

## EFFECTS OF SECULARIZATION ON THE SACREDNESS OF MARRIAGE

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### **Abstract**

Human life has been greatly influenced by the power of change, thus giving rise for man's insatiable demand for knowledge and more recently the struggle for power for a firmer control of his world and the affairs. Secularism of marriage has since been one of the adverse effects of human quest for reinventing his world. The paper focused on the effect of secularization on marriage by way of introducing dangerous practices that undermined the sacredness of marriage. The secularization of marriage has dismantled the wall between religion and the state, causing for the devaluation of the core Christian teachings on the sacredness of marriage. The methodology of the research was both qualitative and quantitative. The paper also recommended workable approaches in the promotion of Christian marital etiquette to uphold the sacredness of marriage.

**Keywords:** Marriage, Secularization, Sacredness

### **Introduction**

Change has been a constant experience for human beings. It has brought along with it, the good, the bad and the ugly. Human life has equally been greatly influenced by the power of change, thus giving rise for man's insatiable demand for knowledge and more recently the struggle for power for a firmer control of his world and its affairs. Exposed to avalanche of information and knowledge, the human person feels empowered enough to exercise unflinching authority over a number of issues that affect his life. The quest by human beings to do things differently in recent time has become more intense, thus leading to abandonment of not just some age-long traditions, but also seek alteration to rules of nature and in some cases, moves to reinvent the wheels. Among the issues he seeks to reinvent is marriage. Over the years, the institution of marriage has been plagued with numerous challenges.

In our contemporary secular society, the institution of marriage is sometimes viewed in an ultimately negative light because of the introduction of some practices that do not reflect the original purpose of marriage. This negative perception relating to the institution of marriage is driven by the fact that marriage is a universal societal phenomenon among people whose understanding of its structure, function and purpose invariably differ amongst different groups of people in societies with different religious or ideological outlooks and agendas.

Similarly, there are also differences in the understanding of the concept of marriage arising from the numerous academic disciplines and the sciences. The understanding of marriage, for example, from within the discipline of medicine may very well differ from that of the social sciences - sociology, anthropology, psychology - let alone the different philosophical approaches to this social institution. Indeed, precisely because of the fact that marriage per se

is not the exclusive domain of Christian theology, it is of no surprise that different understandings of marriage exist within different academic disciplines. In light of all these divergent views relating to marriage in all spheres of human engagement and academic backgrounds, it is clear therefore why the institution of marriage has witnessed desacralisation.

### **The Sacredness of Marriage**

Marriage is of great importance; it is supposed to be stable and serves a wonderful purpose. It is a divine institution established by God Himself to be a mirror of His love for the church. Thomas (2016) comments on the sacredness of marriage by dating the introduction of the concept of marriage to thousands of years ago. This concept dates back to the days of Adam and Eve. When God formed woman from a rib, Adam said these words:

This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” – Genesis 2:23. The scripture continues in verse 24 as, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”

Furthermore, Thomas opined that marriage is considered sacred by most people because of the wedding event performed by a minister in a church. Some other recognize the sacredness of marriage by the virtue of the honour and fidelity ascribed to Christian marriage. However, Thomas further stressed that the sacredness of marriage is signified by the direct relationship between Christ and His followers. This relationship is demonstrated in the exchange of vows at wedding ceremonies. This vow is as thus:

I, (Bride/Groom), take you (Groom/Bride), to be my (wife/husband), to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish; from this day forward until death do us part ([Sacredness Of Marriage: A Symbol Of Union Between Christ And His Followers](#) ([naija247news.com](#), page 1)

These vows are expressions of the commitments made to each other by the spouses, which is indicative of marriage as an exclusive relationship. This commitment is predicated on love. Love is a powerful emotion because God Himself is love, “He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” (1 John 4:8). When love is treated sacred, it becomes a wonderful and powerful emotion on earth. When couples give the vows of “...to love and to cherish, from this day forward...” they should also have Christ in mind.

