

# Christian Marriage and the HIV/AIDS Pandemic: The Role of the Church. Anglican Church of Nigeria in Focus

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## Abstract

African culture allow for marriage as one of their pre-requisite of being a responsible person. It is also one of the most Important laws of God. Marriage is the divine union of opposite sex by God Himself. This is the basis of our human existence. The aim of this paper is to look unto Christian marriage both monogamy and polygamy, the paper will also examine the role of the church of God in curbing the menase called HIV/AIDS in our society. The saying of the philosophers will be looked into about the socio-religious phenomenon call marriage. It will also x-ray the social and religious importance of Christian marriage. It was discovered that there are some negative and adverse effect of polygamy, HIV/AIDS in the course of marriage, all these, this paper will examine. The role of the church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) in curbing this pandemic disease call HIV/AIDS shall be discussed in this paper the re-appraisal of HIV/AIDS in our society shall be done. The key experience, lesson and challenges discussed in the conference of Anglican churches of Nigeria in 2005 about HIV/AIDS problems shall be let loose. Lastly, recommendation will be giving to aid solving the problem of the disease call HIV/AIDS.

## INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a social and God's institution for men and women in special forms of mutual dependence and understanding for the purpose of founding and maintaining families. It is a cultural requirement which is basic to human existence to the extent that people accept of for most part as a kind of intractable dictate on by the laws of God, nature, government and good sense all at once. It plays a key role in promoting and protecting the value of companionship, intimacy, social approval and support.

This social practice becomes unusually problematic if it fails to identify clearly and systematically the full complex of principles it involves as a result of this that this work questions polygamy in Christianity implication for socio-cultural life. It stresses the vulnerability of the who engage in this practice to various sexually transmitted diseases and the epidemic of HIV / AIDS. It sheds light on other social evils associated with this practice recommending ways of overcoming them.

The work concludes by emphasizing that since marriage aims at protecting and promoting the values of companionship, intimacy social approval and support, polygamy in~, which is-often taken out of context, ceases to serve purposes for which marriage is meant. What then are the purposes for which marriage is meant?

## The role played by marriage in today's society

Immanuel Kant a philosopher defined marriage as the union of two persons of different sex for life-long reciprocal possession of their sexual faculties. According to another definition which emphasizes a relationship between the spouses, marriage is a socially legitimate sexual union). The union is undertaken with some idea of permanence and with a contract that defines the obligations between the spouses and of the spouses toward any children they may have.

Another definition of marriage recognizes its importance as a means of providing social legitimacy for children of the union. In this sense, marriage is a relationship between a woman and one or more persons that provides that any child she bears under the rules of the relationship will receive status and rights common to other members of society. In this view marriage provides a way of distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate births. The assumption is that a child must have a "social father" to ensure proper social development and entrance into social order. This definition portrays marriage as a "licensing of parenthood"<sup>4</sup>

Although marriage customs differ greatly from one religion to another and from one culture to the other, the importance of the institution is universally acknowledged. This is attributed to the many basic social and personal functions it performs, such as procreation and provision for sexual gratification and regulation, care of children and their education and socialization, regulation of lines of descent, division of labour between the sexes, economic production and consumption, and provision for satisfaction of personal needs for affection, status and companionship<sup>5</sup>.

In a similar vein, Frederick Eliston<sup>6</sup> explained that marriage has served a variety of functions in the past. These include consolidating political power, forming international alliances, enabling men to escape the draft, providing citizenship for better employment prospects, legalizing copulation, regulating the transfer of property from one generation to another, and legitimizing offspring's. The last is probably still one of the most important and prevalent functions of marriage today because it provides a secure and loving context for having

and raising children. The care and development of these children is of social interest and responsibility. This interest has been recognized for some time in form of children's homes and compulsory education.

However, increasing knowledge about childhood development extends the area in which social interests and responsibility may be reasonably involved. To give an example at the most elementary level, the nutritional diet of children during their first three years is crucial for their future development. So also is their psychological support. All these are made possible within the family structure. The family is the basic social unit, not only for the education of children (that is socialization) but also for the production of necessities including food, clothing, and recreation. Because the family unit provides a framework for most human social activity and since it is the foundation on which social organization is based in most cultures, marriage is closely tied to economics, law and religion. Monogamy, the union of one man and one woman, is the prototype of human marriage and in its most widely acceptable form, predominates in societies in which other forms of marriage are accepted<sup>7</sup>. Under Christian laws, it is one woman one man. Taking only one wife makes it absolutely essential for one to do as much justice as humanly possible to his wife. In common- with other systems, favours marriage as a means to emotional and sexual gratification; as a mechanism of tension reduction, legitimate procreation, and social placement as an approach to interfamily Alliance and group solidarity, what is probably the characteristic of the Christian position, is that marriage apart from its function. and perhaps also because of them, is regarded first and foremost as an act of piety. Sexual control may be a moral triumph, reproduction a social necessity and a gratifying state of mind. Yet these values take on a special, meaning and are reinforced if they are intertwined with the idea of God, conceived of as religious commitments and internalized as divine blessing<sup>8</sup>. This seems to be the focal point of marriage in Christianity though it does not exclude or underrate the other purposes.

