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Till Circumstances do us Part: A Socio-Ethical Analysis of Divorce among Christians in Nigeria

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I. INTRODUCTION

Marriage as an institution is crucial to human existence. It is a major avenue for man to partake in creative activities of God via procreation. The command “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28), can only be fulfilled in the context of marriage. Besides, marriage is a precursor to family formation (Oтите and Ogionwo 1979:78). Given this, every culture recognizes its importance in spite of relativism. Christians marriages are expected to be life contract, hence the phrase “till death do us part”. In other words, on no account may divorce or separation be the option no matter the circumstances. However, the rate of divorce and separation among contemporary Christians is worrisome as marriages do crash over irreconcilable differences. The socio- ethical effects of divorce are obvious and solutions are apparently elusive in spite of several measures being taken by the church, marriage counselors and other concerned individuals or groups to minimise its recurrence. Also, the phenomenon is not alien to the academia; hence, several researches have been carried out in various fields of studies such as education, guidance and counseling, sociology, theology and ethics. The concern of this paper is a socio-ethical analysis of divorce as a major problem confronting the Christian church in the

21st Nigeria with emphasis on conceptual clarification, reasons for the prevalence of divorce as in contradiction with biblical injunctions, its implications as well as recommendations. Official statistics released in 2016 by the National Bureau of Statistics suggest that divorce is exceedingly uncommon in Nigeria. Just 0.2% of men and 0.3% of women have legally untied the knot and wellunder1% of couples admits to being separated. Such counts exclude the vast majority of Nigerians whose marriage ceremonies are not governed by modern law. The figures stated above may theoretically suggest that the rate of divorce is low but in reality it is not this low (<https://www.economist.com>).

II. CONCEPT OF DIVORCE

There is no ambiguity in the general meaning of the word divorce, even though it means different things to different people. Thus are variants of its conception. The dictionary meaning of divorce is the termination of marriage, separation or end of marriage. The termination is usually granted by a court of law. Hence, in a concise manner, divorce means legal dissolution of marriage (Shields 2004:215; Odudele 2006: 24), while separation as a form of divorce is a step towards resolving differences or termination of marriage. In other words, separation often results in resolution of conflict or dissolution depending on its outcome.

A school of thought believes that divorce could be emotional in which case, husbands and wives are merely living together but there is no emotional attachment (Harley 1986:9). Perhaps they are trying to avoid the social stigma physical divorce could impel. Where there is emotional divorce, there is a total breakdown in communication and couples avoid themselves as much as possible. In human communication system, the various stages of relationship disintegration are features of emotional divorce. These stages are:

1. *Differentiating:* At this stage, there is increased interpersonal distance. Difference becomes more apparent as the parties begin to want individualism. If this persists, it can signal the break-up of a relationship.
2. *Circumscribing:* There is less total communication. Topics of conversation are controlled to reduce conflict and tension. On the surface, everything appears to be smooth and normal but covertly,

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there is acrimony. The presence of others increases interaction and attention is given occasionally. At this stage, fewer and less intimate disclosures are made by the interactions. Consequently, the relationship can be said to lack energy, interest and the vibrancy needed.

3. *Stagnating*: The interpersonal atmosphere is very cold, non-verbal messages are often the only feeling stage expressed. The people involved are like strange bed fellows living through the hollow shell of what was once a cordial relationship.
4. *Avoiding*: This is the stage at which one of both parties acts as if the other does not exist. Meetings could be arranged in a way that there is someone else around. Towards the end of this stage, parties seek for a permanent stage of separation.
5. *Terminating*: This is the climax of relationship disintegration. It is the stage where the bond or cord holding the relationship together gets severed or broken. This often leads to the death of the relationship. As name suggests, relationship is terminated, an example of which is dissolution of marriage (Oyewo 2002: 63-64) In other words, emotional divorce is a precursor to legal divorce.

III. CAUSES OF DIVORCE

Divorce is not a new tread in the history of mankind. The fact that it was permitted in the Old Testament coupled with the New Testament teaching on it suggests that it is never a contemporary happening. It must also be noted that legal dissolution of marriage can be explained in terms of the violation of marital vows. There are many factors responsible for divorce among couples, these are discussed as follows.

