



Examining polygamy among Nigerian people

Oguejiofo CP Ezeanya ^{1*}, Ugwu Ikenga Patrick ², Emerho Godstime Emerson ³

¹ Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, Faculty of the Social Sciences, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

² Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

³ Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria

* Corresponding Author: **Oguejiofo CP Ezeanya**

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Abstract

Nigerian people traditionally cherished polygamy as a form of marriage, more than monogamy as preached by the Christian Religion imbued with western cultures. This article reviews the strengths of polygamy among those who cherish it, and showcases the family-life challenges of the modern times to engage scholars with a second look at the wisdom in the cultural practices of the ancient and modern times. The paper gathered data from textbooks, e-books, journals, online articles, newspapers, and magazines. At the end, the study found that in Africa marriage, sexual intercourse and parenthood are cherished and accepted to be between man and woman, with fidelity to God-given roles. This order is inherited naturally. Polygamy does not offend God or anyone and it is based on natural law.

Keywords: Christianity, marriage, monogamy, Nigerian people, polygamy

Introduction

Marriage is a very sensitive human reality that determines innumerable legal and practical issues about the social and cultural life of peoples (Eze, Obi & Ajah, 2020; Eze, Ajah, Nwonovo & Atama, 2021) ^[20, 21]. In Africa, and Nigeria in particular, people traditionally cherished polygamy as a form of marriage, more than monogamy as preached by the Christian Religion imbued with western cultures. Monogamy is marriage between a man and a woman to the exclusion of any other person. Polygamy, which is a general term for marriage between more than two spouses, has two forms. The first is polyandry, where it involves a woman and more than one husband; and then polygyny, where it involves a man and more than one wife. Polygyny is mainly the practice among the peoples of Nigeria (Ugwuoke, Ajah & Onyejebu, 2020; Nnam, Ajah, Arua, Okechukwu & Okorie, 2019) ^[44, 28].

Although the message of love that chiefly characterizes Christianity surpasses every opposing disposition and makes every culture appreciate the message, yet the western expatriate missionary bearers of this message to most African countries clothed the Word of God with their cultural garb in their formulation of uniform disciplines for the religious fellowship. This often causes confusion among various recipient cultures. The continuous disregard of the Christian monogamous marriage reform by many people in ancient and modern times especially in Nigeria shows a reasonable cause for concern, especially now that other alarming marital dispositions of the contemporary times try to challenge the age-long Christian discipline (Ajah, 2018b; Ajah, Uwakwe, Nwokeoma, Ugwuoke & Nnamani, 2020; Ajah, 2019; Nwune, Ajah, Egbegi, & Onyejebu, 2019; Ajah, 2018a;) ^[4, 1, 3, 2]. The Igbo culture area is the chosen sample for this discussion.

The aim of this write-up is to review the strengths of polygamy among those who cherish it, and showcase the family-life challenges of the modern times to engage the reader with a second look at the wisdom in the cultural practices of the ancient and modern times. The intended learning outcome of this topic is the equipment of the reader with unbiased pursuit of wisdom irrespective of the source, especially as Africa seems to be at the receiving end of contemporary world's policies ordinarily emanating from the western cultures.

Definitions of Marriage

Marriage is simply defined in Black's Law Dictionary (2004:992) as 'the legal union of a couple as husband and wife'. The New Webster's Dictionary (2000:611-612) also defines it as "the institution under which a man and a woman become legally united on a permanent basis". These definitions ordinarily presume marriage to be in line with the view of the western society in accordance with civil laws therein. They do not reflect the fact that marriage could have any other face than the western monogamous style.