The second purpose of marriage in Christianity is to respond to the basic biological instinct of procreation children are the realization of motherhood and fatherhood. Christianity emphasizes providing the most possible wholesome atmosphere for bringing up the offspring. To give birth to children and neglect them is a crime towards society, the children and even the parents, themselves<sup>7</sup>. The child Who is deprived of the ample love of his or her parents, who is not properly nurtured Christian way of life at an early age, left to baby sisters and nurseries may develop many anti-social behavioral patterns or end up with crime, perversion and corruption. Such a child may never find his or identity as he or she could have felt it in a systematic manner during his or her childhood. Without family life, governed by Islamic order and discipline, how can we expect a child to have the Muslim conscience and the Islamic value of righteousness<sup>10</sup>.

The Christian injunction on monogamy serves as a means of emotional and sexual gratification for men who find it easy to be satisfied sexually. It is true that sex is more capable than other drives of being diverted into substitutive forms of expression. Sex, according to George Murdock, is capable of impelling individuals, reckless of consequences while under its spell, toward behaviors which may imperil or disrupt the cooperative relationships upon which social life depends<sup>11</sup>. Modern clinical research and evidence clearly indicates that excessive sexual deprivation produces personality maladjustments that hinders satisfactory relationships and endanger the mental health and efficiency of society<sup>12</sup>. A sexually perverted man may find it difficult to cope with just two wives. Sex is crucial to social survival and personality development. It is "intimately bound up with deep psychological gratifications: the need for security, feelings of personal worth, feelings of power, and the assurance of being loved and lovable"<sup>13</sup>. So crucial is sex that no social system can afford to ignore it or be indifferent to its implications. The light in which a religion views sex is probably most indicative of that religion with regard to man, society and the universe. Hence, it seems almost axiomatic that a religious system, which devalues sex, would discourage marriage.

Again, monogamy marriage practices in provide a kind of social security for women security for women. In a situation where there is shortage of males for he majority of females and a real lack of opportunity for women to become acquainted with anyone of the opposite sex other than their fathers and brothers, polygamy plays a central role, This will no doubt reduce the number of unmarried females. The practice of polygamy becomes problematic especially when is taken out of context. This leads us to the heart of this paper: the havoc of polygamy.

### **Some Negatives Effects of Polygamy Vis-a-Vis HIV/ AIDS**

Although polygamy is a partially acceptable form of marriage-in Christian, studies have shown that It IS not to considered the ideal or preferred type: Polygamy may constitute social, psychological as well as health hazards to those who practice it On the social level, polygamous marriages encourage sexual jealousy despite the clearly defined marital rights and obligations of co-spouses: One cannot rule this out usually, a senior or first wife has authority over subsequent wives: It is common for co-wives to hate one another in spite of their separate dwellings: For example, the Yoruba's believe that: *Orisa je npe meji obinrin ko denu.* (A woman can never be pleased with having a partner):

Polygamy as a marriage practice encourages jealousy, which is discouraged by the society: Co-wives

are not expected to be jealous of one another, and even if jealousy is evident it is regarded as an individual response to a particular situation, one that the larger society does not encourage: Also, if taken out of context, polygamy in Islam erases interpersonal relationships: This has been perceived by many to be among the most serious ills of society: In such a situation, it seems likely that the man is denied the need for intimate interpersonal relationships or affection: Such interpersonal relationship is among the most valuable elements of a good life, and include love, friendship and trust; and require intimacy: Intimacy involves a sharing of information about one another that is not shared with others: Moreover, it often involves seclusion from others-being in private where others cannot observe intimacy requires these, then loving relationships cannot extend to an indefinite number of women:

Hence, the difficulty of practicing polygamy: Again, polygamous marriage practices cut children off from the support and care of other adults and co-wives<sup>15</sup>. This living arrangement creates an atmosphere of isolation. Consequently, it fails to provide a loving context for child-upbringing. This is because it restricts in perhaps the most unilateral way possible consistent with offspring survival, the number of adult sources of affection, interest and material support and instruction for the young. The loving context for child-upbringing "is thereby destroyed rather than nourished, providing the structural conditions for such notorious and far-reaching problems as sibling rivalry for scarce adult attention and parental oppression through exclusive monopoly of the child's means of life". The consequence of this is that children are not properly brought up because under this condition, social control is weak. Child abuse becomes widespread and efforts to prevent it are mediocre at best. This may eventually ruin the lives of the children involved or at the least, they may develop into psychological misfits incapable of leading responsible and rewarding lives.

