

CAUSES OF MARRIAGE CONFLICTS AND ITS MANAGEMENT IN THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF AWKA

Owen-Hampo Juliet, C.

Department of Religion and Human Relations

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Anambra State

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Abstract

The thrust of this study is to examine the causes of marriage conflicts in the Catholic Diocese of Awka as there is a prevailing need to identify the contentious issues associated with marriage conflicts which can no longer be either ignored or wished away. Marriage is a divine institution set up by God for a purpose. The purpose seems to have been directly or indirectly misunderstood, misinformed and misrepresented in different religious settings by different people. Marriage has therefore meant different things to different people. The negative effects and uncomplimentary remarks associated with marriage know no bounds. The origin, growth, features and effects of marriage conflicts cannot be left to History, Economics, Politics, Education and Religion. This research is a collaborative study in order to uncover and illustrate social-religiously how functional management of marriage conflicts in the Catholic Diocese of Awka could promote a healthier relationship among people, institutions and relationships.

Introduction

Marriage is an ordinance of God which initially started with a couple as a man and a woman as husband and wife. The couple must be capable and willing to join in matrimony which began by the careful manifestation of their consent. Therefore, the couple ought to have mutually given and accepted themselves solely to establish a marriage. Chiegboka (2006) states that "marriage is sacred because it is an institution that is both natural to man and divinely established and ordained by God from the very foundation of the human race" (p.10). God purposely ordained and established the institution of marriage to be both natural, divine and most importantly for procreation. In the same vein, companionship is for the couples to form a relationship that marks the beginning of family which is the first primary unit in every human society. According to Augustine (cited by Chiegboka, 2006):

The expression of a man and a woman also implies that sexuality is an essential component of the natural union without which there can be no

marital consent. The expression excludes homosexual unions and also signifies that the whole person of each spouse is involved in the intimately personal and interpersonal act. As an act of the whole person which unites both spouses at the intimate core of their being, it entails total self-giving on the part of both spouses and therefore, it is an interpersonal covenant that is irrevocable (p.16).

It's worthy of note that homosexual unions such as gay marriage are unacceptable and not recognized as a sacred marriage in the Catholic Church.

After the intended husband and wife have been joined in holy matrimony in the church and other marriage celebrations have come to an end, the couple begins to face the reality of marriage and life in general such as clarity in partners behavior, in-law interference, life's natural hazards example; low income, loss of job, sickness, accident, childlessness and not having a preferred choice of child. Then their different views and expectation about marriage filled with fantasies of bliss-filled companionship begin to fall apart. Some of these fantasies were formed from one side viewing of other couples married life and drama in movies, such as the Hollywood movies setting where marriages are dramatized as filled with a bed of roses, will become clearer.

These negative realities of marriage can turn the peaceful and beautiful anticipation of the couple's marital bliss to a sad and moody relationship. Before the couple could realize it, they began to wonder if they made the right choice of partner in conjugal bliss. Gradually, the couple may become disappointed in themselves, unhappy and irritated. Hence, the beginning of the marital conflict and if the couple does not work out their difference, they may find it difficult to either be sweet friends, good parents, romantic partners, prayerful lovers or enjoy their marital bliss.

The Catholic Diocese of Awka has observed the deteriorating trends in the marriage institutions and has set some measures to address them. The measures include marriage course on one hand, as a per-requisite for intended couple and on the other hand, annulment used to sort relief for those married couples who are caught in the web of intolerable marriage situation. These trends are not known to the Catholic Diocese of Awka alone, rather other church communities and the world at large but for proper study and understanding of this research, the Catholic Diocese of Awka will be used as an in-depth study.

In the Catholic Diocese of Awka, there is an increase in the number of couples being joined together in holy matrimony. Likewise, there is an increase in the number of marriages in conflict and broken families. Onyango (cited by Ekwelibe, 2013) supported thus “the world is continuously increasing in violence, distrust, political unrest and denominational crisis. These all flow from the instability of the first Christian community which is the family”(p.2).

The researcher's observation that gave rise to the research was the re-current number of couples that troop into the marriage tribunal of the Catholic Diocese of Awka daily with the hope of getting a declaration of nullity of marriage. The researcher is worried by the number of marriages in conflict as it continues to increase as the day goes by. Chiegboka (2012) reiterates that, “man and woman are created by God for one another, (Gen 2:18). It is also the will of the creator that marriage should enjoy unity, stability and indissolubility both man and woman should respect this” (p.147). Chiegboka also explains that Jesus Christ taught that matrimonial union of man and woman is indissoluble. Jesus Christ himself, re-established the stability and indissolubility of Christian marriage in (Matt 19:18), “What God has joined together let no man put asunder.”

