enrichment.

Mutual enrichment encourages the need for change and the openness for the achievement of it... Either the participant finds more appealing insights into his or her reality and embraces a different new world or rather finds more insights into the life structure he or she already has and thereby is enriched in his or her perception of the world. In both, change has indubitably occurred. (NWEKE 2017, 322)

Synculturation means that there is equal respect and recognition among the cultural elements such that the people do not feel alienated from their indigenusness. Both cultures concatenate and do not threaten the other with dominance.

I would like to concentrate on what the Catholic Church can do about the explicated issues of weddings with synculturation, because of her numerical and socio-political weight in Igbo land. Other churches can apply the suggestions here in their different domains. The Catholic Church in Nigeria is fully aware of the predicament and where exactly it is embroiled.

The truth is that attempts to have a marriage rite that effectively integrates catholic and traditional marriage rites have not yielded sustainable result. They have not satisfactorily met the canonical as well as statutory requirements. The issues of place and time as well as official witness of marriage have to be resolved to meet with canonical as well as statutory requirements for the celebration of marriage. (OKEKE 2014, 40)

I intend to only add to the other serious efforts and progresses made so far by soliciting for more seriousness with my suggestions.

1) Identifying and Analysing the Challenge

The Catholic Church is challenged to a new era. Whether she has taken this challenge seriously, paying attention to the new mindset, questions, concerns, needs and difficulties; and whether she has shown enough signs of readiness towards a contemporary approach to contemporary challenges in its catechetical and pedagogical apostolates, is left to be argued.

Less arguable, rather, is that the Catholic Church is struggling to keep up with the growing consternations of the newer generations from little things like dress code on church attires to bigger issues like weddings in the church. It is necessary not to be dismissive of these concerns as theologically incorrect, but to respectfully address them from the socio-cultural concerns.

- A) There is now the mindset of the new Igbo consciousness that the church has been brainwashing the Igbo people with her teachings, so as to keep them uncritical and alienated from their indigenous cultures and identities.
- B) There is also a prevailing awareness in the new Igbo consciousness that church laws were made to make the Igbo people Christians, nearer to the foreign cultures that brought Christianity than their indigenous cultures.
- C) The Igbo people have become critically aware that their cultural inclinations were neither considered nor consulted when the church canons on marriage were drafted. Hence, they were not coined in respect of their cultures or for the interest of the Igbo society. As such, the Igbo should not be involved in church marriages, or 'white wedding'. The traditional wedding is all that is needed. Church wedding after traditional wedding devalues the traditional wedding as insufficient and even inadequate. "Many Igbo people do the Church marriage or wedding mainly to remove the stigma that one has not wedded in the Church" (OKONKWO 2003, 167). This stigma must be eradicated, not through a compromise, but a subversion of the church wedding.
- D) Even more, there is an implied notion that church wedding is a disrespect to the couple's parents and elders. That a priest should certify and validate a wedding after the parents of the couples have already consented to and concluded the union in the traditional setting is disregardful.

- E) The priest, a man who might be younger than the couple and has no relationship or marital first-hand experience, cannot be the one to adjudge or permit if a couple should or should not be together.

2) *Proffering Synculturation as a Solution*

The discussions on this issue show a confusing mixture of opinions from different Christian confessions. Hence conflicting opinions and disinterests, or even aversion, should be expected. Matrimony is a sacrament in the Catholic Church. It is, as such, intrinsically different from traditional marriage. But it must not mean conflicting opposites.

Most Igbo Christians do not understand that the Catholic Church recognizes the traditional marriage as only a preparation and a prerequisite for the real marriage which is church marriage. Therefore, they do not see anything wrong with cohabitation and sexual union of the people who have only had traditional marriage. (OKEKE 2014, 39)

A sacramental teaching would not be understood or accepted by everyone. Yet, seeking for complementarity where others seek divergence, for interreligiosity instead of conflict of spiritualities, should be the Catholic way, a synculturation way.

