



Divorce amongst Christian couples in Yoruba land: Challenges and implications



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Research Project Registration:

Project Leader: E. van Eck 

Project Number: 2400030

Description:

The authors are participating in the research project, 'Africa Platform for NT Scholars', directed by Prof. Dr Ernest van Eck, Department of New Testament and Related Literature, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria.

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Dates:

Received: 26 Mar. 2022

Accepted: 25 May 2022

Published: 08 July 2022

How to cite this article

Uroko, F. & Enobong, S.I., 2022, 'Divorce amongst Christian couples in Yoruba land: Challenges and implications', *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 78(3), a7562. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i3.7562>

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Divorce amongst married couples is a disturbing phenomenon amongst the Yoruba people of southern Nigeria. Unfortunately, the church in Yoruba land, which has focused much of its teachings on financial prosperity, has started facing the consequences of these lopsided teachings. Using a phenomenological approach, this study argues that the lack of sexual satisfaction (such as sexual starvation), poverty, activities of fake pastors, infidelity and lies from any of the partners are the major causes of increasing divorce rates amongst Yoruba Christians. Existing literature has not adequately addressed the issue of divorce amongst Yoruba Christians. This study explores the growing divorce rates from the lens of Yoruba Christians and how it impacts on the family, children and the church at large. As part of this recommendation, church leadership should start organising marriage seminars for married couples where they are taught a nonviolent approach to conflict resolution in the family.

Contribution: This study indicates that the activities of some churches and their leaders indirectly support divorce, and the consequence is mostly felt by the children. This study argues that divorce is not supported by the church in Yoruba land. The study implicated practical theology.

Keywords: the Church; divorce; Christianity; Yoruba marriage; couples; poverty; infidelity; Nigeria.

Introduction

Divorce is an increasing phenomenon among the Yoruba people of south-west Nigeria. It is also worth noting that Christianity is highly prevalent in Yoruba land, with most of the big churches in Nigeria having Yoruba founders and headquarters in Yoruba land. The Yoruba people are located in western Nigeria and are highly religious. The Yoruba are one of the three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria, concentrated in the southwestern part of the country. Much smaller, scattered groups live in Benin and northern Togo (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica 2022).

Notwithstanding the notoriously religious nature of the Yoruba people, divorce is becoming the new normal. Yoruba people being notoriously religious entails that they apply religion to everything they do or practice. They are also notoriously religious in taking the beliefs and values of Christianity and weaving them into the fabric of their lives, whilst refusing to separate the sacred from the secular, that is, the head from the heart (Tleane 2014:1). The alarming rise in divorce demands a practical approach. Divorce has now become so cheap that in some marriages, every argument includes the word 'divorce', whether the husband threatens it or the wife (Abdulhamid & Sanusi 2016:13). The issue has reached the point that Yoruba Christians prefer to take their marital dissolution to the courts rather than allow their Christian denomination to settle it for fear of bias. Consider the case of Nosa Abume, a 48-year-old pastor who approached an Igando Customary Court in Lagos to annul his 17-year marriage, accusing his wife of defaming his character whilst the wife insisted that her husband was a chronic womaniser (Vanguard 2021), or the case of an old pastor, Omotilewa Oke, who secured a divorce at an Igando Customary Court in Lagos over his wife's refusal to go for deliverance (Agency Report 2019). One begins to wonder the reason for this unprecedented hike.

In order to understand the concept, a sketch of divorce is important. For the purpose of this work, divorce is the official dissolution of a marriage. Veevers (1991:105) opines that divorce is traumatic in that it subverts the couple's unilateral and absolute commitment to marriage per se and their high needs for achievement and endurance. Succinctly, divorce is 'the formal, legal or socially

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sanctioned termination of a marriage' (Cherlin 1978:624). It is a truism that very few people go into marriage with the intention of getting divorced at some point. This is seen in the reasons why, in the church, the vow which reads 'for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death do us part' is a usual aphorism used by ministers of God during wedding ceremonies (Ewherido 2020). Of course, issues of conflict will arise, but when they are not prevented or mediated, they become latent and escalate within a timeframe. This escalation results in divorce. Divorce does not simply happen amongst some Christian couples; it has remote causative factors. It starts with the lack of emphasis on conflict management in marriages by church ministers, with the couple exchanging unpleasant words and raining unprintable insults on one another. This results in psychological trauma for either the man or woman. It may thereafter degenerate into physical violence, which may be sexual violence or physical (Moleka n.d.). Veevers (1991:99) is of the view that after divorce, some persons are so traumatised that they do not recover or view it as a temporary crisis but have symptoms of psychological distress, which may last for years or indefinitely.

