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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

EXAMINATION OF THE RELEVANCE OF EFFECTIVE SEXUAL EDUCATION IN THE CHURCH IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

In Nigeria, children and young people are being exposed to sexually explicit materials on a daily basis through social media like television networks, films, music, and the internet. Infact, much of the sex education that these people have is taking place in the media than at home, school, and church. However, the church should be a powerful force for social and behavioural change by giving Christian sexual education to the members of the congregation. There are news rounds of sexually immoral acts like rape, pre- and extra-marital sex, and so on due to a lack of proper sexual education. This paper will therefore examine the Relevance of Effective Sexual Education in the Church in Nigeria. To achieve this goal, a descriptive approach is employed for the study to discuss the concept of the church, the Biblical basis for sexual education, an overview of sexual education in Nigeria, the problem of lack of sexual education, and the role of the church in sexual education, among other things. Passages from the Bible and other scholarly literature will as well strengthen the study. The writer made suggestions that the church members should be given correct information about sexuality; other agencies in schools, homes, and government should work hand in hand with the church to provide adequate sex education to children from childhood; and the church leaders should be prepared for a sexual education ministry in the seminaries and colleges of theology.

Keywords: Effective, Church, Sex, Sexuality, Sex Education

Introduction:

We live in a society where sexual activities bombard us, and unfortunately, religion has not successfully put sexuality in any helpful context (outside of marriage and procreation). Our communities and societies are ravaged by HIV/AIDS, unplanned pregnancies, and widespread sexual abuse and dysfunction. Sex and its relationship to a meaningful spiritual life is a topic largely ignored in Nigerian churches today, and this is being misrepresented in the media and society (Darryl, 2011; 2). Sexuality is a total expression of the identity of humans, and sex education is very important in helping people (both young and adult) deal with their sexual desire in a godly manner.

Human beings have sexual feelings; attitudes, and beliefs, but adolescents' experiences of sexuality are unique because it is processed through intensely personal perspectives. This perspective is derived from private, personal experiences, as well as public and social sources (Ogundipe & Ojo, 2015; 1). Sexual desires are considered a natural aspect of life, and individuals (both young and old), should have the right to express those desires freely and to enjoy their sexuality. Hence, there is a need for sexual education that will help in this regard. Dunn and Alarie outlined sexual education as including sexual awareness, philosophy, attitudes, values, and behaviour of individuals. It also covers various areas such as framework, functioning, and biochemistry of the sexual response system, identity, orientation, roles, personality, thoughts, feelings, and relationships. It is desired to replace ignorance, fear, secrecy, and guilt with knowledge, understanding, openness, and rationality (Dunn & Alarie, 1997, 175).

An Overview of Sexual Education in Nigeria

It is impossible to understand human sexuality without recognising its multidimensional nature. Acquiring accurate information about sexuality can help prevent sexual problems, and it can help individuals deal effectively with problems such as infertility, impotence, sexual dysfunction, sexually transmitted diseases, and

sexual harassment if they occur in life. More importantly, information about sexuality, especially in the church setting, can help individuals become aware of interpersonal relationships, which usually contributes to the growth of intimacy and sexual satisfaction in life (Nwokeji, 2010; 28).

Sexual Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS, 2008), confirmed that sexual education is a lifelong process of acquiring information on sex and forming attitude, values and beliefs.

Sexual education teaches the adolescents and all singles of abstinence- only; that is, to abstain from pre-marital sexual intercourse because of the advantages it offers, like prevention of unintended pregnancies, contracting HIV/AIDS, and other sexually transmitted infections (Kirby, 2005, 7). Sexual education advocates sexual activities within the confinement of a monogamous marital relationship to guard against adverse psychological and physical effects associated with premarital sex; and elucidates further that abstinence from sexual activity outside marriage allows for maturity and understanding of self (Iyang & Iyang, 2013, 36). However, bearing children outside of marriage has serious effects on the child, the mother, and society as a whole (Iyang et al., 2013, 37).

In Nigeria, especially among the Yorubas, little or none is spoken about sexual education is discussed with children. Anyone who tries to talk about sexuality in public will be termed as being immoral; even some Pastors are shy to talk about sex and sexuality in counselling males and females preparing for marriage or on the pulpit while preaching at a wedding (Adeloye, 2017, 4). Any child who inquires about it is turned down with the excuse that he is too young for such a discussion. To them, it is an 'adult game'. This makes some inquisitive children and adolescents get their information about sexuality from the wrong people, which exposes them to danger without remedy. If it is discussed at all, it is certainly seen as

something shameful, reprehensive, and even disgraceful, necessary only for having children (Ituma, Oroko, and Eskay, 2013, 483).

In 2002, when the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), in conjunction with the Federal Ministry of Education, civil societies, and many other International Development Partners, drafted and proposed a curriculum on Sexuality Education for both primary and secondary schools, it was received with mixed feelings, which led to raging controversy, especially in Northern Nigeria (Ogundipe et al, 2015). After some time, the discussion was hijacked by religious leaders and other stakeholders; it was misunderstood and eventually discarded for some “religious” reasons.

