


## Moral Challenges of Marriage Institution in the Contemporary Igbo Christian Society

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## Abstract

Marriage is one of the most significant institutions of human society. It is a universal practice for all colours, classes and races. In Igbo traditional society, marriage is an ideal experience for all involved. However, marriage institutions have been seriously threatened, and the norms protecting marriage and its resultant family institutions have declined. Modern ideas, such as the reproduction revolution, same-sex marriage, cohabitation, etc., are challenging long-held beliefs, structures, and values. All these assault on marriage institutions and have profound negative implications on human society. This study evaluates marriage institution's moral challenges and their impact on society. It further explores the causes of marriage breakdown in Igbo society. The research method adopted for this is the phenomenological qualitative method. The study observed that modernity and civilisation have filtered into the traditional family system of Igbo society and have affected the morality and decorum of Igbo society. The research study recommends, among other things, the need for re-orientation of the Igbo values, as many have lost the cherished values that used to be the reference point for good conduct.

**Key words:** Marriage, Marriage Institution, Morality, Igbo society, Challenges

## Introduction

Marriage is one of the most imperative institutions of human society. It is a legal union of man and woman as husband and wife for companionship and procreation, among other things. According to the biblical account, it started in the Garden of Eden. Following the creation of Adam, God saw that he was lonely, so He caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep and took one of his ribs to form a woman. Adam was pleased concerning this connubial development. He, therefore, took Eve, the woman God created from his rib, as his wife (Gen, 2: 7-15). As a result, the institution of marriage was established.

Marriage is a universal practice that cuts across all cultures and strata of human society. It is for the rich and the poor, the Christians and non-Christians, the literate, and the illiterate. Marriage is for people of all colours, classes, and races. The method of the marriage contract may differ from culture to culture, but the primary issue of marriage as a legal union between a man and woman to live together as husband and wife remains the same.

In the Igbo traditional society, marriage is an ideal experience for all involved. It comes with many responsibilities and benefits to individuals and society. It provides a legal framework for sexual gratification and regulation, division of labour between the sexes, economic production and consumption, the satisfaction of personal need for affection, status, and companionship, and most rewardingly, it is a platform for procreation, the care of children, their education and socialisation including regulation of descent.

In recent times, marriage has been under threat; the mores safeguarding and protecting marriage and its resultant family institutions have declined (Gushee, 2004). The long-held belief about marriage, its

structures and values have been challenged by modern ideas such as cohabitation, divorce, the reproduction revolution, the sexual revolution, and the gay rights movement, among others. All these are assaults on the marriage institution. There is no longer any consensual view on the concept of marriage or the norms and expectations of marriage. Marriage, the fundamental building block of human society, is being compromised, corrupted, and rejected at an alarming rate, and the trend is only accelerating.

Against this backdrop, this research examines marriage institutions' moral challenges and their implications for society. It further explores the causes of the moral decline and suggests appropriate recommendations to help redeem and strengthen the marriage institution. Utilising the principles of phenomenological methodology, the paper is explanatory and qualitative in approach.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

#### **Marriage**

Marriage is one word that does not have a single generally accepted definition, as it is viewed differently by different schools of thought. However, it is widely defined as "the union of a man and a woman who agree to live together as husband and wife" (Egwuonwu, 1996, p. 8). However, this definition, recently, has been challenged by the Gay movement (Gushee, 2004). Marriage is naturally heterogeneous. It is a lifelong commitment with a lot of responsibility. Agha (2003) observed that "marriage is a close partnership of two different people of opposite sex who have concerted to live and work together as one entity" (p. 97).

Marriage is a sacred union instituted by God. This union involves two persons donating to each other to enjoy the fullness of humanity in a life lived in companionship and trust (Oyeka, 2015). Marriage is contracted when a man and a woman mutually decide in the presence of two or more witnesses to live together in love to promote their mutual growth and welfare. Thus, marriage is not an individual thing. It differs from other romantic or sexual relations because it is usually guided by the community and principles such as love,

sacrifice, selflessness, and continuity. Nwaogaidu (2017) pointed out that "marriage is a continuity of life, which establishes an alliance and must be approved by the community" (p. 39). Therefore, marriage in Africa is a communitarian affair.