IV. INFIDELITY

The issue of adultery is a common reason for divorce. In Christian marriage, the wife is expected to be faithful to her husband and vice versa. Where this is not the case, and the one who feels cheated does not forgive the offender, divorce is usually an option. In Africa, especially among the Yoruba of Southwest Nigeria, it is often said: *A f'enil'ayao f'aju'rewo'ni*— he who is having affairs with one's wife is an enemy. Therefore, beyond forgiveness, the one whose spouse is unfaithful could choose the option of divorce if he or she feels insecure. Divorce permitted in the Old Testament can be seen in the event of adultery and any kind of immorality (Kaiser Jr. 1991:200). In the New Testament, when Jesus was asked about his view on divorce, He responded that it was permitted as a result of the hardness of people's hearts (Matthew 19:7-9). He went further to say that sexual immorality was the only reason for divorce and this was why Joseph the carpenter wanted to divorce Mary secretly, when she

became pregnant (Matthew 1 18-22). Jesus' position is given different interpretations by scholars and readers of the Bible.

V. INCOMPATIBILITY

Incompatibility in marriage manifests in different ways such as education, social status, background or upbringing among other factors. Where spouses are incompatible, there will always be disagreement and complexes- inferiority and superiority. On education, there may be conflict if a Ph.D. holder is married to a school certificate holder and the latter fails to develop himself or herself while social status will also lead to disagreement. Also people from different social backgrounds who are married are prone to conflict that may lead to divorce. In the real sense, no two human beings are absolutely compatible but when the level of incompatibility is too high, one cannot but expect all sorts of disagreement.

VI. THIRD PARTY INTERFERENCE

The arithmetic of marriage is unconventional because two human beings have become one and they are expected to act as such (Matthew 19:5-6).. A section of the marital vow says they will forsake others irrespective of previous affinity. However, this is not the case in many cases as in-laws (Abioye 2007:61), parents, friends even religious leaders interfere unduly in the affairs of other families, through which advices are offered and activities in the family are monitored. Marriage is like scientific experiments that require different formulae. In a situation when somebody thinks that what works in family A can work in family B, the end result may be catastrophic. Some parents want to know how their children are faring in all aspect of life. While this is not bad, to what extent can they interfere in the affairs of their children's families?

VII. WRONG TEACHING ON MARRIAGE

Prosperity messages are flourishing in contemporary Christianity. Proponents believe that suffering or discomfort of any kind is evil. A child of God cannot fall sick, neither can he or she lack anything. This has been taken too far that some denominations have changed the marital vow from "for better for worse" to "for better for best" from for 'richer for poorer' to "from richer to richest". There is nothing like in sickness or in health; the belief is that there can be no sickness if they are children of God. Oyedepo and Oyedepo 1999: 53 unequivocally affirm this position as follows:

Marriage provides you an opportunity for better living! I used to be scared by certain marriage vows I hear couples chant on their wedding day. They say such things as: "I do and so get into wedlock with you, for better for worse, in sickness and in

health..." I saw the ignorance of the officiating priest and the intending couples as they chant the so-called marriage vows, because marriage is not designed to be "for better for worse", but "for better for best"

Wrong counseling is often given, which makes people expect what is not possible. Imagine a Pastor who claims to have been married for 30 years without any conflict. With this type of indoctrination, couples become too idealistically utopian and at any slight problem; they think they are married to the wrong persons. An interview respondent, Olasun kanmi Ajayi confirmed this as a reason for divorce. Things have gone worse these days that Pastors do encourage divorce when expectations are not met. Is it possible to have a marriage that is absolutely hitch free?