Christianity frowns at the lack of conflict prevention strategies by Christian couples. Different verses of the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, which is the sacred book for Christians, provided roadmaps for conflict prevention, mediation and management. It includes Ephesians 5:22–27, where Christian husbands are reminded to love their wives and the wives to submit to their husbands. Other New Testament references to marriage include Colossians 3:18, 1 Peter 3:1–7 and Mark 10:1–12, amongst others. In the Old Testament, Genesis 2:18 explains that the husband and wife are supposed to be together, because the woman was created to help the man, that is, to complement the man. It is not her sole duty to ensure peace in the family. This is because Christians consider family life to be a blessing and value the stability of marriage. Also, every Yoruba Christian believes the church should be a model for family life. This is a family life where the father and mother are living peacefully with love and tolerance. They support and encourage marriage and regard the breakdown of a marriage with sadness. Christians believe that marriage is a covenant before God (BBC 2022:1). This is because God was the one who instituted marriage between a man and a woman. Thus, marriage becomes a covenant before God and an institution before man. This is seen in the maxim 'what God has joined together, let nobody put asunder' (Alieke 2022). Thus, family members, relatives of the couple, friends, brothers and sisters and neighbours are warned against distorting the marriage of man and women, directly or indirectly. The reverse seems to be the case amongst Yoruba Christians. Before divorce happens, there is every indication that the marriage has broken down irretrievably and irredeemably, which indicates that there is nothing that both parties can do to make the marriage work. The issue of divorce amongst Christian Yoruba families has reached the point where Christians

divorce and celebrate it on social media. Marriage is no longer seen as a serious spiritual exercise. The maxim that 'till death do us part' is a forgotten issue (Vanguard 2020:1). The maxim entails that marriage was originally made to be a lifelong event. It was not instituted to be short-lived in practice. Anderson (2014:378) is of the view that 'many young adults feel marriage is old-fashioned and confining, and that open cohabitating relationships provide a healthier option that is more conducive to personal development'. If a relationship does not provide personal happiness, parents often believe that their children will adapt to new family relationships, so that divorce or separation will have few long-term adverse consequences. It is the aim of this research to rediscover the reason for the increasing level of divorce amongst the Yoruba Christians of western Nigeria. Using a phenomenological approach, through content and documentary analysis, this study first examines divorce amongst Christian couples in Yoruba land. This study also got data from informants through personal interviews. The interviewees were gotten through purposive sampling method. Secondly, it sketches cases of divorce amongst Christian couples in Yoruba land. Thirdly, it discusses reasons for divorce amongst the Yoruba people. The purpose of the phenomenological approach in this study 'is to illuminate the specific, to identify phenomena through how they are perceived by the actors in a situation and to be powerful for understanding subjective experience, gaining insights into people's motivations and actions, and cutting through the clutter of taken-for-granted assumptions and conventional wisdom' (Lester 1999:1).

Divorce amongst Christian couples in Yoruba land

The Yoruba (*Yorùbá* in Yoruba orthography) are one of the largest ethnolinguistic groups in sub-Saharan Africa. The Yoruba make up about 21% of modern-day Nigeria's population and are frequently the majority population in their communities. Many of the Yoruba in West Africa live in the states of Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo (The New World Encyclopedia 2022).

With its attendant benefits, Christianity came to Yoruba land through freed and converted slaves, via the Church Missionary Society (CMS). Its attendant benefits include '[W]estern commerce, civilisation and education' (Rob 2016:1). For the Yoruba people, Christian missionaries established welfare programmes and incorporated into evangelism that turned most rural communities to cities; for instance, cottage industries opened during the 19th century have witnessed great turn around in the contemporary time (Fatokun (2007).