Marriage is not only sacred but ought to be permanent. It offers a socially approved opportunity for sexual relationships, children's upbringing and socialisation into the social system. Marriage, thus, is the foundation of the family, the basic unit of society. Marriage is highly valued in Igbo society. Anybody who has reached the age of marriage and is not married by choice is said to be irresponsible, and society frowns at such a person. To be married in Igbo society is seen as a contribution to preserving the family lineage and the sustainability of the human ecosystem.

#### **Morality**

The word moral comes from the Latin word *mores*, which means customs. It deals with ethics or a body of standards or principles that govern human conduct. It defines the rightness or wrongness of human action. Girvetz, cited in Agha (2003), opined that morality is those standards of conduct that the reasonable man approves. Onuche (2013) further defined morality as the total set of ethical-moral, legal-human rights values, customs or traditions which define, describe, promote, and defend a given society or community's common good, shared values and vision, their public ethos and the common pursuit of the good to achieve their full potential and civilisation.

Morality is defined in the people's custom. The community maintains it through the family, age grade, village, and clan. According to Okwueze (2003), morality is "a specific form of social consciousness of awareness of your relatedness to others without which societal life would be impossible" (p. 242). In Igbo society, morality is found in the *omenala* (custom) of the people. The moral code of the Igbo society defines the aspects of behaviour that are approved and the ones that are prohibited.

### **Marriage as an institution in Igbo society**

According to North (1999), an institution is the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction. It is "the established, accepted and implemented ways of social behaviour that could be passed from generation to generation" (Asogwa, 2015, p. 12). An institution is an organised system of social relationships that embodies common shared ideals, goals and standardised behaviour patterns fundamental to societal existence. Allen (2005) noted that institutions are not cultural window dressings but purposeful constraints on behaviour that increase the welfare of society.

Marriage is a social institution carved out to meet specific societal needs by performing certain functions. It is a universal institution, but its patterns and structures differ from one society to another. For instance, the contracting of marriage in Igbo society differs from that of Hausa and Yoruba societies. Nonetheless, there are some standard features across all cultures. The most common of all these features is marriage, a union between one man and one woman.

In Igbo society, marriage is a socially sanctioned union of males and females. It is for (a) establishing a household, (b) entering into sex relations, (c) procreation, and (d) provision of care for the offspring. One fundamental feature of marriage in Igbo society is the involvement of a third party. Onyenwuenyi (2002), Mbiti (1976), and Okwueze (2004) agree that marriage in Igbo society is not an individual affair. According to Nwaogaidu (2017), It is the responsibility of a man to look for a girl of his choice, but not without his parents' approval. If a man sees a woman to marry, it is not proper to propose immediately to her for marriage, but instead, he informs his father first, who tells his relatives. These relatives have to go in secret and ask about the family of the woman they are about to marry.

Marriage is communal in Igbo society. It goes in line with the saying that "African marriage is not simply an affirmation

between two people, a man and a woman who decided to be husband and wife, but rather a marriage between two families or even between two clans, which even continues after the death of a spouse" (Nnabugwu, 2004, p. 195). Dissolving a marriage in Igbo society becomes difficult, as it is beyond the husband and his wife.

In Igbo traditional society, marriage was an ideal experience for all involved. Most Igbo teenagers knew what marriage institution was about (a man and woman sharing a bed and a home, a lifetime commitment publicly made, an expectation of sexual fidelity, a context for bringing children into the world and raising them) and looking forward to getting married. They knew that marriage institutions would structure and even confine their adult choice-making, like it or not (Nwaogaidu, 2017).

In the Igbo society, according to Ezeanya (2018), there are two basic types of marriage: monogamy (marriage of a man and a woman) and polygamy (marriage of more than one wife - polygyny- or husband at the same time -polyandry-) with some unique features such as (a) inheriting the wife of a deceased brother, (b)arranging for a dead son to be married in absence, (c) and a wife marrying a woman for her husband, perhaps due to her inability to conceive and bear a child. Polygyny is a common practice in Igbo society. It is a sign of wealth and affluence. Mbiti (1969) observed that the more wives a man has, the more children he is likely to have, and the more children, the stronger the power of 'immortality' in the family.

Additionally, the Igbo man marries several wives for corporate services it offers, especially in the farm work. According to Mbiti (1975), these customs were followed, respected, and accepted without any feeling of wrongness about them. They did all these to ensure that nobody was left out of the marriage and that every family had children who would stand in for the family. In contemporary Igbo society, monogamy is prevalent

because of the influence of Christianity, which has been embraced by many.