VIII. FAILURE TO ADHERE TO BIBLICAL TEACHING

The Bible is clear on the fact that Christian marriage is a form of sacrifice. Thus, the two parties (man and woman) have mutual responsibilities to discharge. Logically, the question of superiority or inferiority does not arise as God did not create one sex better than the other. Therefore, as earlier noted, the two must forsake all others for the sake of each other (Eph.5:3; Gen. 2:24). They are to be faithful (I Cor. 7: 10-11) and must provide mutual sexual satisfaction (I Cor.7:3-5). As the head of the family, the Husband is duty bound to love his wife, (Eph. 5:25-33) honour her (I Peter 3:7) and provide responsible leadership (Eph. 5:23). The wife on her part must respect her husband and submit to him (Eph. 5: 22, 33), have desire for him (Gen 3:16) and live peacefully with him (Rom 7:12). Marital relationship is spiritual in nature as it is analogous to the relationship between Jesus and the church. Sadly, this teaching has been jettisoned; husbands no longer love their wives while wives no longer respect their husbands. Sacrifice has practically disappeared and families are now in disarray. When people think that the Bible is no longer relevant in family affairs, things will definitely fall apart.

IX. SICKNESS, DISABILITY OR MEDICAL INCOMPATIBILITY

Another reason for divorce is sickness of a spouse. In most cases, the sicknesses are discovered after marriage and some may not be patient or loving enough to know that the oath of in sickness and in health had been taken. The matter could be more appalling if it is discovered that the ailment had been there, but it was hidden from the partner. Disability may result from sickness or accident and many a marriage has collapsed due to this factor as noted by some of the interview respondents. Some may lead to legal

dissolution but cases of separation or abandonment abound. In an interaction with some people on this subject, a young woman who knew she was HIV positive, but needed to submit screening result to her church before marriage colluded with her sister who was negative and used her result. The secret was revealed when the husband tested positive. Can this be understood in terms of "in sickness or in health"?

Medical incompatibility could lead to divorce if discovered after marriage. The incompatibility could be in form of genotype or other medical issues. In genotype, it is not safe for an AS to be married to an AS, they are not likely to be fortunate not to have SS among their children. Also, an SS must not marry an AS. For reason, known to some people, they can forge genotype result just because they want to get married to a particular person. A respondent who had this experience narrated his ordeal. According to him, the lady he married presented a result showing that she was an AA and since he is an AS he considered it very safe to marry her only to discover during child birth that she was actually an AS, The man believed that the result was forged and the marriage was eventually dissolved after years of litigation

X. BARENESS OR IMPOTENCE

It is widely believed that Christian marriage should serve three basic needs, namely companionship, guarding against lust and procreation. However, in African culture procreation is the main reason. Hence, Mbiti's pronouncement that the chief purpose of marriage was to provide opportunity for the unborn members of the family to come. It follows that the person who "fails to have children is the most miserable member of the society, since he will be regarded as *"cul-de-sac"* of the family" (Mbiti 1969: 160). Therefore, many African Christians hold tenaciously to this that they do not see any marriage that does not produce children as marriage (Haselbarth 1976: 78). It was discovered that some people who want to be sure that their partners are fertile ensure that the bride is pregnant before marriage and if pregnancy is not forthcoming, they would want to know who has fertility problem. Familusi 1998:86 describes this as circumstantial sexual ethics. According to him:

Owing to reported cases of inability of women to get pregnant after wedding, parents have been insisting on ascertaining the fecundity of the wives to be before marriage. It follows that emphasis is no longer placed on virginity of the brides before marriage as they make sure that they are about five months pregnant before wedding takes place. The reason for this is that many ladies now indulge in sexual indiscipline and have aborted several pregnancies to the point that their fallopian tubes have been damaged. Therefore, whoever marries



any of these ladies run (sic) the risk of being childless and to most old people, procreation is the main reason for marriage. Many young men and women who are Christians have bowed down to this pressure from their parents and thereby compromise (sic) their faith.

The society is in a crisis situation these days; ladies go into marriage without womb as a result of series of abortion. While it was also reported by an anonymous respondent that a particular lady does not have opening, that by her nature, she cannot have sexual intercourse. Why did such people go into marriage in the first instance? It is not only bareness that people are apprehensive of; the potency of the man is also a source of concern. There have been cases of men who are impotent but lured women into marriage only to discover this on the day of the wedding. Ironically, ladies do fall victim because they are faithful to Christian teaching that forbids sex before marriage, hence it was not easy for them to know whether or not their future husbands were potent. An interview respondent, Idowu Benson told a story of Clergy man who suddenly began to preach sex before marriage because his younger sister unknowingly got married to an impotent man. A not cheering question is, do people who have this experience have moral right to go for divorce?