One would have expected that the morals, ethics and injunctions about marriage brought by these missionary activities would have lasted for a lifetime. Unfortunately, the dwindling morality in Yoruba land, exemplified by

phenomena such as rituals, cybercrime and secret cults, amongst others, has affected the marriage institutions by distorting the marriage norms encapsulated in Christian teachings found in the New Testament and Old Testament. According to Esther (2022: oral communication), the situation is alarming and demands urgent attention. There is no day that passes without the news of one Yoruba couple exchanging verbal insults at each other. One hears insults that are unprintable coming from the mouths of supposedly Christian people who have just returned from church services.

Furthermore, if the brewing stage of the conflict is not managed very well, it may nosedive into physical combat and land on one of the parties in the hospital, or it may even lead to death. The divorce cases keep growing, and the church is unable to handle the escalating cases. In fact, the court seems helpless in this regard. Table 1 shows an excerpt of marital instability leading to divorce in Christian-dominated Yoruba homes.

For the reason why the courts decided to handle divorce cases even amongst Yoruba Christians, Alieke (2022:1) reveals that it is because the marriages have broken down irretrievably and irredeemably, and the court granting divorces for the couples is the last and ultimate alternative. Shedding more light, the Family Law Team reports that the Nigerian courts are often not enthusiastic to divorce the couple. Moreover, Nigerian laws, especially the Matrimonial Causes Act and the Matrimonial Causes Rules, which govern the divorce proceedings in Nigeria, are not tailored to support an easy divorce. Nigerian law is more resistant to divorce because of the need to protect family values and children of the marriage (Family Law Team 2021).

Causes of divorce amongst Christian couples

The causes of divorce amongst Christian couples have some specifics (oral interviewees as shown in Table 2). They are listed as follows.

Physical features

Physical attractiveness refers to the fact that human beings have preferences regarding the physical appearances of other people, particularly with reference to their facial features and body proportions (Ellis, Farrington & Hoskin 2019:1). It could be the shape of the face or the shape of the body. Amongst young Christian couples who divorced, it was discovered

that most of them married their partners for the sake of the beauty of the women, the muscular physique of the men and the educational standard of either partner. In fact, Mr Ojo (2022: oral interview) said that he married his wife because of her body shape. Thus, when these body shapes fade away, the love and affection disappear.

Falsehood

A false statement is one that refers to an untrue statement or the absence of truth or accuracy (Merriam-Webster 2022). They are false beliefs (Baima 2017). Divorced couples reported lies by one of the partners as a supporting reason for their divorce. A partner who is impotent will not tell the wife, or he will tell lies about having a job with a company when he does not. The lady, on the other hand, may have removed her womb without telling the husband, or one of the partners may have hidden their health status, such as being HIV positive, from their partner. Mrs Tolu (2022: oral interview) mentioned that she knows someone who divorced her husband, having discovered he was impotent without his telling her. Alieke (2022:1) reveals, '[w]hen the marriage was contracted under falsehood, half-truth or undeclared facts can as well be a ground for seeking a divorce'. Also, one of the couples may have made empty promises to each other, and when they are not fulfilled, divorce takes its course (Vanguard 2022).

Poverty

People in poverty are economically vulnerable individuals (Plucker & Peters 2018:60). When basic personal needs such as food, clothing and shelter are difficult to obtain, one is said to be in poverty (Banerjee & Buflor 2011). Amongst Yoruba Christians, it is difficult to find couples who can endure poverty in food, shelter or housing. When the husband finds it difficult to feed the family, the wife seeks a divorce. When the wife fails to bring in money for food when the husband has no money, the man sees it as insubordination and seeks a divorce. When what the man or the woman expects in the marriage is not materialising, and they have other men

TABLE 1: Some divorce cases that were treated in court in western Nigeria.

S/N	Case	Month	Source
1.	'My wife is ill-tempered, sees pornography, denies me of sex', divorce-seeking man tells the court.	24 February 2022	Olamitoke (2022)
2.	'My wife's violent, chases me with cutlass', man seeking divorce cries out.	17 February 2022	Nsikak (2022:1)
3.	A 45-year-old policeman, Mr Rafiu Ademola, asked an Igando Customary Court to dissolve his 14-year marriage over his wife's alleged adulterous nature.	25 November 2021	Agency Reporter (2021)
4.	A 64-year-old retired civil servant, Amos Akinlolu, has told a Grade 'A' Customary Court, sitting at Mapo in Ibadan, that his wife is an unrepentant adulterer, asking the court to separate them.	14 October 2021	Isola (2021)
5.	'My husband is HIV-positive', divorce-seeking woman tells the court.	10 February 2021	Eagle (2021)

TABLE 2: List of informants.