Medically, scientists often describe multiple partners both in and outside marriages as a major cause of HIV/AIDS. Hence polygamy predisposes men and women involved to various sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS. Polygamy involves multiple sexual partners. The transmission of HIV/AIDS is exacerbated by concurrent multiple sexual partners. For everyone infected the infection rate may multiply in a more diffuse rather than linear manner. Polygamy has the potential of expanding the infection network indefinitely. This is largely because, unlike other sexually transmitted diseases where a line of infection can be terminated by treatment, HIV/AIDS still has no definite cure and therefore, any infection littered has the potential of multiplying unimpeded." The practice of polygamy can therefore become a risk factor in HIV/AIDS transmission.

Since Christian positively sanctions multiple marriage partners, it is to be expected that sexual infidelity will be rife among Christian men thus leading to heterosexual transmission of HIV/AIDS more than other forms of infection. Heterosexual scientists have argued that it was promiscuity which gave birth to a large number of men and women becoming infect Current estimates suggest that over 75 per cent of HIV infections occur through heterosexual, with the sharil J.K of street drug equipments, vertical transmission, sex between men and receipt of infected blood products together accounting for another 25 percent<sup>18</sup>.

Unprotected sex has been and continues to be the commonest rot for the transmission of HIV globally. Since the Christian religious injunction requires that a woman should not deny her husband sex, in a polygamy marriage set-up, the infected husband is also likely to infect an uninfected wife. This, not only makes the "woman susceptible to HIV she also stands the risk of infecting her baby if adequate care is not taken. When HIV is capable of being transmitted through specific kinds of sex contact it may also be transmitted 'vertically' from HIV positive mother to infant during pregnancy or delivery.

Biologically, the act of penile penetration puts women at risk pregnancy, HIV, cervical cancer and many sexually transmitted infection Women's vulnerability to HIV follows from social and also biologic factors. All things being equal, the probability of male to female transmission is estimated to be two to four times that of female to men transmission<sup>19</sup>. Young women may be at risk before marriage, but also within it to the degree that their husbands wander or less commonly that they themselves have sexual relations outside of marriage. The particular vulnerability of women in polygamous marriages is consequence of their desire for sex and this makes marriage problematic. The husband may not be able to sexually satisfy all the women in multiple marriage. The only option left for these women is to take sola in another man.

If women are at risk of being infected with HIV so too are men. concept of perversion according to Thomas Nageliecan hardly fail to be evaluative in sound sense, for it appears to involve the notion of an ideal or at least adequate sexuality that the perversions in some way fail to achieve. Just as hunger leads to spontaneous interactions with food, sexual desire leads to spontaneous interactions with other persons, whose bodies are asserting their sovereignty in the same way, producing involuntary reactions and spontaneous impulses in them. These reactions are perceived, and the perception of them is in turn perceived, at each step the domination of the person by his body is reinforced and the sexual partner becomes more possessive by physical contact penetration and envelopment. A sexual perversion must reveal itself in conduct that expresses an unnatural sexual preference. If we can imagine perversions of an appetite like hunger, it should be possible to make sense of the concept of sexual perversion.

However, it is important to point out that both men and women are vulnerable to HIV within a polygamous marriage set-up. This epidemic has affected every aspect of life in Africa, from people's livelihoods to the capacities of nation states. Apart from affecting the family's livelihood HIV/AIDS can also cause a family to fall apart. After the death of their parents surviving children may be fostered by grandparents, other older female relatives or sent to live with another part of the extended family. These children are not likely to attend schools and are more likely to be working more than forty hours a week than children with both parents especially if they are fostered by distant relatives or unrelated people. Some children end up in the street, where they are particularly vulnerable to extreme poverty and exploitation<sup>21</sup>. HIV/AIDS affects relationships, the processes of decision-making, and attitudes to risk and uncertainty. Paradoxically, while the disease can lead to anxiety or depression, it can also lead to the discovery of new courage and focus: living with courage and focus, as the viability of households is compromised, community resilience can be undermined, especially where a community withdraws its support from the sick or dying, offering instead only blame and discrimination.