Considering the recurrent marriage conflicts in some families in the catholic diocese of Awka and its attendant effect on the church and society at large, what exactly are the causes of marriage conflicts? This is the research question that will be given a critical investigation in this research, while also suggesting a way forward.

The researcher therefore wishes to investigate the root causes of marriage conflicts within the catholic diocese of Awka, how marriage conflicts affect the church and society at large, the role the Catholic church plays in resolving marriage conflict and dissolution of marriage bond when necessary, which will serve as an eye opener to husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, friends, church, and society at large on the best way to maintain peace in the family.

Marriage Conflict

Marriage conflict is the disagreement or opposition of opinions or principles between a husband and a wife which was not properly managed. Marriage conflict is also a series of events, tension or stress between a husband and a wife as the couples try to carry out their marital roles which may have been poorly handled and as such deeply damaged the marriage relationship. For the fact that

a man and a woman decide to live together as married couple, there will always be different expectations, hopes and goals which some will be fulfilled and others unfulfilled. These unfulfilled expectations and goals can make the couples unhappy. These married couples are human beings and no god, therefore, they are bound to make mistakes, coupled with the fact that human relationship is prone to misunderstanding and conflict once in a while. As a result of marital conflict, many families experience difficulties which constitute a major threat to sustainability of marital peace and stability in the society.

Characteristics Of Marriage Conflicts

The relationship between married couples is more of a struggle. Things do not often fall in place. Every happy marriage depends on the quality of attention given to the relationship between the married couple likewise unhappy marriage. The married couple give conflict opportunity to flourish if they choose to ignore the signs of unhappiness in their marriage and avoid communicating with each other about their ill feelings. Characteristics of marriage conflicts are as follows;

- ◆ The inability of couples to communicate openly and honestly with each other.
- ◆ Withdrawal of intimacy both emotional and physical when there is conflict between the two couples.
- ◆ Feeling insecure and unhappy when one's spouse is not at home.
- ◆ Confiding in a third-party about one's spouse.
- ◆ Manipulating one spouse into doing what ordinarily he/she is will not feel comfortable doing.

Marriage conflicts have negative effects on the mental, physical and family health of the couples. The offspring of the couples are not left out, the children go through societal, religious and peer group abuse.

Causes Of Marriage Conflicts

Marriages are faced by different problems. These problems if not properly handled creates tension in the marriage. A conclusive list of factors responsible for marriage conflicts is not possible as it varies from one marriage to another. However, the following are the common causes of marital conflicts.

Money: One of the major reasons for marital conflicts is money related issues, the end product of how couples choose to handle money issues in their marriage can either have a positive or negative effect on their marriage. According to Peter, for peace to reign in marriages, either the husband or the wife must be financially buoyant; then he/she must ensure that the partner is comfortable by providing for his/her needs (personal communication 10 February, 2017). Ukor (2006) affirms that, "when the conditions of psycho-social-economic activities are unfavorable to a family, it causes distasteful moments" (p.87). In cases where one of the spouses misused or misled their money, the result is a break in trust. Money offers a lot of choices when there is plenty of it and limited options when there is less of it.

Infertility: Infertility is a very stressful stage in a marriage that can reduce the bond between couples and affect one or both couples emotionally. It is the inability to conceive after a year or more of unprotected active sexual intercourse. It gives rise to conflict in the marriage when both couples have tried severally for the woman to conceive without positive result.

Inability to Reproduce Male Child: In Awka and Igbo people in general, the male child has a high preference to the female child. It is the male child that bears the name his father for posterity. The inability of married couples to have a male child can cause conflict. One of the partner, especially the man, may blame the other for not having a male child. Some times, the parents-in-law come into the issue thereby putting tension on the couple.

According to Abigail, "I noticed my husband's weird attitude after the birth of our third baby girl, he started having affair with another woman until she birthed two boys for him. All his attention now are on the boys and their mum" (personal communication, 12 January, 2018).