For the Igbo, divorce was a delicate accident in marital relationships. It is tough to dissolve a marriage that has been executed. The dissolution of marriage in Igbo traditional society creates remarkable scars in the community concerned. The most significant single cause of divorce in Igbo society was sterility or barrenness (Mbiti, 1969). It is believed that the inability to bear children blocks the stream of life (Okwueze, 2004). In most cases, if the problem is from the woman, she may decide to stay married and allow the man to marry another wife. Where the husband is infertile, the brother will perform the sexual duties and thus save the marriage from breaking.

In a situation where divorce occurs because of cruelty or quarrel (which is usually rare) and the couple in question already have children, the families involved will step into the matter as a part of their social responsibility and sacred obligation, especially to the children, and thus cushion the effect of the separation and divorce on the children and society at large.

In contemporary society, marriage is rarely arranged based on parental interest, family preference, or ability to do farm work; instead, it is a matter of individuals' consideration based on love, affection and compatibility. This change in the conditions for the contraction of marriage is an offshoot of the emerging social factors in modern society. For instance, family members who used to be together and work within the same area or locality are now pulled away from one another due to rural-to-urban migration, especially in search of white-collar jobs. Thus, Gushee (2004) pointed out that this diminishes the presence of husband and father in the home and contributes to the dynamics of family life. He observed that work and family spheres were split, and marriage subtly shifted from a relationship based on shared work to one based more on shared affection and mutual enjoyment.

Various authors have used different vocabularies to describe this astonishing change. Gallegher (2006) call it, too strongly perhaps, "the abolition of marriage". Whitehead and Hackstaff (2002) write of a "divorced culture". Others, less worried about these visible changes, prefer to speak of a 'transition' in marriage and family life. However, what is not disputed is that the marriage and family landscape has been profoundly altered and deeply confused.

### **Issues that morally challenge marriage institution in contemporary Igbo society**

There are so many challenges facing marriages in Igbo society and Nigeria, primarily due to cultural contact or most Nigerians trying to imitate the white man. The marriage institution is facing both local and global challenges. Ezeanya (2018) noted that an unfortunate wind of unguarded liberalism made Westerners experiment with unnatural sexual and reproductive expressions that challenge traditional family morality and decorum. These have caused several problems in marriages and society. These moral challenges include:

#### **Divorce (marital dissolution)**

In the traditional Igbo society, the divorce rate seemed minimal compared to contemporary society. Husbands and wives knew that marriage was contracted to keep the family genealogy going. However, in modern society, the divorce rate is highly alarming. Oforchukwu (2010) has it that those moral and legal restraints on divorce have weakened enormously. To be divorced was once a highly stigmatised status; today, it has almost become a celebrated event. It has become challenging to restrict people from divorce as they could see it as an intrusion on personal liberty. Convenience has become the main reason for marriage in recent times, and when this is no longer obtainable, people leave their marriage and move on.

Divorce has evolved as an easy fix for any marital issue. People enter marriages with the notion that they could walk away if things do not work out right. When this happens, the

children are mostly affected. They are the victims of this breakup. According to Akanni (2004, p. 12), "Fifty per cent of the troubles on the face of the earth today are linked with troubles in the home." He noted several men who have pioneered evil in the land are people from broken homes because of failed marriages. Area boys, hooligans, prostitutes, and drug addicts of our time mostly have a history of reacting against a family breakup. Omage (2013) admonished that marriage is a sacred institution that must be well prepared for, as failure to plan before entering the union translates into planning to fail after joining the league. He pointed out that an intact family is the better vehicle for childrearing, which every child needs. Studies have shown that children who grow up in orderly family environments are likelier to excel in school and other life endeavours, including marriage (Okon, 2010). To look down on the importance of intact marriage in the interest of promoting a single home is to weaken a moral message on which the very future of society depends (Popenoe, 1992)

### **Human sexuality**

Initially, sex was restricted to married couples, and it was an abomination for a woman to lose her virginity before marriage in Igbo land and several other places (Nwaogaidu, 2011). According to Mbiti (1969), virginity symbolises purity of the body and moral life. A virgin bride is the greatest glory and crown to her parents, husband and relatives. Virginity in traditional African society was held in high esteem, so much so that if a girl went into marriage as a virgin, the bride's prize that her suitor's family paid would be increased. In some ethnic groups, the would-be bride's mother received gifts of cash and cows as tributes to her successful upbringing of the would-be bride and further earned her respect from her in-laws (Ojua et al., 2014).