Sex education should not be seen as a taboo; it should be freely discussed because it originated from God. According to Genesis 1: 27-28 (NIV) 'So God created them in his image both male and female; He blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it'. Since sex came from God, it is not sinful for human beings to discuss it as required by God.

Biblical Basis for Sexual Education

As recorded in some Bible passages, sex education can be encouraged and promoted by the Church. Here are some critical pointers with references to Scripture that talk about sex, marriage, and associated topics to help us better understand the biblical format about the reasons why God created sex and what we should teach about sexuality.

Marriage and Marital Significance as ordained by God can be seen in 1 Corinthians 7: 2-3; where it is written that, “But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should fulfil his marital duty to his wife and likewise the wife to her husband”. The Bible promotes being honest with your spouse and having an

exclusive relationship. According to the Pew Research Center, cohabitation is on the rise, while marriage has significantly declined since the last decade. People with strong religious affiliations now find it acceptable for couples to live together, even if they do not plan on getting married. The biblical paradigm of sexuality education is based on God's purpose for sex to remove immorality and that it should be within marriage. People should be taught to know and appreciate 'sex' as a gift of God and also as something that is sacred (Genesis 29: 2-3; 9: 21-23; 2 Samuel 10: 4 and Hebrew 13: 4).

Unlimited and uncontrollable sexual indulgence and pleasure are condemned in the Bible (Romans 13: 14; Mathew 5: 28; Revelation 14: 8 and 1 Corinthians 7: 1-2). Self-discipline is highly emphasised in the Bible (1 Corinthians 7:9 and Titus 2: 5-6). The Bible even affirmed that to look at a woman lustfully in the heart may condemn a man to hell (Mathew 5: 28-29). According to Onimhawo and Ottuh (2021, 65), the beliefs of the Church about sex as written in the Bible are summarised as follows:

1. First, it establishes the “one flesh” union (Genesis 2: 24-25; Mathew 19: 4-6)
2. Second, it provides for sexual intimacy within the marriage bond (Genesis 4: 1)
3. Third, sexual intercourse is for the mutual pleasure of husband and wife (Proverbs 5: 18-19)
4. Fourth, sexual intercourse is for procreation (Genesis 1: 28).

Sexual education in the Church is rooted within its functions, which include teaching, training, and reaching. Sex education is part of the Church's teaching ministry, which Jesus Christ commanded by saying, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Holy Spirit; and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Mathew 28: 19-20). Teaching morality and values to our children and adults is

commanded in the Bible. We are to teach them to our children and their children (Deuteronomy 4: 9).

Apart from the above, the Scripture, as the word of God, are supposed to inculcate morality and effect corrections, including the ones for evil sexual abuses (2 Timothy 3: 16). Paul, in his admonition, encouraged the believers to be instructors of the foolish, teachers of infants, because they have in the Bible the embodiment of knowledge and truth, which they should teach to others (Romans 2: 20). Apostle Paul is an excellent example to follow by the Church in spreading the Gospel which should include Sex Education (1 Corinthians 4: 17).

The Church should be a place where members, starting from childhood, should be trained the way they should live. Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from them (Proverbs 22: 6). So if there is a lack of sexual education, there will be problems.

Consequences of Lack of Sexual Education

As confirmed by Onimhawo and Ottuh (2021, 62), modern, sophisticated telecommunication technologies and other related visual aids have extremely corrupted teenagers and youths sexually. Photographs, videos, magazines, internet, and virtual games that are pornographic and that depict rape and dehumanization of female sexual scenes have constituted powerful but deforming tools of sex education even with or without prior knowledge of parents (Cline, 1990, 87). As more and more teenagers are being exposed to these sexual materials, they are learning a hazardous message of their lives ignorantly. This is because they are unaware of the possible dangers to their health and lives.

Due to the lack of appropriate sexual education, society is increasingly developing, leading to many new problems. In recent years, the situation of unwanted pregnancies and abortions, which at times lead to premature deaths, has increased to an alarming level, and these are experienced majorly by teenagers (Laundry, Darroch, Singh, and Higgins, 2003, 261).

Apart from unwanted pregnancies, there are some other painful problems like an increase in the number of people suffering from sexually transmitted diseases, cases of sexual violence, and sexual abuse. According to Walker (2004, 240), this situation is so noticeable in some communities that some parents who are seriously afraid withdraw their children from some schools and even limit their going out. However, this is not the best way to protect children because these children are young and need holistic development, including socialisation and exposure to the world outside the home (Walker, 2004, 241).

In recent years, many cases of child lewd and rape have been reported and denounced by victims' parents and family members. In addition to the news about lewd cases, online newspapers are regularly downloading tragic and equally outrageous information such as abortion, young mothers giving birth to their children and throwing the babies into the trash bins, and ruthless killing of their newborn babies (Sau, 2020, 565). This news is hearth-broken, and something has to be done by the society with the intervention of the church of God.

The Role of the Church in Sexual Education

The Church, which is a gathering of believers in Christ, has the purpose of ministering to God, the believers, and the world (Grudem, 1994, 867). The church as a congregation of believers, is not supposed to minister to church members alone but also to the world's unbelievers. Therefore, the role of the Church in sexual education should be to the members of the Church and to the entire society in which she operates.