Many fear that HIV/AIDS will increasingly reduce the ability of state and civil society actors to provide essential goods and services. The epidemic is expected to significantly contribute to future shortages of civil service workers. Even if people with the required skill can be found, the disruptions of illness, absence, and retraining will hinder the operational effectiveness of state institutions.

Studies have shown that agriculture and food security may be severely reduced, especially amongst the poorest rural populations, as illness forces people to work less, lowering the output of their subsistence forms. However, the extent to which communities are able to overcome these impacts and adjust their long-term economic or food-gathering strategies is not known. HIV/AIDS has been able to spread because, in order to replicate, it exploits one of the most complex areas of human life: our sexual relationships. These relationships in turn are shaped by our knowledge and beliefs, our customs and habits of authority, as well as the basic economics of individual lives. This therefore calls for the need to address ways of stemming the tide of HIV/AIDS. Re-appraising the role of the church in curbing the scourge of HIV/AIDS; church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) in focus.

Nigeria is Africa's most populous nation with a population estimated at 126 million in 2003. The adult HIV prevalence increased from 1.8% in 1991 to 4.5% in 1996 and 5.8% in 2001. Estimates indicate that more than 3.5 million Nigerians were living with the virus in 2001<sup>23</sup>. The HIV/AIDS epidemic is of concern for the government, the Church and the people of Nigeria. The Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) has noticed the impact of the epidemic in the communities in which it serves. This includes an increase in illness and death, especially amongst young adults; an increase in the number of persons needing care including orphans; and a decrease in economic status of the people due to illness and early death<sup>24</sup>. The Church began addressing the situation through local parish programmes aimed at meeting immediate observed needs. In October 2001, the Church decided to further mobilize and galvanize the Church's response by inaugurating the Church's National HIV/AIDS Prevention and Care Programme under the Social Welfare Committee. This was to ensure that all Dioceses and Parishes contribute to the Church's response to the epidemic and through this, support the national effort at bringing the epidemic under control. Church, through a process of wide stakeholder consultations developed a Church of Nigeria HIV/AIDS policy that reflects the beliefs and principles of the church and details the actions that the church will undertake in keeping with its faith to bring the epidemic under control. This policy was adopted by the House of Bishops/Standing Committee in March 2004 in Ilesha, Nigeria. In order to implement the Church of Nigeria HIV/AIDS policy, a four-year strategic plan was developed. This was through extensive and comprehensive participatory process in which efforts were made to accommodate the viewpoints of a wide range of groups within the church, including bishops, the clergy, Mother's Union, Youths, Education, Health, theology, social welfare, existing diocesan HIV/AIDS coordinators and representatives of Archbishops. Partners with similar vision within the Christian fold and developmental agencies sat in to provide technical assistance<sup>25</sup>. The strategic plan will require commitment of all leaders within the Church; involvement of all church members and resources from within the church and beyond. The four-year plan contains priority activities that the church has articulated to achieve her objective of a country free from the HIV/AIDS<sup>26</sup>.

### **Recommendations**

There were lessons, challenges and recommendations learned from the conferences held by the Bishops of Anglican Churches in Nigeria.

These are the lessons, challenges and recommendations and key experiences reached and agreed upon in the conferences.

#### **A KEY EXPERIENCES**

- The multi-centres nature of the conference that hosted many sessions of interest to the participants simultaneously greatly tasked the physique and psyche of participants.
- It was stressful for participants to attend sessions in about four centres each day in a 'perambulating' manner without any break period.



- However, the unquantifiable support and encouragement of our indefatigable National Coordinator, Mr. Emmanuel Olatunji, undoubtedly soothed our nerves and propelled us to turn all oppositions into opportunities.
- The success stories from various Nationals and faith based organizations like the Catholics, Redeemed Christian Church of God, Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs etc challenged us to resolve to scale up the HIV/AIDS activities of the Anglican Communion in the coming year at Diocesan level, but fears are being nursed that the present disposition of many Dioceses towards finding the project which is currently discouraging will be a major constraint in achieving our post- conference objectives.

#### **B** LESSONS LEARNT

1. Delegates upon the conference have known the current epidemic situation of HIV/AIDS in the world and Africa in particular.
2. We have also learnt the current development and management of ARV.
3. New skills approach to our work as coordinators. Increase networking.
4. There were coalition meetings that we participated of interfaith based organization (Africa so).
5. We learnt that, the time is ripe for us to take the lead in the fight against HIV/AIDS pandemic.
7. Indeed we learnt that HIV/AIDS is a developmental problem and not medical.
8. The cure for HIV/AIDS is Abstinence.
9. We learnt that such programmes are creating awareness thereby encouraging people living positive to give up themselves and voluntary testing.

