

**A CHRISTIAN EVALUATION OF TRADITIONAL WEDDING:  
ANIMOE CONFERENCE AS A CASE STUDY**

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## ABSTRACT

Marriage as an institution is as old as man. As an institution it is entered into through wedding. There are three forms of wedding- traditional wedding, Church wedding, and Civil wedding through which most couples enter the institution of marriage. Among the Igbo people these three are well recognized. However, traditional wedding is always required before any of the other two. It therefore follows that the Igbo in most cases go through two forms of wedding especially traditional and Church wedding. The major reason being that the traditional is not accorded the same status as the Church wedding which in most cases is legal and is Christian.

Church wedding is legal and statutory if the Church organizing the wedding is licensed by the state and if the couples have authorization from the state marriage registrar for such wedding. Traditional wedding on the other hand cannot be statutory since it operates under native laws and customs but it can be Christian, if practices and requirements that contradict Christian beliefs are not adopted. Several steps can be taken by way of contextualization which will make the Igbo traditional wedding or the Church wedding stand out as the only wedding to be performed by Christian Igbo couples. This will eliminate the burden of double wedding and its disturbing consequences. The whole of this essay is therefore a Christian view of the Igbo traditional wedding with a dose of Igbo Church wedding and what actually makes a wedding legal and Christian.

## CONCLUSION

To Africans and the Igbo in particular marriage is one rite of passage that cannot in any way be overlooked in any culture. Parents, even communities do not see their daughter as duly married if nothing was paid or done traditionally on her behalf neither do they respect a man who cannot pay the bride-price of his intended wife. This is rooted in the Igbo belief that a man must look for a girl and pays something on her behalf and both of them become husband and wife.<sup>2</sup>

The coming of Christianity to the Igbo is a welcome development setting the Igbo on the path of righteousness and covenant children of God through Jesus Christ. However, as E. A. Ahirika puts it, "for Christianity to take impeccable deep root in Igbo land and in the hearts of many Christian

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Trobisch comp. I loved a Girl (San Francisco: Harper & Row, publishers, 1965) 36.

<sup>2</sup> Akande, Marriage and Family Life in the Nigerian Society Vol 1. 60.

converts, the church has to re-examine its attitude towards the culture of the people.”<sup>3</sup> Christianity does not disregard or destroy culture it only transforms culture any where it comes in contact with culture. It should therefore be used to transform the Igbo traditional wedding not to destroy or disregard it. Africans have called for contextualization in many issues, such should also go for traditional wedding.

One thing is clear, that what we call Christian or church wedding is tainted with western culture for example, dressing of the couple.<sup>4</sup> The west have been able to contextualize or Christianize these customs and have adopted wedding to be a civil act as well as a ceremony of religious significance yet observing it only once.<sup>5</sup> The Igbo should also be able to contextualize or Christianize their traditional wedding making it the only wedding Christian couples can observe without being stigmatized in any way by the society or the church.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are directed much on the Church. The different views surrounding Church wedding and traditional wedding ought not to be if Churches speak out in a strong voice drawing a line between what is

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<sup>3</sup> E. A. AHIRIKA “Acculturation of Christianity: A case study of Igbo culture” African Journal of Biblical studies. (AJBS) 6:2 Oct, 1991. 110.

<sup>4</sup> “Cultural wedding customs and traditions” by Beaucoup wedding favors [www.beaucoup.com](http://www.beaucoup.com)

<sup>5</sup>Elof G. Nelson, Your Life Together ( Richmond: John Knox Press, 1968), 34 .

Western, what is Igbo tradition and what is Christian. Lazar and George gave three requirements for a Christian marriage.<sup>6</sup>

1. A Christian marriage has to be made in public with a priest (or other authorized Church minister) as a witness. It has to be between two baptized Christians belonging to the same denomination (in case of a mixed marriage, proper dispensation must be obtained).
2. Both parties must accept marriage as monogamous and indissoluble
3. The union has to be blessed by the Church while the couple promises to live according to the Church's directives.

The writer agrees with the above requirements, which clearly show that the Igbo traditional wedding can be, and is a Christian wedding. This is so because it is a public affair and no unchristian practice is permitted were both families involved are Christians and in most occasions from the same denomination. Also Christian couples accept the scriptural teaching that Christian marriage is monogamous and indissoluble even when it is entered into traditionally. The recommendations below are given to help the church especially Baptist denomination to within ANIMOE on things to do in order to contextualize or christianize the Igbo traditional wedding. In so doing the church will come up with Igbo Christian traditional wedding. Couples through these recommendations will also see the difference between the Igbo legal traditional wedding and Church legal wedding and also what to do if one desires to enter marriage either of them. These recommendations if applied will also help to eliminate the financial burden that is involved in Igbo traditional wedding that has split over into Church wedding. Indeed, Igbo traditional wedding should be differentiated from Christian wedding because the two are not the same. The writer states in strong terms that traditional

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<sup>6</sup> Arasu, "The Church Africa and the Issue of Christian Marriage," 229-230

wedding is different from Church wedding but that both can be Christian wedding.

1. Traditional marriage systems should be given full recognition by the church and must never be looked upon as being inferior to the western style marriage called by default "Christian Marriage."<sup>7</sup> This should be especially in cases where the traditional wedding practices did not contradict or disobey any biblical injunction.
2. Since legality of a marriage in Nigeria is by marriage act not "Church wedding" there should be a redefinition of church wedding<sup>8</sup>
3. While Akande is of the opinion that marriage through the Native law and customs can be legalized by filling a notice of marriage to the Registrar of marriage, after which the marriage could be celebrated either before the Registrar of marriage or in the Church.<sup>9</sup> The writer recommends that filing a notice of marriage to the Registrar of marriage should be done first after which the marriage can be celebrated traditionally with the traditional marriage rites or in the church. The filing of notice and receiving of the registrar's marriage certificate makes the wedding statutory.
4. Traditional wedding should no longer be recognized as engagement as it is not in any way engagement. The term engagement means "... a

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<sup>7</sup> Ejenobo David T. 'The Church and Christian Marriage in Nigeria' A conference paper presented at the Nigerian\ Cameroon zonal WAAT 2<sup>nd</sup> Biennial conference at Ogbomoso, Aug 5-9, 1984. p5.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid 5

<sup>9</sup> S. T. Ola Akande Marriage and Home-Making in Nigerian Society (Ibadan: Daystar Press, 1971), 41.