In Igbo land today, this cultural method of restricting teenagers from premarital sex is eroding. In traditional Nigerian societies, sex was not a subject much discussed. It was considered sacrilegious for an adult to discuss matters regarding sexuality with or in the presence of the young

(Ezeanya, 2018). Moral standards in traditional Nigerian societies were absolute, and parents had total control over their children, male or female. There was no pornographic intent involved in the scantiness of clothing. Sex was not to be indulged in for pleasure, even though it might be craved. The natural role of sex was purely procreative. As a result, sexual promiscuity was rare (Onuche, 2017).

Recently, a sexual restraint until marriage has become weak. Premarital sex increases as youth watch pornography, nudity, home movies, and dance steps. Finding the excitement and dignity of a matrimonial bed becomes difficult for them. Though the sexual revolution did not take place in Igbo land, through cultural contacts, media people in this part of the world started having the same mindset with a group of liberal stances who claim that sex should freely be enjoyed whenever desired as long as there was "mutual consent". The sexual revolution came into place and broke marriage's cultural monopoly of structuring sexual activity. Gushee (2004) has it that marriage confined sexual activities enough to help entice men and women to the altar of marriage. Before now, once a person is married, the firmly held cultural norm against adultery will not allow men and women to commit adultery, which is an abomination in the land. But recently, most people have engaged in illicit sexual activities without fear. It becomes true that "if sex is not confined to marriage, marriage becomes less significant or necessary" (Gushee, 2004, p. 10)

### **Single parenting**

The increase in premarital sexual activity among the young has brought about many unwanted pregnancies and out-of-wedlock babies, often called illegitimate children, which stigmatises mother and child. But it became fashionable these days for a woman to have children outside of marriage and take care of them single-handedly. Some have argued that they cannot stay under a man, others that no man came to marry them, and for fear of being caught up by menopause, many got pregnant just to have a baby. "Single parenthood refers to a group of people who choose not to enter any permanent union



with anybody in marriage, and not also intending to become celibates, but rather stay single and select people of the opposite sex for sexual satisfaction whenever they feel like" (Ezeanya, 2018, p. 111). Ezeanya noted that the desire for free unions and single parenthood often comes from the willingness to shoulder the responsibilities of a married partner and the monotony of having a single-sex partner for the rest of their life.

This group decides to be alone, getting everything due to married couples without marriage. Gushee (2004) posits that if one of marriage's essential purposes had been to structure the birth and rearing of children and to provide a structure of family relations as architecture for a child's world, then single parenting marked the crumbling of one of the fundamental pillars of marriage as a social institution.

### **Cohabitation**

Couples live together these days without any form of marriage rituals being done. One social purpose of marriage as an institution is to provide structure for family ties and the formation of households. Cohabitation is a misguided attempt by people who feel they can stay together and bear children without marriage. Because marriage is a public estate ordained by God and not a shady business to be carried on in dark corners, he who seeks it in corners and dark places or enters into it secretly is a marriage thief, for he has stolen it and not obtained it honestly from God and through obedience to his word, as is fitting so honourable an estate (Luther, 1967). In so many ways, people have attempted to steal what God has planned for only husband and wife in the marriage relationship he designed. Marriage in Igbo land is not an individual thing but a communal affair. Marriages are done before a gathered community with all the mutual exchange of promises. It is never done in hiding. Gushee (2004) rightly said that cohabitation isn't marriage, and cohabiting people do not act the same way as married people do. In Igbo society, there are no existing statistics on the incidence of cohabitation, but it exists mainly in universities. (Imo, 2017). Cohabitation is not

accepted in Igbo society; parents frown at it, but the younger ones are interested in it.

### **The reproduction revolution**

In a society where the high infertility rate is increasing, the emergence of technologically Assisted Reproduction (AR) offers couples the opportunity to have babies. There are different assisted reproduction techniques, and though the failure rate of these techniques is high, they still help thousands of couples to have their babies. However, Gushee (2004) noted that the problem with Assisted Reproduction Technology is that it makes child-conceiving and childrearing available to any person or combination of persons who can pay for it. Two men can use AR to procure a baby, the same as two women. The result is a further weakening connection between marriage, childbearing and parenting.