A Catholic Dictionary (Attwater (ed.) 1977:307) ^[12] further defined marriage as the "contract between a man and a woman by which they are associated and united with one another as a common principle for the generation of children and for their upbringing and education." The above views of marriage therefore are purely western, and that is the garb given to marriage by the western propagators of Christianity. Yet marriage being a social institution stretches farther than merely western conception to admit of several other approaches than the exclusive reserve of a man and a woman. A customary definition of marriage in line with the openness to polygamy, which is peculiar to the traditional Igbo, appreciated in Islam and the traditional Jewish religion of Judaism, and satisfactory to several other cultures of the globe, may be given as a legal union between two or more spouses of the opposite sex for procreation and maintenance of the human family (Nnam, Effiong, Iloma, Terfa & Ajah, 2021; Ajah, 2019) ^[29, 28]. What often makes some people, especially Christians, think that marriage in the mind of God must be monogamous is perhaps the biblical import of 'a man and a woman' in the Holy Bible (Matthew 19: 4 – 6) where the Lord Jesus' answer rejected the desire of the Jews over divorce as follows:

Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate."

When the context of the above quotation is x-rayed it may actually argue more for polygamy than monogamy because the people asking the question on divorce ordinarily practiced polygamy. All the friends of God in the Bible, including the renowned patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David and a whole lot of them were polygynists, and neither God nor the Lord Jesus Christ complained about their marital style; instead Jesus did not allow the Jews to divorce their wives. The union of a man and a woman is therefore seen as the act of consummation that leads to procreation, which can only take place between a man and a woman at a given moment. If there are other wives or even other husbands as in the case of polyandry, the act would always be between a man and a woman at a point in time even if all the wives and husbands would take their turns at other times (Ajah, Nnam, Ajah, Idemili-Aronu, Chukwuemeka & Agboti, 2021; Ajah, Ajah & Obasi, 2020) ^[6, 1].

When Jesus, in condemnation of divorce gave the divine mandamus that 'what God has joined together no human being must separate' (Matthew 19:6; Mark 10:9) it may be unfair to exclude polygamy as part of what God joined together. The joining together is based on the marital act. That is perhaps why in most polygamous cultures like in

Judaism and Igbo Traditional Religion a man who puts a woman the family way was required to marry her once they consented to the act, irrespective of the number of wives he had. But if he was not willing to marry her, then the punishment for wounding the woman's love and offending the social value of sanctity of the reproductive system would ensue ((Nnamani, Ilo, Onyejebu, Ajah, Onwuama, Obiwulu & Nzeakor, 2021; Ugwuoke, Ajah & Onyejebu, 2020) ^[30, 1].

Origin of the Law on Monogamy

Prior to the advent of a code of Canon Laws, the Christian world had been ruled by decision of theologians at ecumenical councils, over which each reigning Pope had the power to veto. This occasioned the uniformity of practice among all Christians since several of such councils on formulation of ecclesiastical laws preceded the protestant revolution. There is a distinction between 'merely ecclesiastical laws' and 'divine laws'. The former are products of human speculation on the better approach to living out the Christian life, and they are changeable with changing situations in life, while the later are eternal truths in the Bible that may not be changed by any human power (*Codex Iuris Canonici* 1983: Canon11) ^[24, 3]. The institution of marriage is governed by divine law, but the definition of its discipline is governed by ecclesiastical law. The way marriage should be, such as monogamy or polygamy or even same-sex is at the realm of ecclesiastical law.

The Code of Canon Law was not yet in place in 1885 when the Christian missionaries first arrived to the Eastern Region of Nigeria (Obi, 1985:11-13; Nwune, Ajah, Egbegi, & Onyejebu, 2019;) ^[31]; instead the Church was ruled by the canons and decrees of the Council of Trent, held from 1545-1563, stretching through a period of eighteen years. According to Thomas (2001:115-120) ^[43] the Council itself was necessitated by the state of spiritual decay that confronted the Church at that time. Issues of bribery scandal, extortion, debauchery, torture, murder, and in a special way, concubinage was plaguing the Papacy at the reign of Pope Alexander VI, such that some people mustered the courage to rise up and denounced the Popes. In 1496, Savonarola, a Dominican preacher of Florence spoke against Pope Alexander from the pulpit calling him a heretic with no true faith, whose hands were dripping with blood, and whose chair is on the fires of hell.

