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Editorial

One of the pressing questions that reverberates often in African Christianity is: What is an (African) Christian family? Family is very important to the traditional Africans. Raising a family is not just a social and cultural demand that has to be meant, but also a conditional for eschatological redemption or salvation. For the African Christian, the place of family cannot also be over-emphasised. Thus, prayers for the family in all its ramifications occupy the central stage in personal and intercession sessions. Although African Christians have for a long time contended with the notions of the Christian family in general, there is a progressive acceptance of its monogynous union based on heterosexuality. However, Western values and globalisation forces have continued to shape Christian family discourses and practices. Sex and sexuality issues have been escalated and mediated so much so that Christian 'theology' of family, sexuality, and sex has to contend with the throes of globalisation.

This volume, which is a product of the 2023 conference on the theme: Christian Family and Sexuality in Contemporary Society, critically reflects the tensions, challenges, and theological prospects of a Christian family. In the lead article, Professor Knoetze departs from the general conception of the Christian family based on Christ's salvation. Although he points out that family is a contested issue in Africa, he argues that a radical conception of the Christian family should centre around relationality, forging a missional relationship with the Trinitarian God. This is in contrast with the soteriological conception of family that has blurred the missional prospects that understanding family can birth for a long time.

Adu-Gyamfi's article also radically takes on the traditional conception of sex as a purely private issue, and attempts to strike a balance between it and the sexual revolution that theology of sexuality has to contend with. Coming from a heteronormative perspective, Adu-Gyamfi strongly maintains conservative theological stand on sexuality. He argues that the biblical

understanding of sexuality cannot be traded with the offering of the over-sexualised world.

On her own, Ayo-Oladayo explores the significance and nexus between language education and family development. She points out that effective communication in the family is a *sine qua non* for cohesion, unity, and progress. In addition to fostering cultural understanding, supporting cognitive growth, and fostering stronger family ties, it also improves communication abilities. Oladapo and Adererele examine the positive impacts of social change, particularly technological advancement, on the family. They opine that despite the advantages derived from modern communications devices, Christian theological understanding of the family should be countenanced and appropriated by Christian families.

Odesola and Odesola reflect on the significance of sex education in the church. Although sex education has not been a major interest in missional and catechetical teaching, they suggest that contemporary challenges make it imperative for the church to be interested in sex education. Otun's article introduces a philosophical dimension to sexuality discourse. Otun views the relegation of reason in choice- and decision-making processes as unacceptable and recommends a balanced deployment of both reason and faith in sexuality matters. Gombi re-examines the accounts of Genesis and contemporary sexual expressions. In the Genesis creation stories, an explanation of the nature of sexuality takes a central, climactic positioning and is given as a fundamental fact of creation. The excessive amount of material given to sexuality highlights its relevance in the Hebrew Bible within the cosmic context of the creation narratives. The foundation for the rest of the biblical narrative and discourse on human sexuality is provided by the profound depiction of God's original plan for human sexuality at the beginning of the canon, which also captures the core ideas of sexuality. Salifu enumerates the negative effects of street hawking, such as rape, unplanned pregnancies, and violence. He recommends that the state and social institutions should intervene to stem the corrosive tide of street hawking in Nigeria.

Biar explores the disagreement between 'pre-modernism' and postmodernism. He argues that the different positions these schools of thought hold have created serious tension in how to understand human sexuality. The recognition of feeling over reason and the relativistic contours that encircle the arguments of postmodernism, modernism, and premodernism all have impact on Christian notion of sexuality. He, however, maintains that the Bible still reserves the best model of sexual appreciation in contemporary society. For Kosoluware, the negative influences of postmodernism should be frontally addressed by contemporary African Christians. It is essential that the Church in Africa rise to the challenge through teaching, counseling and intentional preaching of the gospel. Atteh examines Christian moral victory, and points out the tensions that have characterised its different interpretations. He opines that the best approach to the theological issue is to insist that the victory believers have over the flesh nature is both positional and progressive, encompassing both the divine and the human responsibilities. Asaolu tackles the increasing cases of marital infidelity in society. Articulating the causes and effects of marital infidelity, Asaolu recommends that couples act in such a way that their actions could conform with Kantian categorical imperative. Finally, Ajao makes a case for sex education as a part of socialisation in the family. He notes that it is no longer possible to hold the view that sex talk is a taboo. Therefore, there should be a conscious approach to addressing sexuality issues.