Surrogate motherhood is a reproduction revolution whereby a woman is contracted to carry a pregnancy for another woman, a man, or a couple for a fee. The foetus is usually formed from test-tube preparation, artificial insemination or in vitro fertilisation. And then, it is implanted into the surrogate mother's womb to carry. After the gestation period, the child is born by the surrogate mother and handed to the owner, who in turn pays off the surrogate mother and the contract is concluded (Ezeanya, 2018). Another worrisome issue in human reproduction is that of biogenetics, which involves the transaction of reproductive cells or gametes. The quality of the character features of the cell determines its price. This also poses a significant problem for the marriage institution.

### **Same-sex marriage**

Marriage is basically for procreation; two people of the same sex cannot naturally procreate. Same-sex marriage "is the permanent sexual union of two or more people of the same sex which either receives solemnisation in a religious place of worship or gets constitutional recognition by the state where it happens" (Ozorude, 2008, p. 20). Same-sex marriage denies the unitive, complementary aspect of marriage, and the procreative function of marriage is ruptured as well. The basic

unit of society, the family, is also corrupted, as homosexual acts are closed to life. Channelling towards a good that is naturally sustaining is right. Channelling towards a situation that disrupts the natural order of things is destructive. Because of this, same-sex marriage will eventually destroy society. Same-sex lifestyle is contradictory to the worldviews and values of the Igbo people. It will be a moral contradiction for society to affirm and promote the nuclear family, whose basis is heterosexual, and at the same time establish and promote all the values of homosexuality.

### **Causes of Breakdown in Marriages in Igbo Society**

#### **Poverty**

This is a virus that is eating deep into many Nigerians. It is a condition that is very glaring in Nigeria (Ngele et al., 2013). According to the National Bureau of Statistics, 112 million Nigerians out of the total population of 167 million live below the poverty line today. (premiumtimesnigeria.com 2013). Many people find it difficult to cope with poverty. In a situation where there is a sustained lack or impoverishment in marriage, either of the spouses most times gives up hope. When many things calling out for money in the family, which lie unmet, couples sometimes, employ other easy ways to make ends meet. No wonder the saying that desperate times call for desperate measures. In Nsukka, for instance, cases are bound where married men and women engage in immoral sexual activities for the sake of money. Poverty and impecuniosity have also become reasons for the changing face of marriage in Igbo society and the family system (Ugwu, 2018). It becomes clear that the problem of poverty fans the embers of immoral behaviours among married couples in society today.

#### **Urbanisation**

Urbanisation refers to the growth of towns and cities, often at the expense of rural areas, as people move to urban centres in search of jobs and what they hope will be a better life. Different people with different characters move into the cities to make ends meet. Urbanisation causes serious moral

decadence in society. Urbanisation affects human morality. "It is in urban centres that the problem of poverty and human exploitation, gangsterism, prostitution, risky sexual behaviours, alcohol and substance abuse, and poor gainful employment opportunities are evident" (Uwaegbute, 2015, p. 5). When people migrate to urban centres and the standard of living is high, they face harsh conditions that push them into immoral activities in order to survive. When men engage in alcohol and substance abuse, it results in wife battering and, consequently, divorce. The farming system mainly based on subsistence type ends up in hand-to-mouth feeding. This has caused many problems in the society. (Ugwu,2018)

Urbanisation creates an environment that results in the decline of marriage stability, continuity and community. It consequently increases individualism and social dislocation (Gushee, 2004). In this era, self-actualisation became the order of the day. This came in through televisions, radios, novels, dramas, etc.

#### **iii. Abuse of information and communication technology (ICT)**

The negative influence of ICT on society is quite huge, even though there are positive and good uses for it. For instance, the internet is used for easy access to information and communication. However, the negative side of the internet seems to out power the positive side, as seen in the case of pornography.

Pornography merely portrays sex acts in which people morally and legally may engage in private. Such a portrayal of common reality is certainly not everyone's dish of tea, but in this liberal age, the case for its strict prohibition due to some overriding social reason is not an easy one to make (Randol, 1996). At the other extreme is pornography that portrays, purely perverse titillation, and patently offensive and illegal acts, for example, sex with children and physical violence against women. The case for banning such obscene pornography should be pursued effectively. Pornographic

videos are watched via the internet, and there is no means of monitoring what one is doing with his or her phone or laptop in Nigeria.