From another place Martin Luther, an Augustinian Monk of Wittenberg in 1517 engineered the Protestant Revolution that engaged half of Europe. King Henry VIII of England turned away from Rome, as he was not allowed to divorce his lawfully wedded wife, Catherine. The Church was crushed in France by Calvin and in Switzerland by Zinguli, while Muslims captured Vienna and Hungary. At the heat of all these embattlements there was felt a strong need for a General Council that would restore a focus to the Church. Early deaths fated several Popes elected at this time until Paul III was elected Pope. Pope Paul saw that Christendom was rapidly disintegrating; and that the several wars among the Catholic kings of Europe had seriously weakened the Church. He therefore saw a General Council as the most appropriate remedy for the crisis. The Council dealt with several topics which include Justification, Original Sin, the Bible, the Sacraments, the Holy Eucharist, Mass, Penance, Marriage, the Cult of Saints and Relics, Indulgences and Purgatory. As translated by Schroeder (1978:181) ^[41] some of the Canons of the Dogma on marriage banned polygamy as follows:

Canon 2: If anyone says that it is lawful for Christians to have several wives at the same time and that it is not forbidden by any divine law, let him be anathema. Canon 4: If anyone says that the Church cannot establish impediments dissolving marriage, or that she has erred in establishing them, let him be anathema.

The quotation, following the date of the Council of Trent, shows that the appreciation of polygamy and agitation for its allowance preceded the missionary activities among the Igbo and several other parts of Africa. Commenting on the above canons Ezeanya (2008:114) disclosed that the import of the canon was the effect of the instruction of Pope Paul III in the Papal Bull known as the *Altitudo* of 1st June 1537 where he gave directive that the people found to be practicing polygamy in the Americas, as discovered by the missionaries sent there, should be excluded from the faith unless they changed to monogamy. The Pope insisted that what obtained at the center (that is Europe) must also be extended to all other regions of the world. It was the same Pope Paul III that convened the Council of Trent, and the instruction in the *Altitudo* and other similar instructions were made part of the canons of the Council.

It is in line with the above dogmas that several other laws on marriage were established at the Council of Trent. However, over the history of the Church certain modifications kept on taking place on the laws on marriage, especially with the codification of Canon Law in 1917 and 1983. The changes were in line with the different faces of reality that confronted each epoch, and the fresh insights from theologians and experiences from missionary expeditions of the Church. The missionaries that came to Nigeria at this point in history came with the outright condemnation of polygamy. They preached that it was sinful to have more than one wife, and did not allow polygamous couples to be baptized unless they were prepared to dismiss the other spouses. Proselytizing from the Igbo Traditional Religion to Christianity was centered on the expression of faith in God who *hated* polygamy rather than in understanding the polygamous union among the evangelized. Based on this orientation a cultural tug-of-war was drawn between Christian adherents and those faithful to the Traditional Religion.

Converted but not changed

The culture clash between newly converted Christians and adherents of the Traditional religion of the Igbo kept deepening. The year 1915 was very remarkable in the annals of the Lower Niger Mission (Eastern Nigeria) (Ajah, Dinne & Salami, 2020; Ajah & Onyejebu, 2019) ^[1, 3]. It was when Bishop Shanahan, who was the Apostolic Prefect of the prefecture called the first general congress of all Catholics of the prefecture to give them instructions on the way forward. As Ajah (2018:1) ^[4] and Obi (1985:147) ^[31] narrated it:

The Congress condemned a group of local titles, and those secret societies that gave their members religious, social, political and economic influence if it was proved that the acts of such societies were immoral. It denounced the Muo or the Masqueraders Society.... It proscribed the pagan custom of handing over girls under age to young men, who under pretext of marrying them, abused the unfortunate creatures. Infant betrothal and child marriages were openly condemned.... The Congress took place at Onitsha. Thirty-five principal stations and substations sent representatives to the

Congress. Resolutions to drive home the points discussed were made as follows: No Christian should be initiated into the Muo masqueraders secret society nor participate in Muo public dances and processions. No Christian may take the Ozo and other titles since these tended to promote division between the slave and the free-born and to keep alive oppression of the poor. No Christian should contract marriage in the traditional fashion.