XI. A SECRET THAT IS COVERED AND LATER EXPOSED

This has to do with faithfulness on the parties involved. Christianity teaches that whoever is in Christ is a new creature and old things have passed away (2 Cor. 5:17). The implication of this is that a Christian who has confessed his or her sins is considered to be innocent. This is the reason some denominations preach and practice restitution. During courtship, intending couples may want to know the past activities of their spouses to be. This is a subject of debate because some are of the opinion that it is not every past experience that must be shared. For this reason, some may want to conceal certain sensitive things, which they think may affect their relationship. It is generally believed in Africa that secrets cannot be kept for life. Therefore, a dangerous or sensitive secret that is revealed could bring an end to a marriage. It is possible that some people had babies as teenagers but did not inform their spouses; they could refer to such children as nieces or nephews. There are also instances of people who belonged to secret societies when they were in schools and probably they in the course committed murder or engaged in other criminal activities. Any of these secrets is sensitive enough to lead divorce if kept during courtship. The argument of some people is that no secret must be kept and that whoever genuinely loves someone will overlook

his or past experiences in as much as he or she no longer engages in them.

XII. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence is a threat to marital stability. It takes the form of battering, hitting, throwing of objects, torture, stabbing and use of acid and any other act that is a threat to life. It is on record that many men have turned their wives to punching bags, which has led to permanent disability and death. However, one must not fall into the error of hasting generalization by thinking that only women are victims of domestic violence. These days, men have also become vulnerable (Muslim 2009: III). As men brutalize women, so women brutalize men. Our concern is not about who brutalizes who; it is to establish the fact that several cases of divorce in courts are premised on domestic violence (Familusi 2010: 137). Many lives have been lost to violence in the home. This is the reason many people are no more rigid about the need to be married at all cost. Such people believe that staying alive single or divorced is better than to die untimely in marriage. A respondent told the story of a Pastor who keeps regretting that he caused the death of a female member of his church, who reported to him about her husband's brutality but he encouraged her to persevere. Unfortunately, she lost her life in the process. There are many cases of deaths resulting from domestic violence. To have a balanced argument two of such cases will be cited in this work.

- a) On 24 June, 2011, one Akolade was reported to stab his wife, Titilayo, a banker to death in Isolo Area of Lagos (<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news>).
- b) On 2 February, 2016. Oyelowo Oyediran was allegedly stabbed to death by his wife, Yewande Oyediran, a lawyer in Akobo area, Ibadan (<http://www.nigerianmonitor.com>).

XIII. EROSION OF CULTURAL VALUES

In traditional African societies, marriage was not entered into without some cultural considerations. For this reason, it was an affair not only between the husband and his wife but also between their families (Oтите and Ogionwo 1979:79). Everybody would be carried along and investigations would be made in respect of the suitability of the would be spouse; perhaps, there have been cases of serious diseases like epilepsy and insanity in his or her family or an involvement in any crime. On the wedding day, the wife would be handed over to an elderly fellow in the husband's family, a strong relation would be built and it would be difficult for the wife or the husband to contemplate divorce no matter the justification for it (Fadipe 2012:90). Sadly, things have changed owing to modernity and globalization (Familusi 2012:178). Extended family members are no longer involved and in

some cases, parents may not know who their children are getting married to until few weeks before the time. This makes it difficult if not impossible for them to have any input. Even if there are valid reasons to suggest that the spouse is not suitable, it would have been too late. Therefore, when problems arise and divorce is contemplated, the families concerned would not be able to salvage the situation. It is not even impossible that the marriage would have been dissolved without the knowledge of their family.

XIV. ECONOMIC FACTOR/ CHANGING GENDER ROLE

Many homes are in disarray today, while many have been completely disintegrated because of economic problems. There are many men who cannot perform their roles as bread winners in the family. As a result, their wives become vulnerable to extent of engaging in adultery to meet financial demands (Familusi and Oke 2011:8no 6). Through this many have packed out of their matrimonial homes as reported by Samuel Olaleye an interview respondent. Some women plausibly got married to their husbands because of financial inducement and when money is longer available like before, one could expect any eventuality. This is danger of wrong teaching about marriage. If the vow was taken based on "for richer for richest", it will not be difficult to quit in the time of economic crises.