This volume is a coterie of discourses on sex, sexuality and family. The burning issues raised from multidisciplinary perspectives enrich the volume and provide a critical resource for further engagement. However, the ideas are solely the responsibility of the authors rather than the editorial board of the journal.

Benson Ohihon Igbion
Editor-in-Chief

THE CHALLENGES OF POSTMODERNISM TO AFRICAN CHRISTIAN FAMILY

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Abstract

The traditional African family system in antiquity might not have been the best, yet it could not be described as the worst compared to other cultures within the globe. More importantly, before this time, the advent of Christianity had a tremendous positive influence on traditional African family life. For that reason, practices like polygamy, large or extended family size, etcetera have been reduced to the barest minimum. The resultant effect of the Christian influence on the traditional African family is more responsible parenting where children were adequately trained in the way and fear of God. However, nowadays, the positive Christian influence on the African family system seems to be fast eroding away due to the negative influence of postmodernism. Africa, being part of the global village, has embraced the postmodern ideologies, posing a great challenge to the way of life of Africans, especially their family system. Thus, this paper explores the challenges postmodernism poses to Christian family life in Africa. Employing descriptive research approach, the paper briefly explores the concepts of postmodernism, traditional African family, and African Christian family. The findings reveal that divorce, cohabitation, single parenting, and weak parenting are now very rampant among African Christians due to the influence of postmodern worldviews. The Church in Africa is thus challenged to respond by rejuvenating her preaching, teaching, and marriage counselling ministries.

Keywords: Christianity, postmodernism, cohabitation

Introduction

The fact remains that God instituted marriage and invariably family. The ideal established at the beginning of humanity is for one man and one woman to join spiritually and physically committed union for a lifetime, conceiving and rearing children to the glory of His name (Gen. 1:27-28; 2: 28, 21-25). Although this ideal family of God is not the case in every Christian family in pre-modern African societies, however, the situation was indeed better than what is obtainable today. The contemporary African Christian family is fast losing its values and glory more than before.

The reason for this is not far-fetched. We live in a supersonic, supercharged, fast-paced, or fast-moving culture in which change is the expected norm. Every day, new technological and sociological advances burst on the scene. We welcome creative ideas to enhance our status, refresh our bodies, and stimulate our brains. The postmodern man sometimes questions traditional models in every sphere of life, from relaxation to religion, with an apparent insatiability for ingenuity and novelty. We should therefore be less surprised that the traditional family model has come under fire or that our society has attacked the long-established family values and structures today (Slaughter 1996, 13). Truly, we are in unusual times.

This paper is therefore undertaken to seek ways through which the African Christian family can be protected from the challenges posed by postmodernism so as not to be totally swept away by the wind its ideologies. To achieve this, the paper discusses what African Christian family means. Postmodernism as concept is briefly explored as well, together with the influences it has on the Christian families in Africa, not leaving out suggestions on how the Church in Africa should respond to the issues.

AFRICAN CHRISTIAN FAMILY

This researcher considers it imperative to discourse the traditional African family before talking about African Christian family. It is believed that this will enhance proper comprehension of the reader.

The Traditional African Family

Before the expansion of Christianity in Africa, traditional African family goes beyond the nuclear. This may be largely owing to the practice of polygamy, which was common then. This assertion is corroborated by Tembo (2023) who avers that polygamy was very popular in Africa and it often formed the backbone of the traditional African family patterns. One of the reasons why polygamy was common in the African setting was because of the Agrarian nature of their economy then. This is because; the more wives, the more the number of children, and this will determine the strength of the workforce on the farms.

Invariably, the size of a man's family usually determines his wealth or affluence in the community. It is worthy of note that such a family, no matter how big, usually lived together under the same roof or building, which is usually big enough to contain them. Again, the largeness of the size of the family did not constitute a hardship for her members as the family “serves to provide sexual gratification leading to the rearing of children, economic support, as well as emotional support by showing love and affections to partners and children” (Oyemiyi 2017, 77). This means that though the traditional African family is usually large, mutual support in all spheres of life still prevailed.

Another significant feature of the African family is that there are no family boundaries or demarcation (*Selvan 2004, 221*). The child usually belongs to the whole extended family, to the clan, and in a sense, to the whole village. The child grew up automatically without a clear orientation from his or her immediate parents. According to *Selvan, the absence of clear family boundaries may often lead to what experts call “enmeshment,” which means a lack of sense of esteem and belonging characterized by the absence of a clear identity (Ibid.)*.