While Christian converts from Igbo Traditional Religion {ITR} under the missionary catechesis condemned the things they inherited with their history as idolatry, superstitious and paganism, the orthodox adherents of ITR felt better to stay with the customs and traditions of their ancestors. It was not a healthy competition. The tug-of-war however began to fall toward the side of the Christian faith when the elite of the society began to identify with the missionaries. The conversion of traditional rulers like Obi John Samuel Okolo Okosi of Onitsha and King Onyekaomeli Ogbuanyinya Idigo of Aguleri is very significant, and boosted the success of the works of evangelization (Anthony, Obasi, Obi, Ajah, Okpan, Onyejebu, Obiwulu & Onwuama, 2021; Areh, Onwuama & Ajah, 2020; Ukwayi & Okpa, 2017; Ajah, 2018; Nwune, Chikwelu, Ajah, & Obiefuna, 2018; Ajah, 2019) ^[10, 11, 41, 2, 3]. Apart from the Catechists, teachers and organized laity groups, traditional rulers and chiefs were ranked next in the order of those that aided the growth and spread of the activities of the missionaries among the Igbo. The social amenities and material benefits from the missionaries formed a major part of the reasons why the chiefs allowed the coming of the missionaries into their territories. The dreaded Chief Onyeama of Eke who was highly autocratic in his reign was able to welcome the Catholic missionaries and seriously supported the mission of Father Correia and Father (later Bishop) Shanahan in his area of jurisdiction. He was disappointed by the Protestant missionaries over their lukewarmness in opening schools, yet he (Onyeama) felt the teaching of the missionaries never obliged him. His son later wrote of him, as Nwosu (1985:333) ^[33] recounted:

In spite of the pearly images of God conveyed to the natives by the Christian teachings, together with the divine counsel of the priests to obey the Ten Commandments, Onyeama felt he was exempted and allowed no part of the alien religion to interfere with his own ideals as to what he could or could not do. Although he acquired a deep respect for Father Shanahan and did not allow any other Church than Catholic into the area, he maintained the same style of somewhat un-Catholic government.

In Adazi the role of Chief Ojiako Ezenne, the paramount ruler of Adazi was very pronounced as he helped Father Albert Bubendorf and the subsequent Catholic missionaries to spread the faith to the whole of the area that is today known as Awka diocese, Ekwulobia diocese, and some parts of Okigwe and Orlu dioceses. Yet, Nwosu (1985:334) ^[33] quoting Egunilo said: "Despite his support of the Church, Chief Ojiako was a polygamist throughout his life and a non-adherent". At Owerri province a warrant ruler, Chief Obiejeshi Ajoku Abuba was very prominent in helping the Catholic mission to triumph in that area. According to Njoku (1980:47) ^[27]:

Chief Obi took it as a matter of priority to make sure that the missionaries did not lack congregation. He made a law that any Emekuku man who went to the Church Missionary Society at Egbu would be severely dealt with. He took it upon himself to take charge of guarding the road leading to Enugu through Awka. This tall, fierce and despotic ruler had a special whip with which he dished out lashes to those who defied him.

Accordingly Nwosu (1985:334)^[33] remarked that “his motive evidently was to bring enlightenment and progress to his people and to beat other rival chiefs in this regard, not so much personal interest in the new religion”. Njoku (1980:44)^[27] wrote about the Chief of Ulakwo and said:

The Chief of Ulakwo, Chief Oparaochaekwe... expected the missionaries as white men to do at Ulakwo what the D.O, Mr. Douglas, was doing at Owerri. When Father Feral did not build any court, had no soldiers or policemen and guards, the Chief was disappointed. He said that instead of bringing fame, the missionaries were telling them about sin and heaven and hell, preaching against marrying many wives, while he (the chief) had many wives...