Most people who watch pornographic videos tend to be rapists, homosexuals and also engage in other immoral sexual activities that ruin relationships. Uwaegbute (2015) posits that these youths fall prey to mind manipulations induced by what they see on the internet or watch in the movies. More so, social media counsellors, articles, posts, and testimonies are major destruction to marriages in contemporary society, as people make friends on social media without knowing who their so-called friends are. Some even take advice from such friends to the detriment of their marriage, forgetting that every marriage is unique; what works in this marriage may not work in the other marriage. Couples who spend much time on social media hardly attend to each other. This creates a serious gap in their marital affairs and tends to instigate emotional infidelity.

### iii. Unclear gender roles

In Igbo traditional society, women were under parental sovereignty until their husbands took over. They were responsible for raising children and maintaining the home. Thus, they seldom serve as political or religious leaders. However, in recent times, these roles have changed following the impact of modernisation, globalisation and the advent of Christianity. According to Marioghae et al. (1969), Christian partnership involves equal rights and common responsibilities, with both partners serving one another and serving God and their neighbours, fostering interdependence rather than dependence or independence. The historical economic dependence of women and children on men, which served as the foundation for men's power in the family, has been challenged by the large percentage of working women in modern times. Nowadays, women have achieved a level of economic independence never seen before. They now work outside the home with men, and occasionally, even take on leadership roles in their places of work over the men. One powerful element influencing the shift in gender roles in

society is the movement for gender equality. Women nowadays fight for equal rights to engage in the economy and hold leadership positions in the home, workplace, and religion. Thus, Ugwu (2018) claims that after the gender studies promoted by the Beijing- China conference, which advocates for gender equality, Women now advocate for holding positions in government, church and every sphere of human life. This though traumatising to the African males has come to stay primarily due to Christian dogma and other legal instruments supportive of this movement. (p. 7)

As this change in roles continues, many find it difficult to cope with the trouble that comes with it, and sometimes it leads to the breakup of homes. However, when things are done together in love in the family without necessarily dividing roles according to gender, things move on well. "Respect and love are reciprocal variables in every mutual union; and as such, a spouse owes it an obligation to respect and love his or her marriage partner, failure to do so fans the embers of marital discord and discontent" (Amadi et al., 2014, p. 135). A good couple relationship guarantees a peaceful and joyful atmosphere in the home, which is most suitable for bringing up healthy and happy children.

### Childlessness

Most marriages that are childless are usually not happy ones. Children are seen as a blessing from God. In Igbo society, women are normally blamed when a couple is childless, even though medically, men may contribute. According to Oforchukwu (2000) in most African societies, marriages that are yet to produce children are seen as not having fulfilled their main objective. This generates unhappiness in the life of childless couples and often social pressure from family members, which in most cases forces the male to look for alternatives. Ugwu (2008) states that childlessness is highly abhorred in African marriages and has remained one of the reasons why marriages collapse. Africans generally believe that childlessness is a curse from their



ancestors. However, in some cases, this problem is caused by untreated sexual infections out of ignorance and poor hygiene. Childlessness often leads to separation and divorce. Unproductive and infertile couples are negatively regarded in African society (Ugwu, 2008). Undoubtedly, childlessness is a big challenge to marriage institutions in Igbo society.

### **Implications of the moral declination of the marriage institution**

The implications of the moral decline of marriage institutions are quite enormous, as it affects both the family and society at large.

### **Eroding cultural values**

The value placed on marriage in Igbo society is gradually eroding as people see marriage as just a social contract rather than a legal covenant. "It is more worrisome as an increasing number of people in modern Igbo society recognise all forms of relationship as marriage" (Okwueze, 2004, p. 250). As Okwueze (2004) further observed, in the pre-colonial Igbo society, people saw themselves as owing a sacred obligation and duty to ensure that marriages were sustained and that children were brought up under the appropriate moral umbrella and atmosphere of a family (p. 250). Kinship, the primordial matrix of all social organisation, is in a serious problem, as some children cannot be traced to their descent. Nwaogaidu (2017) said that to be a part of the kinship system based on descent, it must be legitimised through marriage. This is so because, through marriage, family is constituted.