In contemporary time, there is drastic change in gender role because of economic reality. In traditional Africa, women were home keepers; the duty they used to carry out their duties responsibly. This accounted for appreciable level of family stability. Now that the roles are changing, professions that used to be exclusive preserve of men now have many women competing for slots (Morakinyo 2009:66). They are in the academia, medicine engineering, armed forces, politics and paramilitary organisation. As good as this is for national development, it has negative implications for family stability. The reason is that they can no longer perform their roles as home keepers and builders. This has made both their husband and children to be at the mercy of housekeepers. Apart from the physical dangers that may arise from hiring house helps, several cases of broken homes are attributable to women abandoning their family responsibilities in pursuit of careers (Familusi and Oke 2015: 317).

XV. WOMEN LIBERATION MOVEMENTS AND FEMINISM

Contemporary women especially the educated ones have seen the need for proper recognition as far as their status is concerned. They believe they must be liberated from the clutches of tradition that place them secondary to men thereby subjecting them to

dehumanization and prejudice. This is what has brought about feminism and women liberation movements, which have led to dissolution of many marriages. Generally, the concern of feminism is a call for a new kind of knowledge for the human society, the creation of space and level playground for women to realize themselves. Liberal feminists are interested in equal rights for all sexes, equality and justice to women through legal and social reforms. They work within the political system to get better opportunities for women. They are also known as mainstream feminists. However, radical feminists believe that women's oppression is a basic fact of every society and patriarchy is responsible for it. They examine the way human reproduction is controlled and socialized through such institutions as marriage, motherhood and compulsory heterosexuality. Precisely radical feminists seek to:

Create a new social framework as feminist alternatives in every area of life: family, religion, healthcare, marriage, etc. To them, women's relationship to men is politically problematic. They brought reproduction into political arena by questioning women's reproductive role, that is, biological role and insist it must be by choice. They support lesbianism, abortion and the right to have children or not. Radical feminism is associated with militancy (Ukpokolo 2012:152)

From the foregoing, one can decipher the impact of feminism on marital stability. Apart from the fact that unbridled feminism is a threat to the family, radical feminism does not believe in family formation in the first instance. Sadly, many African women are being guided by this philosophy, hence divorce has become a norm among couples, Christians inclusive.

The factors discussed above are the circumstances that now 'do' husbands and wives part in contradistinction to the original plan of God for marriage, which is permanence and stability; and can only be terminated by the death of the spouses. At this point, a socio-ethical analysis of divorce shall be done, which will guide in respect of solutions to be proffered.

XVI. SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF DIVORCE

There are empirical evidences to prove that divorce impacts the society negatively. First, when a relationship beaks up, it leads to disunity among people and groups of people. A once friendly atmosphere becomes hostile. As marriages unite families and individuals, sodoes divorce bring about segregation and absence of cordiality. A Yoruba maxim saysa *kii to kootu de, k'as'ore*, that is, people cannot return from litigation and still remain friends. If enmity so to say impelled estranged couples to go to court for dissolution of their marriages, how can they and their families remain friends after the court process? As earlier discussed, the

need to maintain unity was the reason the family was involved in marriage. Therefore, if there were problems that could lead to divorce, they would be addressed by the two families. Apart from division at general family level, the nuclear family also experiences division. The children are divided some may support the father while others support the mother and they may not be united for life.

Upbringing of children is also affected as they are either with father or the mother depending on their ages at the time of divorce. Such children do have distorted upbringing (Popoola 2014:67). For example, if a divorced woman remarries and she goes to her new husband's house with the children she had for her former husband, will he accept them wholeheartedly? Many children do have unpalatable experiences arising from this, the female one could be sexually assaulted by their step fathers while the males could be maltreated. In an interaction with a student in a university who hardly travels no matter how long the break is, he confessed that his parents were divorced and there was no place he could go to. This experience may affect his performance. It has also been discovered that product of broken homes are prone to anti-social behaviour such as drug addiction, cultism in school, stealing, armed robbery, kidnapping, prostitution among other social vices. The reason is that parental responsibility is crucial to character formation and it is easier if parents are together (Ojo 2006:57). How then can parents who are not together discharge their responsibly concerning child training?