Chief John Samuel Okosi of Onitsha, who revolutionized Onitsha with his conversion to Christianity and services to the faith, became a good example of the plight of Christians at the instance of polygamy. According to Nwosu (1985:337)^[33]:

Despite John's laudable achievements for the Church, which included helping to rid the Onitsha Obi-ship and Onitsha town of idolatrous customs, and personally teaching catechism and promoting other forms of the lay apostolate, he was said towards the end of his long reign to have disappointed the missionaries by adopting polygamy.

Notwithstanding the several Chiefs that disappointed the missionaries in view of their polygamous status and other practices they found difficult to drop, a particular Chief showed an unalloyed faith in the Christian teaching and remained exemplarily faithful till his death. He is Chief Joseph Onyekomeli Idigo (Ogbuanyinya) of Aguleri. He became a convert with his family, and helped the missionaries immensely in the propagation of the faith. He helped in the establishment and running of the Christian village in Aguleri which produced the likes of Blessed Reverend Father Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi and several other holy men and women. The missionaries attested to his zeal in the Christian village in 1898 as Nwosu (1985:336)^[33] highlighted:

Night prayers are said in common in a little oratory before a simple cross. Idigo, our old chief, goes round the village ringing his bell: that is the signal for the assembly which ends with an Ave Maria and a hymn in the Ibo language. In the morning at about 5.00 o'clock Idigo's ivory horn, the insignia of his office as a chief, wakes us up for morning prayers and Holy Mass, at which all participate...

Chief Idigo died on June 23, 1900 having converted so many people, including his fellow Chiefs and other influential members of the society to Christianity. His name is ever remembered with nostalgia throughout the Catholic Church in Nigeria till date. The foregoing has shown how the Igbo embraced the Christian faith with great zeal but having the uncompromising Church's ban on polygamy as their major hindrance. The hierarchy of the Church never had enough pastoral care on the problem of polygamists; instead they were insistent on either monogamy or loss of the faith. Baur (1994:126-127)^[13] reported how James Johnson, a Yoruba of Nigeria, who lived from 1832-1917 became a Protestant convert whose motto was “God and my Country”. He was reputed with “the most genuine Christian in West Africa”, and nicknamed “the Pope of Nigeria” at the Church Missionary Society secretariat in London. The reason for all these is that he maintained that missionary evangelization must either be carried out by the indigenes who understand the culture of their people, or otherwise whoever undertakes it must respect the culture of the area evangelized. Among his proposals for African Christian converts is that polygamy should be tolerated. His preaching gained great adherents among the African converts, but the expatriates vehemently fought against his increasing popularity and as a result the religious nationalistic philosophy was nipped in the bud.

Strengths of Polygamy

Perpetual openness to fecundity is the chief strength of polygamy. The Igbo cherish human life and all the values accruable from the human person. Till date, no Igbo family honestly thinks of sexual enjoyment that is devoid of children as the fruit of marital love. There are different types of polygamy identified as: Adelpic or Sororal polygamy, Free or non-sororal polygamy, Simple polygamy, and Widow Inheritance polygamy. In adelpic or sororal polygamy a man marries two or more blood sisters or those identified as sisters in the bounds of the extended family set-up. This form is appreciated for the prospect that sisters who would have grown up together and understood each other over the years, and who share the same parentage would accommodate each other better than others with mixed parentage. This enlarges the new family formed, and ensures the mutual understanding needed in family life, and at the possible death of a spouse the remaining members of the family would go on happily without acrimonies.

The free or non-sororal polygamy is a situation whereby a man indiscriminately marries women of different backgrounds in the combination of some of the following: unmarried girls, divorcees, run-away wives, captured slaves of war, unwittingly pregnant young maidens or a widow. This approach accommodates every mother or woman within the care of a family setting and continued conjugal consummation. This is within the belief that the life of love and sexuality has to be expressed in a family setting to give valuable identity and social security to every person. However, simple polygamy is where a man marries more than one wife, one after the other; following the normal protocol of marrying a *decent* young girl who was neither married before nor had a wounded history. The family workforce and sustenance is accordingly enhanced. Widow inheritance polygamy, moreover, is the practice of incorporating the widow of a man's brother as a wife. It is a