Role of Significant Others: The role of significant others, especially parents-in-law, is one of the major causes of marriage conflict. Conflicts over in-laws are usually most problematic in the first years of marriage. One of the common issues that arise is one partner feeling that his or her in-laws are too critical or intrusive in their marriage. According to Okafor (2005), "some parents in-law are very domineering and autocratic to the point of issuing orders to their children's (sic) families, forgetting that they have very limited authority over their children families" (p.21). A married couple may also disagree about the length and frequency of their parents' visits. Some people may also feel that their spouse is

too dependent upon his or her parents and gives more attention to his or her parents. All of these in-law issues can trigger conflict within the family.

Infidelity: The trust in marriage is been destroyed when one of the partners engage in extra-marital affairs or there is a suspicion of it. Infidelity causes weak relationship among married couples. It delivers a fatal blow to the relationship.

According to Peter, if I caught my wife having extramarital affairs, that is the end of our marriage. I cannot bear to live with a cheating woman under the same roof. There is no way I will be confident that she will not betray my trust again. (personal communication, 14 February, 2018).

Sexual Intercourse Issues: There is rarely a marriage where sex is not an area of conflict. The perception of man is different from that of a woman when it comes to sex. Man thinks sex while the woman thinks intimacy. Men need sexual receptivity to feel romantic while women need romance to be sexually receptive. As long as both couples are getting what they need, they willingly provide what the other person wants. However, when there is a lessening on either the man or woman, that can trigger a pulling back in the other. If gone unnoticed and unchecked, before the couple realizes, they are seriously intimately estranged and wonder what happened. Also, when one deprives his or her spouse of sex as a way of punishment, this can break the marital bond and unusual fights between the couples at night hour.

According to Amaka Ndeke, we invited our families elders to settle our quarrels yet we could not tell them the cause of our dispute. Before our families left, my father called me out and said, "always give in to your husband's demand of sex". It is worthy of note that any of the married spouse that does not satisfy his or her partner adequately in sex so far he or she is healthy is causing serious problem in the family. (personal communication 2nd September, 2017).

According to Charles, I never allow the quarrel between my wife and me come in the way of our lovemaking. I try to resolve our disputes as soon as possible so that she will not deny my sex. If she denies me sex, it increases my resentment for her and also creates tension in my family. This takes a long time to resolve. (personal communication, 10 April, 2018).

Alcoholism (Drunkard) and Drug Abuse: This is a problem that can create a gap and lead a peaceful marriage to destruction. Married men and women who engage themselves in alcoholism and hard drugs usually spend less of their time

and resources in life-sustaining activities like work and quality time with their family. Alcohol and drug addicts usually believe that heavy drinking or taking hard drugs clear their minds and move their thought away from their problems. Not knowing that once the drugs and alcohol is clear, the problems will still be there. Amaka Ugwu-Agbowo, who wedded in St Patrick cathedral Awka, shared her story as thus; My trouble in marriage started two weeks after our wedding. My husband always come back home very high on drugs and alcohol. He would false fully request for sex which I obliged. Severally I pleaded with him to stop, he accepted but never stopped. I resort to prayers, from one pastor to the other for five years. Then he graduated to taking those stuff at home, beat the children and tie them to the bed so they don't bang the door while he is dealing with me. (personal communication, 7 March, 2018). When one or both spouses are heavy alcoholics or drug addicts, it affects the family in numerous ways.

Concealment of Necessary Information: Hiding important information from one's spouse can cause tension in a marriage and lack of trust between the couples. For instance, if one of the married couples is suffering from a chronic health condition before marriage and withheld informing his or her spouse of the health issue, this may result to conflict when the spouse finds out. In Catholic church, such is a good ground for marriage annulment as the marriage is deemed never existed.

Household Chores: Sharing household duties is one of the primary sources of dissatisfaction among married couples. According to Ifeoma, my husband does not participate in household chores. He cannot make the bed he lies on, not to talk of doing laundry or bathing our kids. I go to work, take care of the kids, do house chores and still fulfill my obligation on the bed. The worst is that my husband refused to accent to employing a house help or nanny. (personal communication, 23 May, 2018). If both couples cannot work out a consensus on the question of household chores, it may result in conflict.

Food: Food is an essential factor in making a successful marriage. The unavailability of food, type and style of preparing food, and habits like cooking late and/or inability to cook delicious food can cause marriage conflict.