The parents, that is, the married people (men and women), should be taught and trained in the Church by the Pastors and other recognised institutions about sexuality. Most parents did not learn about sexuality from their parents and thus lacked the capabilities of becoming good examples to their children in overcoming sexuality problems. Such parents see themselves as being uneducated about the

subject matter and may be confused and not qualified for the sexual values they wish to communicate to their children (Onimhawo and Ottuh, 2021, 67). Parents are the primary disciples of their children (Deuteronomy 4: 9), so the Church must teach the parents by giving them materials and encouragement that will make them approach the issue of sexual education confidently and successfully.

Onimhawo and Ottuh (2021, 68), affirmed that Churches that build good parents will end up building good children. This can be termed 'Positive Parenting'. Parents should be taught to become listening parents. Parents should apply learning skills so that their children will not go astray. The children should have the opportunity to ask questions the parents must answer appropriately. Even during a crisis, an established relationship with parents and children by the Church is a ready, peaceful resolution.

Every member of the Church, including adults, teenagers, and children, should be taught appropriately. In both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, the Church has the mandate to teach members to be consistent Christians. The teaching of God's Word was the responsibility of every believer in the Old Testament times, when God commissioned the Priests, Judges, Prophets, and Rabbis the tasks of instructing his people with the proper application of Laws to their day-to-day life (Anthony and Benson, 2003, 17). Also, in the New Testament, Jesus instructed his followers to teach as the Great Commission (Mathew 28: 19-20). Therefore, the Church today should devote time to sexuality education, which could be done through Bible Study, where there will be room for interaction, questions, and answers. Regular preaching on ideal sexuality should be done from the pulpit.

The Church should take a serious step to stop already existing unhealthy sexual teachings that the members are exposed to outside the Church from schools, friends, magazines, televisions, the internet and other sources and replace it with correct teachings. God that created man, male and female, has mandated us to teach even

sexuality, so the Church should not restrict herself from providing adequate teaching that will benefit the members so that they will not go outside the church to learn the wrong thing. The Church should not be ashamed to discuss what God was not ashamed to create and declare good (Hendricks and Hendricks, 1991, 275). The people outside the church should emulate the lifestyles of the church members and live responsibly.

Another role of the church in confronting the challenge of sexual education is an effort to teach or reach out to the community. The teaching of the Word should not be limited to the church members alone; the people outside the church should hear Godly messages from them to live right because Christ has sent them believers to the world. According to Adeloye (2017, 8), this is the reason why churches organise crusades and outreaches to minister to the public. A church that is not preaching to its community is dead. This can be done by organising seminars, conferences, camping, and so on for the community at large. We can read about this in the life of Jesus in the Bible as he engaged in open discussion with publicans and sinners to teach them about the Kingdom of God.

By organising seminars, conferences, and camps, the church would be able to teach the public the godly form of sexuality, educating them that sex is godly only in marriage. According to Song of Solomon 4: 1-16, Sex is godly, and it is meant to be enjoyed because God delights in the joys and pleasures of his creatures. If a local church is finding it difficult to organise seminars and camps mentioned above, she can work in conjunction with interdenominational organisations like the Scripture Union of Nigeria (SU), Evangelical Missionary Agency (NEMA), and Calvary Ministries (CAPRO) to carry out these activities of teaching Biblical sexuality.

Recommendations

When the church has performed her role effectively, other agencies in schools, homes, and government should work hand in hand with the church to provide effective sex education to children from childhood. In partnership with the Church, the government should develop and

provide workable sex education curricula and materials in schools. Teachers handling sex education should not mislead the children under them by receiving proper and appropriate training regarding this. The government and religious organisations should properly vet the recommended books for sex education in schools for compliance with the word of God.

The church leaders like Pastors and other ministers in charge of churches should be prepared for a sexual education ministry in the seminaries and colleges of theology. The curriculum of the seminaries should include courses on sexual education that experienced faculty members will deliberately handle before the students graduate to go and perform in the churches. The Pastors that are already leading churches should also be given the opportunity of short-term courses and seminars on how to handle sexual education in the seminaries and colleges of theologies for the proper discharge of such at affordable fees.

Conclusion

One factor that has not been given adequate attention is the involvement of the Church in sexual education for the members and the society. Although several studies, according to Lehrer (2004, 720), have shown a correlation between adolescents' sexual behaviour and religious commitment; no severe attempt has been made to confirm the underlying mechanism through which religion affects sexual behaviour in Nigeria specifically. It has been argued in the discussion above how the church can handle the problem of sexual immorality effectively in the context of the church's life and programme. The church, through the ministers, is responsible for ministering to the congregation and the world as a whole. The church today should take the mandate of her teaching with all seriousness and provide adequate sexual education to the people she can reach out to both in and outside the church's confinement. This mandate can be done by strengthening families, honouring and celebrating

marriages, providing marriage enrichment, and helping parents with immoral adolescent children, among other things.

The timely response of the church to promote sex education by teaching all people, as recorded in Mathew 28: 18-19 should be taken seriously, and this will save the entire world from the problem of sexual immorality that is prevalent in our world.

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