type of the Levirate union encouraged in the Old Testament of the Bible (Genesis 38:8) whereby a man takes over the widow of his late brother and raises children for the brother. Generally speaking, in cultures where polygamy is practiced it is often chosen for several aims including the following: Remedy for childlessness or for a male child to inherit the father's wealth, desire for larger families, response to the demand of the deities – as in *inulu alusi nwanyi* (marrying a wife for a deity), an expression of wealth, and means of wider social connections through in-law relationships; and also guard against prostitution and waywardness as the sexual passion is obvious with age. Conflicts do not necessarily occasion it in some cases; instead it is valued as an honourable way of enhancing family and community strength. Without delving into the critique of polygamy as championed and influenced by western civilization and domesticated in Christianity, it suffices to say that polygamy is part of the marriages legally adopted in the civil matrimonial dispensation under Nigerian laws (Enweonwu, Ugwu, Onyejebu, Areh & Ajah, 2021) ^[19].

Contemporary Challenges

Ezeanya (2009:94-97) rightly highlights that the family is the starting point of the human society and the nursery ground of moral values. Human life is enhanced in procreation by the coming together of a man and a woman in sexual intercourse. The institution of marriage is therefore both natural and divine, and the respect accorded the marriage institution comes from the moral and human values it nurtures and transmits from one generation to another. Unguarded liberalism seems to have led some westerners to champion experimentations on unnatural sexual expressions that challenge traditional family morality and decorum. The aftermath, through globalization, has put the world in dilemma of whether or not to legalize and adopt issues like same-sex marriage, surrogate motherhood, abortion, free unions, single parenthood, bio-genetics, bestiality (and even pronounced marriage with animals) and several other deviations from the natural order of marriage and family life. Same-sex marriage is the contractual sexual union of two or more people of the same sex which either receives solemnization in a religious place of worship or gets legal recognition by the state, or both. Statistics (cf. TELL Magazine No 43, October 27, 2008:20-27) show that homosexuality and same-sex unions are already in place practically everywhere in Europe and America, only that in some places the state had given statutory recognition to the unions while others still struggle with the agitation for such recognition. Globalization has also spread this union to almost all parts of the world, including Nigeria. Procreation is not the concern of these partners. They also agitate for right to adopt children at will, but a big question for this agitation is the type of upbringing such adopted children would get under such families. This is contrary to traditional African morality. Same-sex partners draw their strength from the freedom granted by the declaration of human rights (United Nations Organization: 1948) and similar domestic laws. Surrogate motherhood is the practice whereby a woman is contracted to carry pregnancy for another woman, man, or a couple, for a fee. The fetus may have been formed in any of the several ways like test-tube preparation, artificial insemination, or in-vitro fertilization, etc., and implanted into the womb of the surrogate mother to carry. At the end of the gestation period the woman puts to bed, gives the baby to the

owner and is paid off. Surrogate motherhood raises to the African mind the question of the ability and readiness of the owner of the child to carry out the post-natal responsibilities towards the child (especially in cases outside of ill health) when the surrogate mother must have finished her job and gone? In the scale of rights the right of the mother does not surpass that of a new-born-baby. The vulnerability of the feeble child imposes greater responsibility on the parent that brought the child into the world.

Abortion is already such a widespread issue in western countries that it is often taken as a rule of action rather than a criminal act that it is in the laws of many African countries. The Criminal Code of Nigeria (Sections 228, 229, 230) made it a criminal act attracting terms of imprisonment for anyone that procures abortion, including the doctor that carries it out, the person on whom the abortion was carried out, and any person who supplied anything for the purpose of procuring the abortion. This is in line with the family morality of the African culture. Although the Nigerian Criminal Code was inherited from the westerners, many of the western states had amended their Criminal Codes to remove abortion from being a criminal act. They now highlight it as part of people's rights to do anything with their body, and through some greedy, corrupt, or consenting legislators across various countries of the world they sponsor bills for a law to that effect to be adopted in their respective countries. Contraceptive manufacturing industries, of course, would flourish more with the passage of such bills, especially in densely populated countries, such as Nigeria. Various non-governmental organizations and agencies in Nigeria and in other African countries are heavily sponsored from the western countries to use enlightenment campaigns, seminars and conferences, brainwashing exhibitions and debates and legislative advocacy to overwhelm students, the public and governments to accept the agitation for the legalization of abortion.