Christian Family in Africa

It is not a hidden fact that Christianity had had a significant influence on family life in Africa. While some things have remained unchanged, others have either been transformed or completely

changed due to Christian teachings' impacts. For instance, Christianity has reduced the culture of polygamy to the barest minimum. Again, African Christians have embraced the culture of structured family size through family planning. The resultant effect of this is more responsible parenting, where children are properly trained in the way and fear of God. However, the advent of postmodern ideologies is already changing the narratives negatively, and this is a severe threat to the Christian family life. How? and in which areas? are the questions this paper addresses. Let us now discuss the concept of postmodernism.

Concept of Postmodernism

Scholars have generally expressed difficulty in finding an appropriate definition for postmodernism. Thus, it is better described than defined. According to Banjo (2015, 103-113), the reason for this is that it is a concept that finds itself in virtually all disciplines or areas of study like art, architecture, literature, sociology, fashion, communication technology, and so on. However, he further submits that the most widely adopted definition of postmodernism is from Jean-François, who defines it simply as 'incredulity towards metanarratives' (Ibid.). Postmodernism is actually a reaction to modernism, which was a movement that emphasized reason together with the power of science and technology in solving human problems. This is why Olawoyin (2015, 1-11) asserts that the "postmodern" age is a successor to the "modern age."

Majolagbe (2020, 41) gives a glimpse of the specific key elements that form the various strands of postmodernism. These include search for truth with the impression that there is no absolute; moral values are relative: "you determine whom you want to be, or we make ourselves what we want to be;" culture and structure are fragmented and less predictable; people are shaped by culture and communities; there is the fragmentation of social life, and this makes people less likely to follow rigidity; confusion, lack of structure and incessant choices since all thinking is contextual; a relativized God

whose sovereignty is limited; individual defines religion, religion does not define the individual; greater pluralism; all religions are identical and should be tolerated; transformation of the self and discard of the traditional labels and categories; consumerism in all that matter; the greater impact of information and communication technology (ICT) on social life; and glocalization which has narrowed down time and space.

One major feature of postmodernism is the position that there is no absolute or universal truth. According to postmodernists, truth is a matter of perspective or context rather than being universal. They give for this because what is true today can become falsehood tomorrow. Hence, they challenge tradition and deny any reality and foundational truth-claims like the biblical truth-claims. They raise questions about the standard of God or principles with which man should live (Oyemomi 2015, 1-12). Again, postmodernists maintain that texts, whether historical, literary, or otherwise, have no inherent authority or objectivity in revealing the author's intents, thus they cannot tell us what happened. This makes them question some biblical events like 'parting of the Red Sea', 'calling down fire by Elijah', 'receiving of sight', and many others (Banjo 2015, 105). Thus, they advocate for what they call “deconstruction” of meanings.

Another important feature of postmodernism is advocacy for freedom. It is the belief of postmodernists that humans are free-will beings who should be able to choose whatever they want without interference from any constituted authority, whether visible or otherwise. Postmodernism is diametrically opposed to the notion that there is only one way to do anything (Townsell 2007, 1-10). In essence, Postmodernists will only consider those approaches that allow for personalization and permission for one to take the lead and have a decisive part in one's own pursuits. They do not believe in the fundamental or foundational ways of doing anything (Ibid.).

Again, postmodernists believe that all religions deserve equal recognition. They maintain that no religion is right, and none is wrong. Every person's morality belongs to them alone; therefore,

morality that is imposed by another, whether by religion, government, or another person, and anything claimed to be absolute truth is to be distrusted (Banjo 2015, 106). That accounts for the reason postmodern ideologists do not subscribe to the Bible as the source of absolute and universal truth.

Effects of Postmodernism on African Christian Family

Although it will be unfair for one not to see anything good at all in the postmodern ideologies, yet the fact remains that the challenges and threats they pose to Christianity generally are far more significant than what may be good therein. Since this paper focuses on the challenges of postmodernism to the African Christian Family, the researcher's intention at this level is to discuss how postmodern ideologies affect the Christian family in Africa. This becomes necessary because the world has now become a global village; thus, Africa should not pretend as if it is immune to the threat of postmodernism.

