

COURTSHIP IN CONTEMPORARY YORUBA
SOCIETY: IMPLICATIONS FOR PASTORAL
CARE AND COUNSELLING

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ABSTRACT

The research "Courtship in Contemporary Yoruba Society; Implications for Pastoral Care and Counselling" showed that sometimes, a person can only be preparing for wedding ceremony without preparation for marriage life; such person thinks or fantasizes the beauty of wedding without a bit reflection on and planning toward the reality of marriage relationships.

In chapters one and two the writer expressed the principles by which this study will be carried out. He defined the operative terms in the study and, he reviewed certain literature related to contemporary Yoruba courtship practices which highlighted the way young people who intend to marry related during courtship. There are evidences of more allegiance to the conventional norms, rules than the required commitment to God and each other for interpersonal understanding respectively.

In chapter three, the writer observed from the Christian perspectives that courtship can either be very long, moderate or very short. Nonetheless, both partners in courtship need to learn the following: trust, loyalty, discipline, self-control, healthy dialogue and caring. They become properly involved in courtship as they patiently learn more about each other.

In chapter four, the findings in the study were presented that:

- (1) The patterns of courtship have positive effect on the nature of marriage relationships among the present day Yorubas.
- (2) It was found that it is erroneous to think that the contemporary young

couple face psychological scars or conflict in their marriages just because they had faint knowledge of each other before marriage.

(3) The practice of premarital sexual intercourse among the young couples cause no guilt feeling or distrust later in their marriage.

In chapter five, the writer examined the implications of the above discovered phenomena for pastoral care and counselling. He pointed out certain function of the Church by which the intending couples and the youth at large can be helped.

In conclusion, the writer therefore encouraged the Church to be actively involved in the educational programme and training of the youth. Moreover, the dynamics of premarital counselling need to be further examined to effect marital stability.

the family protocols are observed. Consequently, the would-be husband will come with his 'family' to beg for pardon and recognition. He later fulfills the required society rites (giving gifts). Consequently, they become husband and wife.

However, the concern here is whether or not the fulfillment of society rites has atoned for the pre-marital problems, whether or not it can guarantee marital stability, and whether or not it has taken care of some marital adjustments and the importance of compatibility needed for marital success. These observations confirm that the couples need Church support for stable marriages.

Therefore, this researcher wishes to state that while society's demands are necessary, they are not the solutions to the marriage problems. Some recommendations are thus felt necessary at this stage.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study require that the parents, the children (intended partners), and the Church be offered some recommendations.

The Parents

Analyses of the findings done in this study show that the parents (relatives) are significant others in the courtship process. The parents need to acknowledge the marked changes in courtship. Today, some of the children are economically independent, they have opportunity for higher education; they

have been influenced by increased urbanization and cultural innovations, e.g. easier accessibility to each other by automobile.

Therefore, they need freedom guided by love and parental counsel. The parents need to talk with them freely, fearlessly and respectfully. Communication is very important. They should be able to ask them all about their growth and social life. This is very important, especially with the female children.

Parents should encourage the children to bring in their friends in order to discourage, "secret courtship". They should not ignore the children's moral and spiritual life. S.T. Ola Akande urges parents to guide their sons. He disagrees with Samuel Coleridge who says: "I don't believe in giving little children any religious instruction because I don't want to prejudice the child's mind. Let him come to maturity and choose his religious opinion for himself."³⁷ This is a wrong position for any parent to take. The parents should guide their children toward moral purity right from the tender age period.

The Children (Intended Partners)

Marriage is instituted by God. The courtship period is a learning field. Intending couples should give time to test and retest the faith of their partners. The courtship should be done with guided freedom. They should only meet to discuss, to appreciate and correct one another in the fear of God. They should allow the scriptural standard to guide their relationships. They should

³⁷Akande, Prevent a Divorce, p. 5, citing Samuel Coleridge.

be patient to seek the counsel of the Church (pastor). This is necessary to avoid infatuation.

In conclusion, they should respect the opinions of their parents. They should inform them of a relationship before the relationship goes deeper. The parents should not be despised; that is why the Church asks for the person who gives a lady for marriage during the wedding service. They should always remember that their relationship is guided by the Bible (II Timothy 2:22). Young people should make sure they know their Partners face to face and very well before marriage.

The Church (Care and Counselling Ministries)

The Church is obliged to intensify her care and counselling relationship ministry. It is obvious that without caring for the members, there may not be motivation for seeking counsel. The research done in this study shows that there are problems, beyond the experiences of the couple, that emerge during pre-marital relationships. The Church must be ready to help by the following ways:

1. Start a counselling ministry in the Church.
2. Motivate the intending partners to seek the counselling relationship of the Church. The Church may even arrange regular pre-marriage guidance class(es).
3. Do the motivation through pre-counselling activities like announcements, preaching emphasis, visitation, pastoral rapport with the Church family members, etc.

4. Make pre-marital counselling a pre-requisite for wedding in the Church, with a guided policy on periods of study.
5. Discourage "rush and crush" pre-marital guidance. Teach them to give enough time for the counselling programme.
6. Refer them to another marriage counsellor in case there is not enough time to meet with them.
7. Encourage the youth to use their youth week for teachings on marriage, family, courtship, and sex.
8. At pre-marital counselling sessions, their (couple's) immediate needs are on companionship, compatibility and adjustment. Help them to explore their belief systems goals and aspirations for life (adopt Enyioha and others suggestion in this study).
9. Organize teenage seminars on sex, family, etc. Use Lydia meetings to focus more on their marital aspirations, sex education, etc.
10. Encourage and educate the parents against putting pressure on the child to marry someone against his/her wish. Do not wait until the problem arises before teaching. Pre-marital guidance should start before the youth begins to think of marriage.

This writer does not know whether the Church has power to recommend length of courtship. Fadeji says, "this should not be arithmetically penned,"³⁸ there is no hard and fast rule for it. However, the ideal duration of courtship is the length of time that will give the intending couple enough room for knowing and deeply understanding each other.

³⁸Fadeji, interview.