Free unions and single parenthood refers to some people that choose not to enter any permanent union with anybody in marriage, and also not intending to become celibates. At will they may decide to get children with any person of their choice without any marital obligation and hence remain single parents. This disposition ordinarily beats the imagination of the African mind. Several psychological problems have been associated with children of this type of family, most of which border on their being social misfits, more prone to criminality, having poor resistance to diseases and being morally decadent.

Bio-genetics is one of the most recently discovered approaches to family life. It has to do with a man not needing the services of a woman to get his own children, but carrying his own child by himself as pregnant women do. This means that both men and women may now be pregnant. The man only needs to go to an ovum bank and buy the ovum that will give him the type of genetically endowed child he wants. The price of the ovum (just as the sperm for sale) varies in line with the quality of character traits it contains. It could be the one extracted from a female musician, great academician, politician, actress, or even that of a soldier etc. He then donates his sperm to fertilize it in a test-tube and the formed fetus would be planted inside his stomach already artificially prepared with a womb to contain and nourish the fetus throughout the period of gestation. At the end of gestation period a caesarean section surgery is used to bring out the baby. In this way any person, whether a man or a woman may remain single and still raise his or her own children. Of course

there is more to motherhood that may not be supplied by a male-mother. The inherent feminine attributes of mothers may hardly be manufactured in the scientific laboratory, and where they are absent right from the womb, that enigmatic child of the male-mother needs to be watched with keen interest as he or she grows.

Bestiality or Zoophilia, whereby a human being indulges in sexual relationship with animals had been a concern to the society, but now some European Nation (EU) countries like Hungary, Finland, and Romania have legalized the union (BBC News, Accessed online 25 October, 2021). People now come forward to present animals to the state for marriage. Farming Minister, Dan Jorgensen, who introduced the bill to the Danish parliament on 22 April, 2015 argued that “an animal by its very nature cannot say no” (BBC News accessed online on 25 October, 2021). Amazing and amusing as the strange family dispositions could be, the fact remains that such situations have come to be, and the natural order of things has been seriously challenged. That is why the condemnation of polygamy needs to be given a second look.

Appraisal and Conclusion

In Africa marriage, sexual intercourse and parenthood are cherished and accepted to be between man and woman, with fidelity to God-given roles. This order is inherited naturally. Polygamy does not offend God or anyone and it is based on natural law. The Christian message preached among the Igbo was garbed with western civil laws and this has seriously distracted the people and keeps on affecting the traditional sanctity of their family life. Western thought influenced the definition of Christian values, and seriously contradicted some cherished Igbo, and by extension, African, heritage in marriage that actually accommodated solutions to the ordinary problems of love and life.

With somewhat flimsy reasons tied to human freedom, some western states have permitted, as alternatives, monstrous family situations that are both contrary to the natural order and debasing to human dignity. It is a thing of great concern to the Igbo, as well as other well-meaning scholars and lovers of family sanity. The Igbo, and indeed Africans allowed polygamy and early marriage to domesticate within the family setting the fire of passion that comes with maturity. This made it impossible for prostitution as a profession or way of life to be known among the Igbo prior to the contact with the west. Yet this Igbo (African) wisdom was seen in west-influenced Christianity as reduction of human freedom and dignity, and child abuse, as if nothing is wrong with the alarming proportions of spousal divorce and remarriage whenever anyone wishes; and different unbridled extramarital sexual relationships that have become the consequent recourse. Sex-workers (prostitutes) now professionally stand out to satisfy the sexual passion of any person that so desires it for a fee, whereas polygamy is discouraged for those who desire it; where then is the wisdom behind the praxis? This puzzle in the sexual life still remains an unfinished agenda for Christian lawmakers. The argument of monogamy as remedy for population control does not hold water; neither does the recourse to God’s will nor its sinfulness.