In the Epistle of St. Paul, he gave the following instructions by illustrating the sacredness of marriage as follows: Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;” (Ephesians 5:25). Paul’s message was a classical illustration of God’s greatest sacrifice to man when He came to earth in the form of a man (Jesus Christ) and died for our sins. This same sacrifice is the anchor of love on which marriage is built when God instructs the husband to view his wife in the same manner. It does not literally suggest that husbands must be killed in order to fulfill this instruction but that husbands must be willing to sacrifice whatever is necessary for the sake of their wives. This is a very important instruction and a huge responsibility that God gives to husbands. In the same vein, just as Jesus Christ is the head of mankind, the husband is the head of the wife. St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:3 said: “But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.” This verse has been misinterpreted in many quarters to mean that a man should control his wife. This verse was a call for cooperation amongst couples and that a

husband should view his wife in the same manner and wives should be accepting of the husband's Christ-like guidance.

God places great emphasis on marriage between a man and a woman as a foreshadow of a spiritual union with Him at the end of time. This is a pointer to the fact that earthly marriage should always be treated with honour, respect, and sacredness. Hence in Revelation 19:9 the sacredness of marriage was established by God as follows: "then the Angel said to me, happy are those who have been invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb. This is referring to the event that will occur in heaven when Christ returns for those who have accepted Him as Lord and Saviour. When Jesus returns, He will take his followers into heaven where they will all feast in the greatest wedding reception of all time.

### **Secularization of Marriage**

Karel (2002) defined secularization as the breakdown of religious authority and decreased adherence to religious practices. As a result of modernization, religious institutions and values have significantly declined. Secularization is a multidimensional concept that involves changes on at least three levels: societal, organizational, and individual. Societal secularization concerns a functional differentiation process resulting into a process of specialization of subsystems. Organizational secularization comprises the changes concerning the religious institution itself, including churches and religious denominations. Individual secularization concerns individual behaviour and measures the degree of normative integration into the respective religious bodies.

Secularism amongst other things means the separation of the Church and State. There are arguments that this separation will be for the benefit of secular individuals whilst others have argued that, although the effect of the separation of church and state remains arguably obscure, nevertheless, separation will protect religious freedom (Hamburger 2002). The process of secularization involves practices that jettisons religious thinking, practices and institutions wherein social significance are lost. (Wilson 1966). Hence, secularization affects Church's position on the sacredness of marriage by the introduction of dangerous practices into the original understanding marriage

Today, changes in the values and social consciousness influence the traditional understanding of marriage and family. Globally, there is a modern trend that considers marriage and family life as a non-essential element in fulfilment and maintenance of human life. The influences of western culture, the diffusion of mass media, increasing population, industrialization and urbanization have changed people's way of life. New sexual ethics and sexual permissiveness affect the segments of marriage and family life. Single parenting, test tube babies and other scientific inventions to the brim of cloning are part of human life and evolution that moves the society towards a new understanding of family ethics.

Obi (2016) in a report on *Thisdaylive* said marriages are piqued with high rate of divorce, and single parenting seems to be in vogue as seen in this present generation. A marriage counsellor, Mrs. Lovett Obiakalusi lamenting over societies' quick embrace of ungodly principles, said that people now have little regard for the honour and sanctity of marriage as God designed it to be. She Described as appalling the adoption of same sex marriage, the crave for western ways of life, cohabitation of unmarried people. Obiakalusi (2016) notes that immoral practices have continued to gain acceptance and approval of the society.

Similarly, Ron (2010) asserts that legal marriage, which was once the only accepted context for sexual relations and the nurture of children in Western countries, has long ceased to be central to people's sexual or reproductive lives in many parts of the world. In a 2014 report by Child trends, world family map, twenty-six percent of adults in the eighteen to forty-nine age range were cohabiting in France, while thirty-nine percent were married. In Sweden, twenty-five percent were cohabiting and thirty seven percent were married. In the United Kingdom, in 2001, twenty-two percent of adults aged between twenty and thirty-four were cohabiting, while thirty-two percent were married. A regional analysis of cohabitation in sixteen sub-Saharan African countries by Ndagurwa et al. (2018) show 21.7% prevalence of cohabitation in Central Africa, 11.7% in Eastern Africa, 10.4% in southern Africa and 6.8% in Western Africa.

