

NBTS
OW 5-9
M. Div.

**AN APPRAISAL OF THE IMPACT OF CHILDLESSNESS AMONG
CHRISTIAN COUPLES**

**AN ESSAY PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY OF THEOLOGY OF THE
NIGERIAN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, OGBOMOSO**

**IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF MASTER OF DIVINITY**

**BY
OWOLABI, Moses Olurotimi.
JUNE, 2007**

ABSTRACT

Childlessness is a nightmare! An undesirable condition a family can find itself. It negates the original plan of God, the creator and originator of marriage who mandated "be fruitful, multiply and subdue". This blessing eludes some families and this brings untold sorrows, frustration and pain on them. The problem of childlessness is responded to in different ways by different people, and the impact of the absence of this precious gift varies from one religious background to another. This research work therefore sets out to appraise the impact of childlessness among Christian couples.

This research work considered some existing literatures relating to marriage. Origin of marriage, marriage among the Hebrews, the contemporary concept of marriage and biblical principles of marriage were among other topics considered. The place of children in marriage, sterility, causes and effects were also reviewed.

This research work makes use of primary source of data collection which is considered generally to be the ideal method. Questionnaire was the only instrument used in this research work to collect information. The questionnaire was distributed in some churches within Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) Kubwa-Abuja chapter, covering the various mainstream churches with the aim of collecting information about personal data of respondents as related to the implication of their state of childlessness and its effect on other aspects of their lives, their spiritual lives and their relationship with their spouses and if the problem is a threat to the relationship in anyway.

Despite the breakthrough that had been recorded in the field of medicine, barrenness still exists as a stigma on the homes of childless couples in our society. No matter the achievements of a couple, whether Christians or non-Christians, without a

child, they feel unfulfilled. Our findings show that the problem of childlessness cuts across age. Even though the highest percentage of childless couples varies according to age in marriage which decreases as couples advanced in their marriage. The greater percentage of the respondents desire more support from the church in the area of prayer, encouragement, show of love and care.

The need for the Christian community to know that it is her duty to worship God and worshipping God is not conditional is stressed in this research work. Therefore, those waiting upon the Lord for the fruit of the womb should have absolute trust in God for their miracles. The need for the affected couple to be opened to their counselor or pastor is also noted. Programmes targeted at bringing solution, encouragement and direction for this set of people should be organized from time to time. Childless couples are encouraged to seek medical help as and when due, such step will give a direction to the counselor or the pastor and a focused prayer which will bring quick and lasting solution to the problem.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the work, it has been discovered that the problem of childlessness cuts across age. Even though the highest percentage of childless couples falls within the first five years of marriage thereafter the percentage decreases with age in marriage. Many reasons account for this, such as answer to prayer, separation and death of either of the spouse. There is no doubt that the church has been sensitive to the plight of this set of people with this peculiar problem. There is still much to be done. The greater percentage of the respondents wished that the church can still do more in helping them in prayer continuously, encouragement, show of love and care.

The word of God has much to say in this regard when the Bible declares: ‘Worship the LORD your God and his blessing will be on your food and water. I will take away sickness from among you, and none will miscarry or be barren in your land. I will give you a full life span’ Exodus 23:25-26. It is very important to note that no word of God returns to him void, but the church has an obligation toward this set of people to see the potency of God’s word. There are several cases of barren couples

in the bible, but as numerous as they were, so numerous were their solutions too!. The only exception to this was David's wife, Michal in 2 Sam. 6:20-23 who despised King David for dancing naked unto God before slave girls, verse 23 says, 'And Michal daughter of Saul had no children to the day of her death.' Besides Michal no other woman died barren in the Bible, This means there is hope for all that are waiting upon the Lord for the fruit of the womb.

There are some of these problems that would not have lasted for long if the people were well informed. Hosea 4:6 says, "my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge...." There are situations that medications or minor operations would have corrected but to most pastors, going to the hospital shows a lack of faith. It is important to know that God has endowed some people with knowledge in the area of medicine. Members of our congregations should be encouraged to exploit this avenue. It is also important to know that there are cases that only faith, that is absolute trust in the Almighty God can solve. The church should not cease in constant prayers for those that are found in this situation. The need for the pastors to also be sensitive in the language and examples they use on the pulpit is very important so that the heart that need to be strengthened will not be living the house of God constantly broken.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of the work the following are recommended:

- That it is very important for the Christian community to know that her duties as Christians to worship God are not conditional, not because of the needs but because he is God. Faith is the basic tool needed by believers to serve God in an acceptable way. The Bible says, 'But without faith *it is* impossible to please

Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him' Heb. 11:6. It is therefore, recommended that:

1. Those waiting upon the Lord for the fruit of the womb should have absolute trust in God of all possibilities, 'For with God nothing shall be impossible' Luke 1:38.
2. Many are kept longer than necessary in their state of barrenness because of their refusal to open-up about the probable cause of their childlessness to their counselor or pastor. I therefore recommend that childless couples should help their pastors to help them by confiding in them knowing fully well that God cannot be mocked. The point of opening up is the beginning of their miracles.
3. It is also important for the church leaders to know that childlessness is a very sensitive problem that must be handled with care and love. There are many problems that the childless couples do face in their marital life, such as rejection, abandonment, threat from in-laws, and insecurity of their marital homes. These problems are compounded already than for the church to add to it through insensitive announcement, and negative emotion-laden messages. Also programmes targeted at bringing solution, encouragement and direction for this set of people should be organized from time to time.
4. The place of medical science cannot be over emphasized in solving some of the problems associated with barrenness, I, therefore, recommend that childless couple should be encouraged to seek medical help as and when due. This will go a long way to help the counselor or the pastor to trace the probable cause of childlessness hence the focus of prayer. Many believe that

childlessness is the woman's problem, but science has proved that childless problem is a 50 : 50 problem between the man and the woman.⁸⁹ Therefore, childlessness should be seen as a couple's problem.

Suggestions for Further Studies

Base on the experience gained from the conduct of this research, the following recommendations are made for further studies:

1. Since the scope of this study is limited to childless Christian couples, further research can be conducted on non Christian couples.
2. Better still the role of different prayer houses on childless couples may be research on.
3. The future researcher can work specifically on the attitude of Christian couples towards child-rearing.

⁸⁹ Van Regenmorter et al, p.68.