S/N	Name	Gender	Occupation	Age
1	Esther	Female	Self-employed	Adult
2	Ojo	Male	Civil servant	Adult
3	Mrs Tolu	Female	Student	Adult
4	Ade	Male	Civil servant	Adult
5	Adenuga	Female	Civil servant	Adult
6	Olaide	Male	Civil servant	Adult

enticing them, they will file for divorce. According to Mr Ade (2022: oral interview), 'stress that comes from economic insecurity in the family and chronic financial issues makes dissolution of the marriage easier'. The children of poor families suffer from certain deficiencies. Existing studies reveal that most aspects of children's physical, cognitive and affective health and development are affected by poverty, primarily due to the effects of deleterious environments, lack of access to quality education and resources (Hill & Sandfort 1995; Odgers & Jaffee 2013).

Infidelity

Marital infidelity is a relationship transgression that could be sexual infidelity, emotional infidelity or a combination of sexual and emotional infidelity (Chi et al. 2019). Some Christian couple divorce because they suspect their husband is seeing another woman or their wife is seeing another man. Mrs Adenuga (2022: oral interview) reveals that a relative divorced the husband because he always claimed to go to his church for a night vigil but ended up with his lover. The experience and interface of the author with other Yoruba Christians reveals that most infidelity committed by the man results from the behaviour and sexual starvation the man suffers from the woman; on the part of the woman, the man sues for divorce because, notwithstanding the fact that the Yoruba man is a Christian, he still pays allegiance to his traditional culture, which allows for sexual escapades in the name of polygamy with other women.

Poor conflict management

Some Yoruba Christians find it difficult to adopt conflict prevention strategies. According to Miss Esther, men may be hot-tempered before marriage and then tend to use their hot temper to impose on the wife, and if the wife behaves recalcitrantly, they sue for divorce. If the temperament and psychological disposition of each couple are not well controlled, domestic violence will ensue. The environment of the upbringing and the background of the upbringing of a husband and wife can also cause domestic violence. The husband's character may differ from that of the wife due to the environment in which they were raised (Odeleye 2019:365). The modus operandi of temperance is difficult to find in Christian homes. It also gets to the point where Christian couples engage themselves with physical weapons. For instance, Mr Steve Bashorun sued his wife in a competent court of jurisdiction and requested a divorce, because when the wife became angry, she became violent and used dangerous weapons such as cutlasses, knives and pounding pestles to threaten him (Nsikak 2022).

Activities of pastors and prophets

Pastors and prophets have impacted negatively on most Christian families in Yoruba land. The prophet may tell the husband that the wife is a witch, obstructing the progress of the man. The man may return and begin to maltreat the woman, and it ends in a failed marriage. Also, there are

situations where a pastor will start committing fornication with the wife of a church member whilst telling the woman that the husband is bad luck for her. When the man discovers that, he has no other option but to call for a divorce. Oludare (2022:1) explains the narrative of Timothy Oluwatimilehin, a pastor who was having sexual relations with a woman and her two daughters. In fact, the pastor asked the woman to divorce her husband and come to his own home to live with him. A woman moved into his pastor's house with her two daughters, and a sexual relationship ensued between the four of them. Mr Olaide (2020: oral interview) lamented, '[w]hat do you expect in a country where some people cannot pray by themselves? They believe it is only clergymen that can pray on their behalf'.

Denying sex to the other partner

Sex starvation was discovered to be one of the reasons why divorce has increased amongst Yoruba couples. Some women are very spiritual and claim to be praying and fasting every day. This makes the man uncomfortable and he calls for a divorce. Some of the women also usually claim to be going to church for a night vigil, simply to deny their husbands sex. The man endures but gets to a point where he feels that he needs to get another wife and divorce his current wife. In a marriage, a man denying sex to his wife and vice versa could amount to cruelty and may be grounds for divorce (Today Reporter 2012). Corroborating further, Odeleye (2019) lamented:

[S]exual problems may arise in marriage as a result of sublimation [of] sexual urging for several possible concentrated interests in his or her work. He or she may suddenly have become disinterested in sex as an avenue of sensual happiness. One of the spouses could be nursing a grudge against another. (p. 364)

Chronic domestic violence

The concept of 'domestic violence' refers to many kinds of abuse committed by a member of a family, a household or an intimate partner against another member of the family, household or the intimate partner (MassLegal 2022:1).