One has to recognize that essentially the average Igbo couple is leading a marital life that is, in *stricto sensu*, neither Christian nor traditional orientated, irrespective of the type of wedding they had. While Christianity teaches the Igbo couple that marriage is a two-people affair, yet they know that as Igbo people they married a whole family in their partners. They cannot lose sight of their families and communities, which they have become part of by virtue of their cultural marital reality. They Igbo Christians are more than Christians, and that is a good thing. It does not mean that they have no religious affiliation or identity. It means that they are more than their religious identity. They can learn, respect, accept, reject, adapt, and so on. What this implies is that Igbo Christians do not have to choose between indigenesness and Christianity. They can always decide against rituals and religiousness of the indigenous spiritualities that contradict Christianity, and vice versa. Hence, synculturation is the way, church and indigenous culture together, not one versus the other.

For example, since it is of cultural value to the Igbo that his/her feasts are well attended and merriment would not lack, availing him/her of one wedding where both cultural and church elements are synchronized protects him/her from burdensome expenses.

On a single occasion, a bride can 'carry wine' to the groom, taking the cup of wine from her father to the groom, thereby making her person of choice public. The groom drinks the wine, stands up and both go to kneel before the elders. Then in the same flow the Christian exchange of ring could follow immediately after the groom takes the wine and come out to the elders with the bride. The Christian ring exchange could follow immediately after the groom takes the wine and comes out to the elders with the bride. The exchange of consent could be done through the parents/elders as they ask the traditional marital questions to the couple. The priest stands in as a witness. The prayers of the

parents/elders to the married couple could serve as the prayer of the faithful to which the priest concludes with his nuptial blessings.

In so many ways, the essential elements of the traditional and the church could be brought together in one wedding.

3) *Leading the Solution by Example through Structures*

I have three feasible propositions on how the Catholic Church can be proactive in applying synculturation in the pastoral concerns of *Ndi Igbo* on weddings.

i) A marriage rite for weddings in the Igbo Catholic churches is necessary, where the cultural and theological elements are synchronized into one aim; to afford the Igbo Christian a valid and licit marriage. Vatican II underlined the rightness of people of different cultures, Igbo people in our context, to be truly Igbo and truly Christian, through its reforms in the sacraments and liturgy. Through documents like *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (1963), *Lumen Gentium* (1964) *Ad Gentes* (1965), the church enabled the involvement of cultural elements in the Christian life of people, and in their mode of worship. “That the process of vernacularization or indigenization of the liturgy is part of the self-governance (or self-regulation) of the local church (always in communion) is captured by the change in liturgical law by Vatican II” (Uzukwu 2015, 138). There are difficulties to such a rite, but they are not unsurmountable hindrances.

I recognize with respect the numerous and tedious liturgical canonical works and propositions that have been done in and by the Catholic Church on this. The efforts of the CBCN towards achieving a rite, and the individual works of people like C.S. Mba, Hilary Okeke, Patrick C. Chibuko, and so on, are accessible evidence on addressing this pastoral problem. I can only urge for more, until the issue is resolved.

ii) It is also a lot of work, a responsibility the Catholic Church has already accepted in the pastoral interest of *Ndi Igbo*, to address the political-legal conundrum of combining a customary wedding and a statutory wedding. I believe that the difficulty in untangling this knot has been worsened by the fact that the church delayed till now on addressing this issue. “Religion does not only have the uphill task of repackaging and re-presenting itself to a secular world, it equally lacks any other option but to seek communion with the more decisive secular world” (NWEKE 2017, 147).