Incompatibility: Compatibility is mostly the strength of every marriage but when the couples are incompatible the marriage is bound to fail. Incompatibility in marriage makes day to day relationship with spouse boring and uninteresting. Ukor (2006), maintains that:

If married couples are not compatible, such a marriage will likely know no peace. This is because; no two different people that lack compatibility can peacefully live together. It takes two to tangle, and to tangle in marriage, the parties involved need to be psychologically, mentally, spiritually, behaviourally, physically, emotionally and socially compatible (p.86).

Couples who are very different from each other may find it difficult to live happily together in marriage.

Distance: After marriage, couples sometimes live apart from each other due to some circumstances like work or business. Distance can affect the couple's relationship physically or emotionally, both cause marital problems such as lack of trust and infidelity. Ukor (2006), affirms that "if spouses lack quality time together, they would not be rediscovering themselves. Such spouses lose their communication skill and a lot of things might be left undone. Fantasies will not be explored and enjoyed, if it continues, other remote problems could join" (p.85). If they are not able to resolve the issue of staying apart, it may lead to serious conflict that is irreparable which is not good for marriage.

Effects Of Marriage Conflicts In The Catholic Community

Marriage conflicts in families in the Catholic Diocese of Awka continue to increase as the day goes by. The rapid rate with which separation is sought for in the Catholic diocese of Awka Tribunal is perturbing and really a sign of high rate of conflict in marriages. Obe (2005) explains thus:

The Tribunal System is established by the church to identify with the suffering members. Hence, whatever affects the individual members of the church should be of great concern to the church. The high level of the marriage breakdown today is disturbing as it is shocking to a concerned mind. The rapidity with which separation and divorce is sought in our Diocesan Tribunal is actually a sign of an impending danger (p.23).

Some of the effects of marriage conflicts are as follows:

Non-Communicant: Some couples whom are in marriage conflict find themselves as unworthy to receive holy communion, therefore, refuse to partake in the holy sacrament. They continue to dwindle in faith and may be tempted to engage in sin such as infidelity. In support of this Obe (2005) states thus:

In a culture where communalistic spirit is highly appreciated, those who are denied of the sacrament usually see themselves as not belonging to the faith community. Statistics have shown that the greatest percentage of the fallen Christians are those who were for one reason or the other denied the sacrament. They unfortunately withdrew from public opprobrium caused to them by their fellow Christians who profess holier-than-thou-attitude (p.29).

It is important that the Catholic church continue to encourage non-communicant couples not to separate themselves from the Church and her liturgy because of conflict in their marriages. Though they cannot receive sacraments but they are still valid members of the Church through baptism.

Reduction in Spirituality of Members of the Church: The spirituality of some members of the Church are being reduced as they observe the couples in marriage conflicts dwindling in their faith. Obe (2005) observed that “statistics have shown that ninety (90) percent of those who have fallen away from the Catholic faith are those whose marriages have been intolerable because of one thing or the other” (p.33). Some of these church members may have looked up to these couple as spiritual mentors or they may have been their sponsors in marriage and baptism.

Problems for Children: The psychological, social, physical and academic development of children whose parents are in conflict are greatly affected. These children lack parental love and care which may result to indiscipline in them. They find it difficult to socialize and are most likely to experience feelings of unhappiness, hunger, anxiety and dejected. Their performance in school are usually poor. These children may engage in all sorts of social vices, crimes and most likely graduate to irresponsible adults, hence, becoming liability to the society.

Separation of Couples: Marriage conflicts which cannot be managed and endured is petitioned to the tribunal hoping for separation. Onu (cited by Obe, 2005) opined that “if the marriage is no longer happy, separation has taken place and all pastoral measures have failed to achieve reconciliation and or convalidation, then the tribunal is prayed for annulment” (p.23).

The tribunal system in the Catholic church is established by the church to help her show concern to her members whom are in intolerable marriage situation. Through this system therefore, marriage bond are dissolved. One of the couple

whom the separation did not favour may decide to join another church or re-marry into another church other than the Catholic church. According to Chukwuma, after the success of our separation, I heard that my wife stopped attending masses for some time and later joined Winners Chapel (personal communication, 20 January, 2018). These people may not have left the church in the right frame of mind as they may have been deceived or frustrated.