The communal nature of marriage in Igbo society is also in serious shakes. In Igbo land, generally, the notion of family does not mean parents and children. Ekwuonwu (1996) asserts that families are said to be extended in the sense that family includes close relatives such as uncles, aunts, cousins, and other persons who are in one way or the other related. In Nsukka, for instance, marriage is not a personal affair. It is never a union of man and woman but rather that of the extended family of the man and woman. Igbo

What has happened in recent times is baffling. Youths entering into marriage do not consider the decisions of their parents. They tend to go ahead with their marriage, even when it is contrary to the opinion of their parents. "Marriage alliance is a cultural integration into the vast community of relationship, which confers it a great importance and relevance in the life of the community" (Nwaogaidu, 2017, p. 40). Marriage is not left to a personal or individual decision. It is believed in Igbo traditional society that anyone who insists on a personal decision as it regards marriage has denied oneself of the parental blessing. This makes the marriage illegitimate within the individual's clan /descent. However, in recent times, once a person does not get the consent of his parents in marriage, he goes ahead to organise his friends who stand in as his parents and the marriage is contracted. Worst still, he goes ahead to get the proposed girl pregnant, and they start living together without any form of marriage rituals (Nwankwo, 2018).

In Igbo society, the quality of communal life which characterised families is gradually fading away. Individualism has virtually replaced communalism or dependence in human social relationships. Individualism is on the increase in contemporary society, and this is made possible by urbanisation and technological advancement. People believe they have a world of their own. Suchanic (2016) asserts that society has drawn closer to the individualistic culture. Love yourself and leave those who do not love you or give you what you want. This is a very big problem as nobody seems to care about anybody. But when things go wrong, it affects everyone in society. Ezeanya (2018), therefore, warns:

The reckless lifestyle of Western individualism that makes them lose sight of the teleological nature of family life by exhibiting all sorts of psychosis in the name of personal control of their sexuality and family life has to be checked before it rocks the whole world one day (p. 105).

The cultural value of virginity is on the decline in Igbo society, initially, a virgin bride was the pride of her mother and matters

of sex were not discussed in the open. Today, sexual activities are everywhere, in the movies, the internet etc. People engage in sexual activities before getting married and nothing happens.

### **Moral decay**

The family, which is constituted by marriage, is the moral structure of society. It is the foundation for the inculcation of morals into the young ones. According to Okwueze (2004), "Marriage and family life are (were) therefore the structure upon which the moral growth of the society depended and only the concept of marriage and family relationships as sacred religious relationships sustained this" (p.248).

But in recent times, as marriages are not contracted in the right way, children from such marriages become a problem to society. For instance, children from broken homes become a nuisance to society, and they are involved in all sorts of criminal activity, drug abuse or alcohol, and prostitution and consequently become single mothers. A society where immorality is thriving is a coarse society, and it is difficult for such a society to progress.

Children of broken homes or single-parent homes are affected both emotionally and academically. Emotionally, they have hampered social development and difficulty in interpersonal relationships, and also the problem of inferiority complex (Ahiaoma, 2013). Their academic performance is relatively poor, with a high rate of deviant behaviours. Parents, as well, face the problem of adjustment and their roles as divorced parents.

### **Recommendation**

The following suggestions are made to help solve this challenging problem.

- i. There is a serious need for re-orientation of the Igbo values, as many have lost the cherished values that used to be the reference point for good conduct.
- ii. Marriage should be seen as a sacred duty and not a social function.

- iii. There should be a constant moral reaffirmation of the importance of lasting marriage and some cultural stigmatisation of divorce.
- iv. The church, which is the conscience of society, should speak out against those marriage aberrations and stand firm on what marriage is.
- v. Parents should create time to stay with their children and discuss issues with them. They should also try to be their role models because children imitate behaviours.
- vi. Marriage should be encouraged from the standpoint of civic responsibility, recognising that marriage is good for society.

### **Conclusion**

There is no doubt that marriage institution is suffering seriously from the doctrine of modernity and civilisation, if care is not taken, the next generation will not know the true definition, structure and value of this noble institution. Therefore, it beckons on all who are morally upright to rise in defence of this institution for a better society. The church must speak up clearly in marriage matters in such a glowing term so that people will learn how honourable a thing it is to live in the estate which God has ordained.

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