Concomitantly, Martin et. al. (2015) submit that not only has there been a decline in marriage as the basis for an intimate domestic partnership, but it has ceased to be the dominant context for child-rearing. The highest rate of extramarital births in Europe is in Iceland, at sixty-five percent of all births in Europe. More than half of these ex-nuptial births across Europe are in cohabiting unions, although there are significant variations among countries. Many children are being born to single mothers outside of any cohabiting relationship. Cohabitation is emerging as a significant experience for young adults. It is now replacing marriage as the first living together union. It is estimated that a quarter of unmarried women between the ages of 25 and 39 are currently living with a partner, and about half have lived at some time with an unmarried partner. Referring to this state of affairs as "the deinstitutionalization of marriage" (online) researchers at the National Marriage Project at Rutgers University concluded: "Taken together, the marriage indicators do not argue for optimism about a quick or widespread comeback of marriage. Persistent long-term trends suggest a steady weakening of marriage as a lasting union, a major stage in the adult life course, and as the primary institution governing childbearing and parenthood" (Popenoe & Whitehead, 1999 online).

Changing Gender Role is one major effect of secularization in marriages. In contemporary times, there has been a paradigm shift in gender role because of economic reality on ground. In Africa, women were traditionally known to be home keepers; the duty they use to undertake diligently. This accounted for an appreciable level of marital stability. What is currently obtainable in many societies are changes in gender roles. Professions that used to be exclusively preserved of men now have many women competing for slots (Morakinyo, 2009). They are in the academia, medicine, engineering, armed forces, politics and paramilitary organizations. As good as this is for national development, it has negative implications for marital and family stability. The reason is that they can no longer perform their roles as home keepers and builders. This has made both their husbands and children to be at the mercy of housekeepers. Apart from the physical dangers that may arise from hiring house helps, several cases of broken homes are attributable to women abandoning their marital responsibilities in pursuit of careers (Famulusi & Oke, 2015).

Women Liberation Movements and Feminism pose a great threat to the sacredness of marriage. Women especially the educated ones have in recent times begin to clamor for adequate recognition in society. These movements are driven by a course to liberate women from the clutches of tradition that place them secondary to men thereby subjecting them to dehumanization and prejudice. Generally, the concern of feminism is a call for a new kind of knowledge for the human society, the creation of space and level playground for women to fully actualize themselves. Liberal feminists are interested in equal rights for all sexes, equality and justice to women through legal and social reforms. They work within the political system

to get better opportunities for women. They are also known as mainstream feminists. However, radical feminists believe that women's oppression is a basic fact of every society and patriarchy is responsible for it. They examine the way human reproduction is controlled and socialized through such institutions as marriage, motherhood and compulsory heterosexuality. Precise radical feminists seek to:

Create a new social framework as feminist alternatives in every area of life: family, religion, healthcare, marriage, etc. To them, women's relationship to men is politically problematic. They brought reproduction into political arena by questioning women's reproductive role, that is, biological role and insist it must be by choice. They support lesbianism, abortion and the right to have children or not. Radical feminism is associated with militancy (Ukpokolo, 2012, 146-158).

From the foregoing, one can decipher the impact of feminism on marital stability. Sadly, many African women are being guided by this philosophy, hence divorce has become a norm among couples; Christians inclusive.

### **The Nexus between Secularization and Enlightenment**

Igwe (2017) in establishing the connection between secularization and enlightenment opined those secular ideas are rooted in the intellectual movement of 17th- and 18th-century Europe called the Enlightenment. This movement gave reason a central place of authority and legitimacy. It interrogated the dogmas of the church and opposed absolute power and authority. John Locke, Denis Diderot, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Voltaire, Montesquieu and Baruch Spinoza were among the philosophers whose ideas shaped the Enlightenment. They advocated for the values of liberty, progress, scientific thinking, tolerance, constitutional government and separation of church and state.