Practically speaking, the African Christian family system is already having its fill of the negative influences of modernization and especially postmodernism on humans and all human institutions, including the God-ordained institution of marriage. Oyeniyi (2017, 77) affirms this when she laments that modernization has redefined the family institution, and this is contrary to traditional and biblical worldviews about family. In the same vein, Massaquoi (2015, 27-51) shows a concern that African society is fast moving away from biblical standards generally makes one wonder whether it is possible to live according to the family principles laid down in the Scriptures. It is indeed a worrisome development.

Marriage

The fact that postmodernism questions all sources of truth and knowledge claims and thus advocates modification of temporary understandings and that there are multiple forms of truth has indeed de-oriented people negatively about many things, including the institution of marriage. Massaquoi (2015, 43) corroborates this by

asserting that “postmodernism has changed people's understanding and expectations about marriage.” It is unfortunate that quite a number of African Christians today no longer see marriage as life covenantal but rather contractual. In other words, they do not see marriage as a life covenant between husband and wife but only as a contractual agreement in which a party is free to discontinue the moment the other party seems to have failed in his or her obligations (Oyeniran 2019, 27).

As a matter of fact, young people now see marriage ordinarily as joining two individuals who could continue to maintain their freedom and independence. Indeed, individualism, as preached by postmodernists, has made us focus on self rather than relationships and groups (Balswick and Balswick, 1991, 35). Consequently, they are less willing to commit wholeheartedly to marriage. Thus, trust, commitment, and closeness are undermined. This accounts for the high rate of divorce being experienced within the Church. One can only imagine the negative impact of divorce upon the couple themselves not to talk of their children. Let us now quickly touch on the issue of divorce as a resultant effect of postmodernism on the family.

Divorce

Due to the negative influence of postmodern thoughts on marriage relationships, marriages today are more likely to end up in divorce than death and couples are less likely to be happy than in the past decades, and African Christians are not exempted either (Massaquoi, 34). Although the menace of divorce cannot be limited to the postmodern age, the rate of divorce has gone astronomical today. Things we read in the dailies and hear in the news shows that courtrooms are flooded nowadays with cases of divorce, many of whom are church members. The worry of Oladimeji (2017, 8) that responsible homes are gradually dying out worldwide because people are becoming more individualistic and less committed to responsibilities is a pointer to the fact that postmodernism is a severe challenge to marriage unions.

This, indeed is evident in the postmodern thought or attitude that values self-fulfilment and happiness above all else. Massaquoi's (2015) observation on this issue is thought-provoking:

divorce has been accepted today in the African society partially because of its pervasiveness, but also partially because the postmodern mindset believes that lack of happiness and self-fulfillment is a reason enough to leave a relationship to seek something fulfilling, even if that change is difficult, or detrimental to others involved (39).

Unfortunately, divorce only seems to be a solution to marital problems, instead, it also creates in most cases, some other bigger ones for the parties concerned, and especially the offspring of such marriages. This will now lead us to the influence of postmodernism on parenting.

Parenting

Research has proved that families are substantively the bedrock of society and the place for nurturing happy, capable, and resilient children ("Postmodernism Effects on Family," 2018). This is because the family is the smallest unit of society and the child's first place of social contact. Thus, the importance of proper parenting can never be over-emphasized. It must also be noted that the traditional African family system did not take parental responsibility with levity. However, the postmodern influence where the new concept in the deconstruction of the notion of "family," in particular the heterosexual family unit, for a more liberalized notion of family that embraced single-parent, surrogate-motherhood, and gay and lesbian families, and other less popular variants of the post-modern family is already posing a threat to parenting among African Christian families (Ibid.).

One significant effect of postmodern thoughts is the changing roles of women in society, which makes more women find themselves within the workforce than before. It is obvious that where the two parents are so much occupied out there, little time would be allocated for the children's emotional, psychological and spiritual

needs because they scarcely realize that parenting itself is a serious business. Sarah Hughes describes it as bloody hard work that requires attention every hour of the day (Hughes 2020, 1). Moreover, another postmodern ideological proposition is freedom. Postmodernists believe that everyone should be given freedom, including children. This has made parents in contemporary society liberal in dealing with their children, and the result is an increase in wayward children on the streets of African towns and cities.