#### **C** CHALLENGES

1. Inadequate implementation of policies by the African Countries poses a setback on HIV/AIDS programming.
2. The issue of condom as one of the HIV/AIDS prevention remains controversial.
3. Lack of free access to treatment of people living positively.
4. Poverty and ignorance continue to pose a challenge to HIV/AIDS prevention.
5. Socio- cultural issues has continued to be a setback in HIV/AIDS programming.
6. Gender has remained a main issue in HIV/AIDS programming.
7. Lack of information of youth has caused decline in HIV/AIDS programming.
8. Stigmatization and discrimination has remained a strong barrier in HIV/AIDS programming

#### **D** RECOMMENDATIONS

In consideration of the benefits, success, challenges and experiences gained in participating in this 14th ICASA, and the essential of this aspect of social service in the Church of Nigeria, the 14th ICASA contingents recommends as follows:-

1. That all the Diocesan Bishops be encouraged to establish strengthen structures that will enhance the comprehensive HIV/AIDS programming in the areas of prevention, care and support.
2. That the Diocesan HIV/AIDS coordinators be encouraged the more to fully disseminate the knowledge and experience gained in this conference in their various Dioceses through further capacity building and exposures.
3. That networking and collaboration be strengthened between Dioceses through inter-project study tours so as to share experiences for effective programming.
4. That Dioceses be encouraged to facilitate the mainstreaming of HIV/AIDS education into Diocesan Health and Educational Institutions.
5. That more capacity building be organized and conducted for clergy, church teachers and their wives and health workers in their various Dioceses in the areas of HIV/AIDS counseling and stigma reduction.
6. That other Dioceses should follow the example of Diocese of Abuja in making social services of the church wear a human face.
7. That a certain percentage of the Diocesan annual budget be set apart for HIV/AIDS programming in various Dioceses. "\$0

#### **CONCLUSION**

The whole idea in this paper focused on Christian marriage, curbing of HIV/AIDS and the role played by the church in curbing of the this pandemic disease called HIV/AIDS. The work also stressed that polygamy in marriage is not the best and at the same time caused a lot of havoc in our homes. It also give room for the scourge of HIV/AIDS. Monogamy is the best of marriage where it is well managed. All the recommendations are from the conference of all Anglican Conference of 2005 at Abuja, Nigeria.

### Glossary

AIDS	ACQUIRED IMMUNE DEFICIENCY SYNDROME
ANC	ANTENATAL CLINIC
ARV	ANTI-RETROVIRAL
BCC	BEHAVIOUR CHANGE COMMUNICATIONS
CACA	CHURCH ACTION COMMITTEE ON AIDS
CBOS	COMMUNITY BASE D ORGANISATIONS
CON (AC)	CHURCH OF NIGERIA (ANGLICAN COMMUNION)
CSOS	CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS
CSWS	COMMERCIAL SEX WORKERS
DACA	DIOCESAN ACTION COMMITTEE ON AIDS
EPACA	ECCLESIASTICAL PROVINCIAL ACTION COMMITTEE ON AIDS
FGN	FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OF NIGERIA
FMOH	FEDERAL MINISTRY OF HEALTH
HEAP	HIV/AIDS EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN
HIV	HUMAN IMMUNO - DEFICIENCY VIRUS
IEC	INFORMATION EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION
LACA	LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACTION COMMITTEE ON AIDS
LGA	LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA
M&E	MONITORING AND EVALUATION
MTCT	MOTHER TO CHILD TRANSMISSION
NACA	NATIONAL ACTION COMMITTEE ON AIDS
NAFDAC	NATIONAL AGENCY FOR FOOD, DRUG ADMINISTRATION & CONTROL
NGOS	NON- GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS
OVC	ORPHANS AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN
PABA	PEOPLE AFFECTED BY AIDS
PACA	PROVINCIAL CTION COMMITTEE ON AIDS
PLWHA	PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS
PMTCT	Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission
RPHCC	RURAL PRIMARY HEALTH CARE CLINIC
SACA	STATE ACTION COMMITTEE ON AIDS
SMOH	STATE MINISTRY OF HEALTH
SRMR	STATE RURAL MOBILISATION REPRESENTATIVES
STI	SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTION
TB	TUBERCULOSIS
TOR	TERMS OF REFERENCE
TOT	TRAINING OF TRAINERS
TWC	TECHNICAL WORKING COMMITTEE
VCCT	VOLUNTARY CONFIDENTIAL COU~JSELI~,JG AND TESTI~JG

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