Marriage Conflict Management In The Catholic Diocese Of Awka

Pre-Wedding Marriage Course: The Catholic church regard marriage as sacred, and the couples who decide to get married in the church need to be thoroughly prepared for it, so that they acquaint themselves and understand what marriage is about, which is why dioceses and parishes organize marriage preparation courses. Pre-wedding marriage course also called pre-cana is a special process of preparing the couple for the wedding and marriage, if the couples wish to wed in a Catholic church. These usually last for about six months, and the pre-wedding marriage course is led by a priest, a deacon or a Rev sister.

A Catholic married couple can also join the consultations and offers insights into their real-life marriage experiences and advices. These important aspects are taught in the pre-wedding marriage course; spirituality/faith, conflict resolution skills, careers, finances, intimacy/cohabitation, children, commitment. Other important topics that may arise during the interaction are; Wedding ceremony planning, the family origin of the spouses, communication, marriage as a sacrament, sexuality, theology of the body, couple prayer, unique challenges of military couples, extended family. The purpose of these courses is to deepen the couples' understanding of the sacrament.

Annulment of Marriage Bond in the Catholic Marriage: Marriage is a covenant between a man and a woman. The spouses establish this covenant through their marital consent, by which they intend to establish between themselves a partnership for the whole of life. This means each spouse will assist and support the other in all areas of their common life, the best he or she can, so long as the other spouse is alive. Marriage bond can only end through the declaration of nullity of marriage or annulment which should not be referred to as a kind of Catholic divorce. A divorce is a civil act by a civil court that claims to dissolve a valid marriage. A declaration of nullity of marriage is an official determination by the church Tribunal to examine and confirm that the marriage

was invalid from the beginning. This simply means that at the time of the wedding, the marriage lacked some important element of a valid marriage. For example, if one of the parties is incapable of having children, intend life long infidelity to the partner, grave immaturity, mental illness, constitutional weakness and under age.

A new marriage covenant cannot be created with someone else until nullity is declared after the judicial process, the parties are then considered free to contract a new marriage in the church.

Conclusion

Catholic marriage have witnessed series of problem which affect the will of God for a perfect marriage. This in turn affects the society at large. These days, no human person wants to suffer or displease him or herself for the benefit of others regardless of being husband and wife. A successful marriage does not required a lot of money, big house, perfect spouse or a big and expensive car. One can have all these yet have a miserable and empty marriage. A successful marriage requires selfless and sacrificial love, honesty, undying commitment and Jesus at the center of it all.

It is very important to note that every marriage requires conjugal intimacy of two persons, with patience, understanding and time because every marriage is like building a house, systematically laying one block after the other to obtain balance and alignment. Therefore, all hands are called on deck to salvage Christian marriages. Not just the married couples but also the church pastors, the state legislators, administrators of political communities and the society at large.

More importantly, anyone planning to get married is expected to have known the teachings of the Church and have positive plans with vision on how to train and bequeath such knowledge to their children. This will help to ensure the firmness of such a family.

It is worthy of note that peaceful and happy marriage is attainable. If one have a happy marriage, obviously, the family will be happy and that would eventually contribute to building a happy and prosperous society.

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APPENDIX I

LIST OF PEOPLE INTERVIEWED

S/N O	NAME	PLACE OF INTERVIEW	DATE OF INTERVIEW	OCCUPATIO N
1	MR PATRICK OKOYE	FACULTY OF ARTS UNIZIK	10 TH FEBRUARY, 2017	CIVIL SERVANT
2	NDEKE AMAKA	ST PATRICK CATHEDRAL AWKA	2 ND SEPTEMBER, 2017	CIVIL SERVANT

3	MR PETER OKEKE	ST PATRICK CATHEDRAL AWKA	21 ST MARCH, 2017	PUBLIC SERVANT
4	MRS UGWUAGBOWO AMAKA	ST PATRICK CATHEDRAL AWKA	7 TH MARCH, 2018	CIVIL SERVANT
5	MR CHUKWUMA ONAH	ST PATRICK CATHEDRAL AWKA	7 TH MARCH, 2018	PUBLIC SERVANT
6	MRS ABIGAIL OKOYE	ST PARTRICK CATHEDRAL AWKA	12 TH JANUARY 2018	CIVIL SERVANT
7	MR. CHARLES NWOKE	ST PARTRICK CATHEDRAL AWKA	10 th APRIL, 2018	CIVIL SERVANT
8	MRS IFEOMA ANAYO	SOCIAL MEDIA INTERACTION (WHATSAPP)	17 TH AUGUST, 2019	CIVIL SERVANT