The Enlightenment modernized and secularized Europe, moving it away from religious totalitarianism and theocratic control. It influenced the French Revolution, a wind of social and political change that swept across French society from 1789 to 1799. The revolution led to clashes between church and state that brought the church under the control of the state and culminated in the law of 1905 that institutionalized the separation of church and state. This law, which is a landmark in European secularism ensured state neutrality on religious matters and recognition of individual rights. Thus, the French revolution led to a shift in the political landscape from a state based on the divine rights of kings to a state based on the consent of the governed. These secular ideas and events not only transformed the politics of Europe, but also informed the social and political ideologies of European colonialists who introduced state institutions to Africa in the late 19th century. Till date, the effect of secularization is felt in all spheres of human life including marriage.

Furthermore, Miller (2012) argued that the influence of evolution and humanism in our educational system, the impact of feminism, the increased participation of women in the work force to the neglect of their children, the widespread prosperity that we enjoy as a nation (causing us to forget God and to indulge ourselves)—these and other factors have contributed to our moral decline. The media also have been culpable in the decline till date through Hollywood, television, and cinema content which have unquestionably glamorized, defended, and promoted divorce, premarital sex, unwed motherhood, abortion, and the use of alcohol, filthy language, and many other immoral behaviours. What is even more startling is the fact that as an institution, marriage has lost much of its legal, religious, social meaning and authority. For most of American history, marriage was one of the most important rites of passage in life. But now, marriage has lost much of its role and significance as a rite of passage.

**Conclusion**

Any society whose practices introduce secularized concept of marriage as against the Christian teachings on marriage is driving towards self-destruction and even worse so annihilating human beings from the surface of this earth by adopting same-sex marriage. Hence God's instruction in Genesis 2:24 "for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife: and the two shall become one flesh." and Genesis 1:27, "Be fruitful and multiply" agreed. African countries including Nigeria cannot function well under secular rules because of the various religious groups in the country and each of these groups has a template on how society should function. The core Christian-based morals on marriage is apparently seen in the protection of monogamy, heterosexual marriage, eternal matrimony, fidelity and sexual morality by the church. These values have been interrupted by the quest for freedoms of alternate faiths and non-religious citizens of the western world by outlawing values not in accordance with the Christian religion. Therefore, the secularization of marriage has dismantled the wall between religion and the state, causing for the devaluation of the core Christian teachings on the sacredness of marriage.

With the crisis introduced into Christian marriage by the secularization, the institution of marriage has been plagued and is fast becoming unfashionable because many unmarried people are skeptical in venturing into marriage. This paper has unraveled the different ways in which the institution of marriage can be secured and has proffered solutions in addressing the challenges faced in marriage.

**Recommendations**

The solution to the confusion and corruption that has gripped the modern world in relation to marriage is largely founded on biblical provisions. If hearts are humbly yielded to the will of God and families submit to God's will, this will help reposition and help to conform ourselves to the sacredness of marriage as found in Genesis 2:24 and Matthew 19:4-6. Good spirited individuals who still hold marriage must advocate against the movement by secular and religious leaders that could be detrimental and destructive to the human race as well as posterity.

In addition, it is incumbent upon all African countries to adopt marriage laws that seek to conserve as much as possible the African traditional understanding of marriage.

Furthermore, church leaders and marriage counsellors should continuously have trainings in form of seminars, symposium and lectures for the married and unmarried people to educate them on the dynamics of secularization of marriage and the challenges it poses on the stability of Christian marriage.

Finally, couples must not imbibe all media content that glamorizes practices that are against God's purpose of marriage. They should however get acquainted with sound Christian teachings on marriage through sermons and sound Christian literatures on marriage.

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