Cohabitation

Another effect of postmodernism on marriage is cohabitation. It used to be a trend only in the Western world but is now finding its way into African society. Cohabitation is the situation where “two unrelated, unmarried people set up a household together, sharing a domestic and sexual relationship, just as if they were married” (VanGoethem 2005, 21). Massaquoi describes it as a way of trying out a marriage to see how it works before commitment is made (Massaquoi, 37). This means cohabitation can be simply described as “trial marriage.” People believe it is better to try their compatibility and fruitfulness by cohabiting rather than directly going into holy wedlock. This is due to the postmodern emphasis on shared experience. The postmodernists believe that people can only know their potential by sharing the experience of living together.

Although this idea is alien to African cultural ideology and biblical worldview, yet it is here with us already. Unfortunately, As Thatcher (2002, 10) observed, some people choose cohabitation as an alternative to marriage, not as a trial or preparation. Those who choose cohabitation as an alternative to marriage are unwilling to get married legally. One can imagine the fate of a child born into a relationship that lacks commitment.

Single Parenting

Massaquoi (2015, 39) argues that another effect of postmodern ideology is the divisive issue of single parenting, which has taken root

in traditional African society. According to him, there is a report that the percentage of babies born to unwanted mothers has increased more than six-fold since the 1960s (Ibid.). Although as mentioned by Margow (1999, 1), there are a number of factors, such as death, adoption, and the illness of a family member, upon which one may not have control, yet there are others like never married, artificial insemination, contractual arrangement between people which are as a result of postmodern influence. For instance, the rate of divorce is increasing as result of the permissive nature of contemporary society as mentioned previously. Again, contractual agreement, never married, and artificial insemination are all new trends that postmodern ideas brought.

Another important reason for single parenting is postmodern influence on African youths which has made sex to become more disassociated from marriage. This is unlike during the traditional African society when youths, particularly girls vehemently avoided pre-marital sex due to the ridicule and disgrace it could bring to her and her family should she lose her virginity before marriage. It is an unarguable fact that sexual intercourse could lead to unwanted pregnancy which could invariably lead to having a child outside wedlock. And if the two individuals involved are not willing to get married to each other, eventually, the lady or the young man concerned will automatically become a single parent.

What Church's Response Should Be

It is obvious that the Church in Africa cannot afford to display care free attitude towards the enormous challenges postmodernism is posing to Christian family in the continent. In fact, the response should be fast, articulate and comprehensive (Kolawole 2020, 1). This is in line with Pocock's (2005, 78) opinion that the challenges postmodernism poses to the Church merit clear and compassionate response. Although, this researcher may not be able to suggest a comprehensive response in this paper for lack of space, yet an attempt will be made.

Teaching is a major way of response to the postmodern challenges against the Christian family in Africa. The Church needs to be more committed to her teaching ministry. This becomes imperative because emphasis seems to be more on prayer in the contemporary Church in Africa. While we are not trying to undermine the importance of prayer ministry of the Church, this researcher believes that more teaching is needed. Youths need to be taught how to maintain purity as singles, including God's standards and expectations for marriage. The married themselves also need to be taught the whole counsel of God for family relationships. Moreover, it is expedient for Christians in the education sector in African nations to be more committed to instilling African moral values into the younger generation while they position themselves as role models.

The counselling ministry of the Church also needs to be rejuvenated. This is also very important because this age of information technology has exposed Christians to many wrong counsels through the internet. Therefore, pastors should rise to pre and post-marital counselling more than ever. Family enrichment programmes should continually be organized for church members. Parents in Africa, especially Christians, should be counselled to step up in their parental responsibilities more than ever before. This will help correct the wrong postmodern impressions teenagers and youths are getting online and from their peers.

Again, the Church in Africa must re-awake to her preaching ministry. Indeed, postmodern ideologies are drawing more people to hell than before, and it is only through the preaching of the gospel that they can be snatched from the power of hell. The gospel remains the only potent power of God for salvation (Rom. 1:16). No matter what postmodernists say, the Church must continually preach against whatever God says is sinful and always call people to repentance.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the African Christian family, the concept of postmodernism, and the harmful effects of postmodern thoughts on the African Christian family. It has been established that though postmodern ideas did not emanate from Africa, the continent is not immune from its negative influences. The simple reason is that technological development through Information Communication Technology (ICT) has transformed the world into a global village.

Therefore, the Church in Africa must rise to the challenge through teaching, counselling and preaching the undiluted word of God. This becomes very important because if we do not teach people the right things, the wrong ones are readily available to them, especially from the internet. Moreover, the gospel must be preached to those moving farther away from God's kingdom due to their exposure to postmodern ideologies.

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