The continuous abuse of a partner may result in divorce. A situation where one partner persistently maltreats the other partner is known as domestic violence. This maltreatment may be physical or sexual. In physical violence, there is the beating of a partner, slapping and kicking, whereas in sexual violence, there is the rape of a partner. According to Odeleye (2019), this:

[C]omes up when sexual activity is carried out without the consent of the woman. It is also referred to as 'marital rape.' This comes when the male assumes that it is his right and privilege to have sex whenever he wishes, and in any form he desires without considering the disposition of the partner. (p. 363)

On one hand, some Christian women who lack love, respect and submission to their husbands have been cited as reasons why their husbands maltreat them (Vanguard 2021).

Christianity and divorce

The New Testament has several narratives that explain Jesus' position on divorce. In Matthew 19:3, Jesus was questioned by the Pharisees thus: 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason?' This means that a man can divorce his wife for anything which he dislikes in her physical attributes or character. According to Benson (1998), the Pharisees asked the question because:

[T]hey knew his opinion, and solicited him to declare it, hoping it would incense the people, who reckoned the liberty which the law gave them of divorcing their wives, one of their chief privileges. (p. 1)

Corroborating further, Danner (1969) explained that the bond of marriage ought not to be broken, unless it is because of fornication, if the injunctions of Jesus is to be followed. In Mark 10, Jesus made it clear: '[t]herefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate', which indicates the necessary realisation of the original relation and condition of the sexes in marriage (Lange & Schaff 1980). Revealing further, Guzik (2020:1) explained that Jesus emphasised the heart of the matter in Deuteronomy 24:1. Moses did not command divorce; Moses permitted it. This went against the teaching of Rabbi Hillel, who taught that it was a *righteous duty* to divorce your wife if she displeased you in any way. Jesus mentioned that life has two categories: single and married. You are either bound under a marriage vow or you are not. If you are bound, you cannot marry another. If you are not bound, you are free to marry in the Lord. Understanding 'the whole counsel of God on this subject frees people from the stigma of divorced in the church' (Guzik 2020:1).

In Christianity:

[M]arriage is viewed as a life-long promise between partners. While many believe that means God hates divorce, and Christian divorce is indeed normally frowned upon, that isn't the end of the story. Reasons for acceptable divorce in the Bible may include unfaithfulness (Matthew 19:9) and abuse (Exodus 21:10-11). (Callahan 2022:1)

Some Christian denominations have indicated their own stand on divorce. Whilst churches such as the Mennonite

Christian Fellowship and the Evangelical Methodist Church Conference restrict divorce except in cases of fornication and do not allow divorced people to remarry, the United Church of Christ accepts divorce and allows for remarriage (Anderson 2012). Shedding more light, Domen (2021) explains that the Christian faith does not promote or encourage divorce. It does not casually condone divorce or take it lightly. But it does allow it in certain circumstances such as adultery, addiction, abuse and abandonment. (See Table 3 for Christianity's stance on divorce compared to other world religions.)

As the Pharisees continued to interrogate Jesus, he used this opportunity to expand on Moses' law, explaining that divorce is not what God intended. Jesus said, 'Moses approved divorce merely as a concession to your stubborn hearts', but that was not what God had meant. 'Whoever divorces his or her spouse and marries someone else is guilty of adultery'. According to Domen (2021), Jesus stated that God's standard goes beyond the law and God's intent is for no one to divorce.

There is increasing rate of divorce in Yoruba land. Ademola (1990) reveals that it has been rapidly increasing due to the fact that women presently enjoy more economic independence, and divorce is often initiated by women on various grounds, including cruelty, desertion, lack of support, bad relationships between co-wives and childless wives. Bascom (1951:65) says, 'The increasing independence of women is sometimes blamed for the increasing frequency of divorce, and it is clearly a contributory factor'. It is regarded as a destabilisation of the traditional Yoruba sexual system (Caldwell, Orubuloye & Caldwell 1991:229). Some Christian denominations still emphasise that divorce is still prohibited. In their teachings, they make it clear that Christian couples should learn to endure challenges and adapt to changes by following the scriptural backup (BAOBAB 2007:46). The Church is believed to be the gathering of believers, so if the church on Earth is to join the church triumphant (church in heaven), then it has to follow the path of Jesus Christ. Thus, Jesus Christ mentions that divorce is not allowed, so Christians should ensure that they follow this injunction. Christians in Yoruba land become part of Christ's extended family. Therefore, they should do everything within their power to propagate these virtues. Donovan (1996) says that

TABLE 3: Comparison of Christianity and other world religions' belief on divorce.