Divorce breeds mistrust and discourage those who have been affected by it from seeing marriage as something worthwhile. Experience has shown that products of broken homes are hardly enthusiastic about marriage because they donot want to experience what their parents experienced. A young girl brought up by a single mother may likely want to be free like her mother, while a young boy who shares the feeling of his father may think that entering into marriage is dangerous. It is no exaggeration that robust family system that was cherished in Africa has collapsed with attendant consequences.

Divorce has psychological effects on both divorcees, their children and in some cases their parents. When a marriage is dissolved, can there be absolute happiness again? Victims may be emotionally disturbed that their productivity will decline at work. Some of them could try different means to cushion the effects. However, such may solve the problem. A case of suicide by a young child was reported on 4 January, 2019 as a result of unresolved marital crises. Although there is no mean knowing if someone is happy, one may wish to ask whether a divorcee will not live with psychological trauma for life (Mattoo and Ashai 2012:

113). Ajayi 2016: 18-19 lends credence to this in the assertion below:

The trauma that follows divorce has made many victims to become insane thereby having permanent bed in psychiatric ward in the hospital. In order to cope with psychological trauma, it is common for divorcee to resolve to sexual immorality or drunkenness and drug abuse. There are many case of suicide that occurred as a means to escape from the reproach caused by divorce.

Social effects of divorce are summarised by Kunhiyop 2008:255 as follows: "Divorce is undesirable, psychologically traumatic and socially disruptive. Divorce means disunity, the separation of two parties who were formerly united" while Oyedepo 2007: 40-41 likens it to marital amputation, that:

Causes a lot of grief, pain, and wound that only God can heal. Even when a wound is healed, the scar remains, and in most cases, for life...When part of a man's body is amputated, even when an artificial replacement is in place, the difference is still there. People who see such a man from afar off may not know that a part of his body has been amputated, but he that is concerned cannot claim ignorance.

Legal dissolution of marriage is usually the last option after every means of resolution has been exhausted. Therefore, it is usually preached against because of the negative impacts. However, a school of thought opines that divorce is beneficial. Those who subscribe to this argue that that divorce would prevent marital conflict from snowballing into violence that may claim lives. Perhaps, one can reason with them and ask whether those who have died, become disabled or developed psychiatric problem as a result of marital crises would have had these experiences if they had approached the court before the matter got out of hand. None of the interview respondents preferred death or disability to divorce.

XVII. ETHICAL ISSUES IN DIVORCE

The question of rightness or wrongness of divorce is insightful as there are many ethical issues arising from it. It needs to be stated that divorce is a violation of marital vow, which the two parties entered into in the presence of God and man (Dzurgba2007:100-103).Thus the violation could be understood to be unethical. The vow goes thus:

a) Solemnization

The Priest, receiving the woman from her father's hand shall cause the man with his right hand to take the woman by her right hand and the bridegroom facing his bride shall say as follows:

I, A before God and these witnesses take you B to be my lawful wedded wife, to have and to hold from

this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death according to God's Holy law. This is my solemn vow.

b) The woman shall say

I, A before God and these witnesses take you B to be my lawful wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death according to God's Holy law. This is my solemn vow. Morality demands that husband and wife need to be found faithful to all the issues that emanate from the vow as pronounced on their day of marriage (Bolaji 2015:84).

From the above, one can see commitment on the part of the man to the woman to an everlasting covenant. Therefore, divorce for whatever reason is a grave breach of covenant. The moral of this argument is that they must not divorce for any reason having said they would be together no matter the circumstances. Marriage vow is sealed with the pronouncement that "Those whom God has joined together, let no man put asunder". With this statement, Dzurgba 2007: 110 says divorce has been pronounced dead among married Christians, that is, there is no valid justification for it.