Could it not be said that both the traditional Igbo (Africans) and the westerners, with the west-influenced Christians all practice polygamy, the difference being that the African polygamy is simultaneous and responsible while that of the west, with the west-influenced Christians is consecutive and

irresponsible? It means that as African polygamists stay together as a family and shoulder the responsibilities thereof, the western polygamists, with Christians, form their family one after the other by multiple changes of spouses in divorce and remarriage in accordance with their laws, and remove themselves from the feelings of the wounded spouses.

Is it as if the lifestyle of western individualism makes those influenced by it to lose sight of teleological nature of family life by exhibiting various types of unguarded freedom in the name of personal control of one’s sexuality and family life? If that freedom is allowed, why remove it from those who prefer polygamy? Why should Christianity, which appeals to faith, be used as a tool for doing this?

The west posited Christianity as rejecting polygamy, such that polygamists were consequently denied the right to become Christians and enjoy the sacramental life unless they dismissed their other spouses; is it Christianity then that encourages same-sex marriages and other anti-life dispositions of the union of love which both the civil laws and some Christian Churches have promoted? The Criminal Code of Nigeria (sections 217, 214-215) prohibits homosexuality and other unnatural sexual behaviours but TELL Magazine (No. 43, October 27, 2008. 20 – 27) reported how the Episcopal Diocese of New Hampshire, U.S.A. elected Gene Robinson, an openly gay Anglican priest, to be made a Bishop. Despite all opposition the majority of the decision-makers in the Church carried the vote in favour of his Episcopal ordination. He was ordained bishop on June 7, 2003 on the ground that his choice of sexual life does not affect his Christianity; yet in Africa polygamists are not allowed to receive baptism, unless they were ready to adopt monogamy. They were thereby prevented from being Christians.

Several Church leaders in the protestant Churches have wedded same-sex couples and blessed the union of gays and lesbians; who knows how long it would take before the Catholic Church succumbs to the increasing pressure to follow suit. The recent decision of the Vatican (15 March, 2021) on same-sex marriage and the entire LGBTQI+ (Lesbianism, Gay, Bi-sexualism, Transgenderism, Queer behaviour, Intersex, and others) is that God cannot bless sin, and therefore the Church cannot bless such unions (NPR.Org, Accessed online on 27 October, 2021). Several countries in the western world have legalized the unions, and South Africa has joined them as the first African country to legalize same-sex union. Agitations for LGBTQI+ had started to gain recognition even in Nigeria, but as fate and the people of Nigeria would have it, Nigeria has officially reiterated the ban and criminality of homosexuality and the allied unnatural sexual behaviours.

It is the popular feeling that the west always tries to be the god of the whole world, seemingly dethroning the universal God of creation with impunity. Perhaps in view of the technological advancement of the west the world tends to swallow anything western line, hook and sinker; only a few countries, especially in Asia, dare to hold back to their age-long wholesome traditions and reject the Greek gifts of the west. Whenever the hemlock is spiced with honey and the destructive and non teleological lifestyle is hidden under the cover of Christianity or any religious faith, it is always wise to distinguish between shadows and reality.

Igbo Traditional Religion and culture never allowed only polygamy, but allowed it to stand with monogamy as a family saw the need. That immemorial practice still persists till date

even among elitist members of the society but the pressure to make it obsolete and asocial is much. The people's resilience despite the culture clash with western-garbed Christianity shows that it is natural, and there is nothing that flows from nature that may be bad in itself. The western experimentations with sexuality in vogue seem to be the aftermath of long time unguarded liberty in the pursuit of happiness and that is why the complexities of the contemporary age are both new and challenging; and should be appraised as such. Christianity should not see unity as uniformity as to insist on monogamy, excluding polygamy, as both are purely natural and biblically recognized. True and lasting Christian unity may more be found in diversity than in uniformity.

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