Providing the social security to the people that such a synculturated rite of marriage provides all cultural, theological and political requirements and services that a wedding in our time should provide, both nationally and internationally, would definitely reassure the people of the goodwill of the church, and attract more trust and openness towards her.

iii) It has to become officially structured and evidential that weddings are affordable to the average person, and no one can be denied of this sacrament on financial grounds. I am aware of the numerous efforts of some Catholic priests who periodically celebrate ‘mass weddings’ in their parishes where the couples pay little or nothing. I am also aware that sometimes, men's or women's groups choose to sponsor some weddings from their purses. Clearly, a lot of wonderful

pastoral works are done in many parishes so that people can receive this sacrament. Yet these efforts seem not propagated and presented well enough to the public. Consequentially, the church wedding is presented as a financially demanding occasion and so should be expunged, when that is not the case. If it becomes evident that financial situations cannot hinder a wedding, then it will be easier to attract people into a synculturated church and traditional wedding.

The church has to do more against the expensive mentality of excessiveness in ceremonies among the Igbo people. She has to communicate better that it is not church wedding that causes the extravagance. It is the cultural mindset on ostentatiousness. People deliberately avoid the core aspect of a church wedding, the prayerful-liturgical part in the church, but at the 'reception', the festivities that would follow, they are all ready for the party. The interest of many is on the entertainment after the church. Hence it becomes financially demanding to celebrate the traditional and church weddings on different occasions, providing the expected entertainments twice.

Besides entertainment, there are other frivolities whose assumed importance is only connected with the culture of ostentatiousness among the Igbo people. It is an untenable flamboyancy to have to change into three different expensively customized dresses in a wedding. Worse still, with each occasion, an unhealthy competitiveness of splurging provokes introduction of certain unsuitable things into the occasions. One wonders what a cake, for example, an expensively giant sweet flavoured made of flour cake, to be cut with a knife by the couple, has to do in an Igbo traditional wedding. Of what relevance is the cake to the cultural indigeneness of the Igbos? Of what significance is the 'cutting of cake' by two people who are supposed to be bonding in matrimony, and not cutting? From cakes and flowers to hiring expensive cars for the events, all are unnecessary burden, constituting stress and financial complications. Smith submits.

I have attended more than a twenty traditional weddings in southeastern Nigeria over the years. ... But in many ways the *igba nkwu* [traditional wedding] [[[ceremony is a performance of modernity, social class, consumption, and conspicuous redistribution. In other words, it is very much about having and spending money. (SMITH 2017, 68)

The church has to show its cards and insist officially on making weddings in the church affordable. Then, she can stand against the culture of extravagance in Igbo land.

Conclusion

We have been informed of the conflicting development, especially among the younger generations, promoting an alternative perspective against the hitherto church and/or traditional wedding style. This development creates an either-or narrative in a time when identity politics, inside and outside Nigeria, is prevalent. The narrative is: Foreign elements have destroyed the socio-cultural identity of *Ndi Igbo*. In the ideological climate of a struggle for an Eldorado 'Igboness' by disparaging non-Igbo elements and decisive structures, a vilification of 'white wedding' to promote 'traditional wedding' sounds appealing. Hence, a fight for superiority ensues. There is an increasing number of convinced propagators who discourage people from church wedding, which they succinctly connote as 'white

wedding’, suggesting its alien cultural origin and indicating its ‘superiority’. ‘White wedding’, is thus enrolled as part of the inferiority complex syndrome that suppresses whiteness to superiority. What can be done?

Beyond the readiness to change, the Catholic Church in Igbo land has to initiate the practical steps towards transformation, especially in her propagation style. The days of classroom catechetical recitation seem over, and its practical effect are not seriously felt. A new pastoral impulse suitable and matching to the contemporary sophistication in propagation is needed for her to communicate convincingly and effectively. Resources cannot be spared for technological advancement in communication, or on the utilization of social media channels.

However, more important in this impulse is the mindset. Given the pastoral situations, a revolutionary mindset is needed where the church sees alternative and opposing ideological standpoints as opportunities for mutual enrichment. With this synculturation mindset, I believe the problem of weddings in Igbo land would be resolved.

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