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**CHILDLESSNESS AMONG THE YORUBAS:
A CHALLENGE TO PASTORAL CARE**

**A Thesis
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to attempt to look at involuntary childlessness as a crisis, and how Yoruba belief system views the reality, causes, effects, and methods of care of such childlessness. The aim is to motivate pastoral care-givers to an effective pastoral ministry to the parishioners who are involuntarily childless.

Chapter one is a general introduction which consists of the statement of the problem, relevance of the research and state of the purpose. Other things discussed in this chapter include definitions, delimitation, thesis of the research, methodology, and organization of the thesis.

Chapter two is a presentation of a relevant case study which is analyzed in chapter three. The dimensions of the case study analyzed are socio-cultural, medical, psychological, ecclesiological and theological. Chapter four is an evaluation of the Yoruba belief system on childlessness. Its causes from a Yoruba point of view as revealed through interviews are presented and evaluated. The evaluation also covers the effects and method of care. The methods employed towards solving the problem are: traditional, cultural, medical, spiritual, and/or natural.

The fifth chapter is a pastoral approach to infertile couples. The three main approaches are: educating, curative, and sustaining. The church members are to be prepared for whatever circumstances that may occur in the future. Attempt should also be made towards helping the couples cope with their crisis constructively. While the condition persists, the victims must be sustained or supported. The last chapter is the conclusion and recommendations for meeting the needs of the childless couples and suggestions for further research.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. CONCLUSION

This research has looked into the issue of childlessness among the Yorubas. Childlessness is a crisis that rocks marriage. It is a crisis because, as it affects marriage institution negatively, it gives the couple affected and their relations psychological and emotional disturbances. Faith is also affected. The couple wrestles with theological issues like life meaning and meaninglessness, hope and hopelessness and whether or not God is fair.

Childless condition raises questions of meaning and meaninglessness, and it portrays an irony of life. What some are preventing from coming is the same thing others are praying to have. There are those who are shocked about the alarming rate of increase in population. They say that the biblical injunction, 'Be fruitful and multiply' is poor stewardship in the face of economic downturn. They feel that there is the need for zero population growth which will allow "a couple to decide on having two children."¹ The ironic part of it is that childlessness

¹R. O. Evans, "Infertility," Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling, 1990 ed., p. 579.

still remains a problem, because there are those that infertility robs of that choice.² This shows that "childlessness is a complex and fluid state."³

This research is intended to stimulate pastoral care-givers to support and care for the childless. The significance of this lies in the fact that, "Couples who are able to work through this experience . . . emerge with stronger marriages and new ways to express their generativity as a part of the larger family of God."⁴ The victims of this circumstance must be made to realize that,

Childlessness can be a test of endurance, requiring that the couple waits patiently. Mutual love, understanding and cooperation are essential. A healthy and happy relationship should be preserved in spite of all the odds. Hope should be cherished and the couple should strive to maintain a good cheer. The correct mental attitude to trials helps⁵ the couple in no small measure to weather the storm.

This means that the couple should have a right perception of the problem and jointly tackle it. Moreover,

Intercourse based on love, which unites the bodies, minds and hearts should be encouraged in order to enhance the chances of getting pregnant. While the waiting continues, husband and wife should not idly

²Evans, "Infertility," p. 579.

³Diana Burgwyn, Marriage Without Children (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), p. xvii.

⁴Samuel O. Oloruntoba, Family Bliss (N.p.:n.p., 1987), p. 55.

⁵Ibid.

sit down and bemoan their misfortune. God, the third partner in the marriage contract, should be regularly informed of the situation. His will and direction should be accepted. This is not easy but there is no better option.⁶

The emphasis here is on appropriate timing of intercourse and casting the burden unto God through prayer.

Summarily, in addition to chapter one which is an introduction, the paper has presented a case study on childlessness. The couple used was chosen, even though they got a son after ten years of their marriage, because their feelings even after they got that child makes no much difference from that of these without any child. If they could have had the experience for about eleven years, they qualify more than those without any child but less in their years of experience.

Furthermore, the socio-cultural, medical, psychological, ecclesiological, and theological dimensions of the case study were analyzed in chapter three. The Yoruba belief system as it relates to the reality, causes, why childlessness is not a satisfactory condition to the Yorubas, and its effects have been treated. The method of care employed are discussed which include: cultural, medical, spiritual and natural means. The pastoral care approach which constitutes chapter five includes educating, curative and sustaining. The writer now makes some recommendations.

⁶Oloruntoba, Family Bliss, p. 55.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

There are various recommendations for effective ministry to the childless couples. Below is an inexhaustive list of programmes that may guide the pastoral care-giver.

1. There is the need for monthly or quarterly fellowship to be organized for the childless couples in local churches.

2. Balanced Bible study on the promises of God concerning children.

3. Biblical characters should be studied in order to strengthen the faith of the childless.

4. Character study on the children later born to those who were once barren.

5. Inviting people who have had the experience to share their testimonies.

6. Sharing painful and joyful experiences by the childless couples among themselves.

Also, the researcher is suggesting that another research be carried out in other cultures of Nigeria to allow room for a comprehensive idea on childlessness in the country.

Finally, as much as it is desirable for every couple who wants children to have them, it is noteworthy that,