However, those in support of divorce argue that each of the reasons, divorce is strong enough and that they in a way violate the vow taken. Many respondents (Christian clerics) were categorical that some marriages were no valid because they were built on falsehood having claimed that there was no lawful impediment why they may not joined in Holy Matrimony. This they established in the pre-joining declaration:

- The Priest says to the person to be married:

A and B, I require and charge you both as you shall answer on the dreadful day of judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, that if either of you knows any impediment, why you may not be lawfully joined together in Holy Matrimony, you do now confess it. For be you well assured that if any person are joined together otherwise than God's word does allow, they are not united by the Lord, neither is their Matrimony lawful. (Emphasis mine)

The man shall say

I do truthfully declare that I know not of any reason why I, A may not be joined in Holy Matrimony to B

The woman shall say

I do truthfully declare that I know not of any reason why I, A may not be joined in Holy Matrimony to B

According to them, claiming that there was no impediment where there were, has nullified the marriage, hence it must be dissolved. It is argued further that such

a marriage is not a covenant but contract that can be terminated because there was a breach of it *abinitio*. Why would an impotent man lure an innocent lady into marriage and why would a lady who has no womb or opening deceive an unsuspecting man into marriage? Can such an experience been seen in light of "for better for worse"? A Christian leader opined that many people are not actually ready to be committed to marriage neither do they want divorce. Such individuals would deliberately flout marital vow and would want to cow their partners with teaching that on no ground should dissolution be an option. He did not see any reason some marriages must be kept for life.

c) Divorce is a threat to Christian integrity

Because it is immoral, Christians who opt for divorce have rubbished Christian integrity given the shame that goes with it. It is serious these days that there are many divorces among Christian leaders and one wonders what they would preach to their followers in the matter of marriage and how they are going to advise couples who have challenges in their homes. It is imperative to say that whatever leads to divorce and whatever the outcome, is against Christian ethical values. If it is caused by adultery or it is as a result of dishonesty or falsehood, one expects Christians to be men and women of integrity

d) Ethical dilemma

The ethical dilemma divorce drives is much in that there are divergent views on biblical teaching. While some justify it on the grounds of Jesus' pronouncement, some opine that he did not in any way approve of dissolution of marriage. Therefore, people are confused regarding which position to maintain. The dilemma is more pronounced when one considers the reasons people give in contemporary time, which negate the position of the Bible. Can present day reality change the standard of the Bible or can a man or a woman continue to endure marriage in the face of possible eventual death? The dilemma will continue as long as people exist and they continue to get married. In maintaining a stance on ethical matters, there are usually two major perspectives. These are the liberal and conservative (Dzurgba 2007: 79-80). In this discourse, the conservative will not in any way support dissolution of marriage even when it is a logical option. This is the reason some people will not remarry if they are divorced or abandoned by their spouses. This is the position of the Deeper Life Bible Church led Pastor W.F. Kumuyi. A member of the church who was interviewed described divorce as evil. The liberal are not doctrinaire about ethical issues, thus they hold that for some serious reasons, marriages could be terminated and the termination could be in the interest of the actors as opined by three of the clerics interviewed.

Some hold tenaciously to the teaching that marriage can only be terminated by death. Therefore, nothing justifies divorce. According to Kunhiyop 2008:252, those who belong to this school of thought are of the view that the word translated “except for marital unfaithfulness” in Matthew 19:9 should actually be translated “not even in the case of marital unfaithfulness”. Therefore, even when there has been a separation and there is no physical contact, the marriage is still intact. Another arguments is the translation of the Greek word Matthew uses (*porneia*) as ‘fornication’ (the sin of unmarried person) in older English version. Shield 2004:219 says that “if that were to be the correct interpretation, Jesus would seem to be referring to sin that had occurred before marriage ...but which had come to light after marriage”. What does Matthew 19:9 actually mean? The different ways scholars interpret the Bible create more confusions than clarifications. As a counter reaction to “till death do us part”, some theologians argue that metaphorically, marriages themselves do die, the death therefore dissolves the marriage covenant and the union. In other words, when there is no love, no sex and no intimacy of any kind in a marriage, it is considered to be dead and must be summarily dissolved.

Another dilemma is the eligibility of divorced person to remarry even if divorce is permitted. It is argued that Jesus in Matthew 19:9 only permitted divorce but not remarriage (Kunhiyop 2008:252). The statement, whoever marries divorced woman commits adultery is not explicit. If a divorced woman must not remarry, what about the man who divorces his wife? In this case, remarriage is taken as adulterous since the spouse is still alive. In some denominations, such people are not accorded rights and privileges of full members while there are many clerics in some other denominations that had broken marriages and remarried.

XVIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

The prevalence of divorce among Christians as discussed in this piece is pathetic given the role the family plays in the society. It is therefore imperative to have the home that would be a prototype of the desired society. On this premise, the following recommendations are made.

There is a need to count the cost before entering into marriage. If this is done, most of the factors that necessitate divorce wouldn't have arisen. Concerning procreation, it is wrong for impotent men and women who have no womb to pretend that there is no problem. As God hates divorce, so he hates falsehood or dishonesty.

Religious leaders must be careful in handling marital issues. Premarital counseling must not be handled with triviality. A major reason for recurring

cases of divorce is superficial counseling that intending couples are given. Therefore, marriage counselors and clerics are admonished not be too idealistic by preaching what is not practicable. Also they must be careful in the type of advice they give, while interference in family affairs must be minimal. If married couples are made to believe that Christian marriages can be devoid of challenges, home will continue to break. What does not exist in their homes must not be projected as model. God does not promise human beings hitch-free lives. Logically speaking, the contemporary phrases of “for better for best and for richer for riches” adopted by some denominations in the name of positive confession and prosperity gospel are aberrant teaching. When problems arise, enabling grace to cope must be aimed at.

In the event of sin by any of the parties, such must be acknowledged, confessed and forsaken while the offended party must be magnanimous enough to forgive. The magnitude of some sins may make forgiveness difficult, but it must not be seen as impracticable.

For divorce to be minimised, courtship must be taken as a serious business. Experience has shown that many people trivialize it by failing to iron out knotty issues that could engender conflict in future. It is not time to be economical with the truth because as truth cannot be suppressed for life, so falsehood cannot be covered for life.

Marital vow must be taken with all seriousness. Breaking marital vow is ungodly and God detests ungodliness. This is the reason the Priest always says before solemnization that marriage is “not to be enterprised by any, not taken in hand, unadvisedly, lightly or wantonly to satisfy men's carnal lusts and appetite like brute beasts that have no understanding, but reverently, advisedly, soberly and in the fear of God, duly considering the causes for which Matrimony was ordained” The insightfulness of this statement is clear. Therefore, barrenness is not a fault of the woman while impotence as a result of accident or sickness and other natural occurrences are no valid reasons for divorce. It is high time people understood what the phrase “for better for worse” actually means.

When divorce becomes inevitable, the church must not reject and condemn those who are involved. The issue of salvation and eternity goes beyond divorce. Instead of chasing them away from the church as those whose sins are unpardonable, they must be helped to recover from the psychological trauma divorce has caused them. This is important because no rational human being would want his or her marriage to be dissolved in the first instance. In most cases, divorce is the last resort based on circumstances beyond the control of divorcees (Haselbarth 1976:78).

XIX. CONCLUSION

As established in this paper, the prevalence of divorce among Christians is worrisome with attendant social effects and ethical implications. The society cannot progress if the home is not stable. One expects the Christian home to serve as model to others. Sadly, this is not, as divorce has almost become fashionable. Minor issues that could be resolved without third party interference do lead to divorce these days. If we consider the reasons identified in this paper, it can be concluded that many Christians no longer attach sacredness to marriage. They are only concerned about the ceremony that is, wedding, which cannot last for more than few hours at the expense of the need to have an ideal home. While divorce may solve some problems, it will not fail to create some. Married people must know that there is no perfect marriage as conflicts, storms and crises are inevitable. Perfect marriage is an illusion and symbolic thinking; it exists only in imagination. The only marriage that is completely crisis-free is the one that is never contracted. Therefore, what does not exist cannot be found. With sacrifice and commitment on the part of husbands, wives, families, the church and society, marital stability and not necessarily crisis-free marriages can be attained. The counsel of Oyedepo 2007: 40, is germane: "When there is a challenge in your home, divorce should not be the first option that comes to mind. Rather, it is important to first identify and analyze the challenge. Then, make proposal and choose a possible solution. This way, most problems can be solved".

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