Protestantism	Whilst it advocates against divorce whenever possible, many Protestant churches allow divorce if a marriage is beyond repair. Protestantism also permits remarriage in many cases.
Catholicism	Since marriage is considered a sacred sacrament, the Catholic Church does not believe in divorce and considers it a sin. To this religion, a marriage only ends in the case of a partner's death or if there is a Catholic annulment, which declares the marriage invalid and says it should have never happened.
Anglicanism	In 2002, the Church of England repealed a long-time ban on divorced people remarrying until after a spouse's death under 'exceptional circumstances'.
Mormonism	Similar to Protestantism, Mormonism disapproves of divorce but permits it in some instances. Couples may be able to get a 'cancellation of sealing', which allows for an ending to the marriage in the eyes of the church.
Judaism	Similar to many Christian denominations, divorce is allowed in Judaism, even if it is not encouraged. According to traditional Jewish law, only the husband can divorce his wife, but, whilst some Orthodox Jews still abide by that thinking, most Jewish communities will now allow for a divorce initiated by either a man or a woman.
Hinduism	Historically, divorce was forbidden in Hindu relationships as women had an inferior standing in culture and society.
Islam	As with many other religions, divorce is allowed in Islam, but it is considered a last resort.
Buddhism	Since Buddhism does not have strict tenets about marriage, divorce is allowed in the religion and is unrestricted. Divorce may actually be recommended if an unhappy marriage causes stress or suffering.

Source: Callahan, G., 2022, *Divorce and religion: What different faiths say about ending a marriage*, viewed 12 January 2022, from <https://www.divorcenet.com/resources/divorce-and-religion.html>; May, C., 2017, 'Harry and Meghan: Can you remarry in church after divorce?', *BBC News*, viewed 03 February 2022, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-42141868>

church in Yoruba land is the extended family of God on Earth where God's children are equipped. Jesus:

[R]eminds us that in the beginning God joined man and woman together. 'One flesh' often refers to one's relatives or kin, so the husband and wife becoming 'one flesh' should be a family unit no less permanent than our families of origin should be. (Miller 2016:1)

Implications of the increasing divorce rate amongst Yoruba Christians

Divorce has far-reaching consequences for the church, the couple, their children and society at large. Divorce has brought shame and stigma to many churches in Yoruba land. People hitherto thought that the church, which claims to be the body of Christ, should be able to exemplify Christ's moral standard for marriage and, as the light of the world, provide directions for other people in society to emulate. Unfortunately, the reverse is the case, as divorce further makes the church a laughingstock, with other bad names still hanging around the neck of the church such as rape, rituals and corruption. The integrity of the church has been lost. Conventionally:

[The] church, it was recognised, was more than a community of moral deliberation; yet intentional efforts to be such a community could help bridge the gap between faith and life and be a way to contribute to the well-being of society. (Stumme 2005:1)

Furthermore, the image of the church, which is at this point questioned and a point of controversy, loses its boldness in its evangelistic outreaches. The church teaches peace, tolerance, faithfulness and honesty in marriage; unfortunately, members and leaders of churches witness an increasing level of intolerance, unfaithfulness and dishonesty amongst couples. This sends a negative signal to members and prospective members of the church. People who had their wives snatched from them by pastors spread news of the hypocrisy of the church in Nigeria. People are now mocking the Christian community for saying and teaching what they are unable to do. Most families now even prevent their spouses from attending churches because they have a negative impact on the lives of their spouses. This is due to the fact that what is taught to be written in the Bible is not practised by ostensible church members. It was on this premise that Gustafson (1970) lamented that:

Christian community moral discourse takes place in light of Scripture. The Bible is confessionally an authoritative locus of consensus about what the shape and purposes of life in relation to God and to man ought to be. (p. 1)

In the long run, the Christian community is losing members as more people are beginning to find satisfaction in other religions, such as African traditional religions and Islam. Lamenting this development, Nieuwhof (2022) maintains that:

But that also means we live in an age where attending church for attendance's sake is dying. Fast. And maybe that's what we see happening around us. People who aren't engaged in the mission

are leaving the mission. And while that's sad, you can't build the future of the church on passionless, disengaged people. Nor can you build it on consumers. The future will be built on Christians who want to serve, share and engage the mission of the local church. This situation is really disturbing seeing the way that African traditional religion votaries are surging. (p. 1)

In further revelation, Fani-Kayode (2013:1) lamented that 'the Church in Nigeria today is like the Laodicean Church as described by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Himself in the Book of Revelations'. 'They are rich, they are wealthy, but they have nothing' and 'they blow neither hot nor cold'.

The children experience their own fair share of the impact. Most children from broken families experience low self-esteem, abandonment and withdrawal, which have far-reaching consequences for the child's educational pursuits. Morin (2021) reveals that:

[A]dolescents with divorced parents are more likely to engage in risky behavior, such as substance use and early sexual activity. In the United States, adolescents with divorced parents drink alcohol earlier and report higher alcohol, marijuana, tobacco, and drug use than their peers. (p. 1)

Children from divorced families may experience more externalised problems, such as conduct disorders, delinquency and impulsive behaviour than children from two-parent families. Also, a study published in 2013 suggested that mothers are often less supportive and less affectionate after divorce. Additionally, their discipline becomes less effective and consistent (Morin 2021). This shows that women who are divorced show little concern for their children compared to what the children would have received if their parents were together. More elaborately, 'divorced parents don't follow up on their children after separation. This can result in children not concentrating on their studies and losing interest in working hard at school' (Irakoze 2021:1). Children with divorced parents are likely to have depression, anxiety and stress. They tend to worry a lot because of how they saw their parents fight and argue before they divorced. They also tend to not want to be yelled at, so they run away from such situations to avoid being affected. Also, some children who end up living with stepparents who have other children tend to have conflicts within the family. Parents cannot be strict with their stepchildren to avoid problems, and this has an impact on their education and behaviour. Shedding more light, children of divorced parents are more likely to abandon their faith (Feigelman, Gorman & Varacalli 1992), those raised in stepfamilies are less likely to be religious than those raised by both biological parents (Myers 1996) and because religious practice provides benefits in areas such as sexual restraint, the child of divorce may lose this protection (Rostosky, Regnerus & Wright 2003).

Recommendations

As part of finding a way forward in addressing the surging cases of divorce in Yoruba land, the following suggestions can be adopted:

1. Church leadership should start organising marriage seminars for married couples where they are taught about nonviolent approaches to conflict in the family. They should also be taught how to use negotiation, mediation, reconciliation and compromise in the midst of a disagreement.
2. The church in Yoruba land should educate intending couples on family life expectations, so that they will not be caught unawares when there is conflict. Most Christian Yoruba youths think that marriage is all about sex, so when they see other things popping up, they cannot bear the shock and depend only on divorce to drive home their point.
3. In contemporary Yoruba communities, intending couples and married couples should be taught parenting techniques, so that children do not serve as the fulcrum of their conflict or suffer the consequences of their uncontrolled marital instability.
4. The church, especially the pastors and priests, should continuously preach the mind of God rather than the contemporary emphasis on God's blessings.
5. Pastors and the clergy should be careful how they counsel people's wives and daughters. They should control themselves and not lust after the wives of other people, giving them fake prophecies that will lead to the total collapse of the woman's family.

Conclusion

Poverty, infidelity and sexual starvation are some of the prominent causes of the increasing divorce rates amongst the Yoruba Christians. The situation has far outweighed most denominations because the church gives little time to exhortations that dwell on conflict management in families. If the church has failed in its mission, it is because church ministers have been indicted for causing marriage couples to divorce. Thus the Yoruba Christians, who prided themselves on producing most of the general overseers of the biggest churches in the world, yearned for a messiah to bring these escalating challenges to a halt. For instance, in the New Testament, Jesus at no point permitted divorce, so church ministers must look at the recommendations previously stated for guidance and pastoral counselling strategies.

Acknowledgements

The authors sincerely appreciate the efforts of Professor Ernest van Eck in seeing to the publication of this article.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

Authors contributed equally to the findings of this research.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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