



Publication Date: September 20, 2025
<http://ujres.org.ng/index.php/ujres/index>

**AN ASSESSMENT OF MARRIAGE CUSTOM AMONG OGUGU PEOPLE OF
OLAMABORO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF KOGI STATE
VIS-A-VIS CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE**

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Abstract

This Study explores the similarities and differences between traditional marriage customs and Christian marriage practices in Ogugu, Olamaboro local government, Kogi State, Nigeria. Using a historical research and comparative method to investigate the beliefs, practices, and values of traditional and Christian marriage in Ogugu. The study finds that traditional marriage customs emphasize family and community, while Christian marriage prioritizes individual love and commitment. The study also reveals tensions and negotiations between couples and families as they navigate both traditional and Christian marriage practices. The findings have implications for church care, counseling, and community development initiatives in Ogugu and beyond. The study contributes to the understanding of the complexities of marriage in Nigeria and highlights the need for culturally sensitive approaches to marriage and family relationships.

Introduction

Concept of marriage: Marriage, also called matrimony or wedlock, is a culturally and often legally recognized union between people called spouses. It establishes rights and obligations between them, as well as between them and their children (if any), and between them and their in-laws. It is nearly a cultural universal, but the definition of marriage varies between cultures



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and religions, and over time. Typically, it is an institution in which interpersonal relationships, usually sexual, are acknowledged or sanctioned. In some cultures, marriage is recommended or considered to be compulsory before pursuing sexual activity. A marriage ceremony is called a wedding, while a private marriage is sometimes called an elopement.

Traditional marriage custom is the primarily established form of marriage recognized in a given country or religious or social group at a given time: In that culture, traditional marriage requires the families of the future bride and groom to engage in ritual visits and exchange gifts. Traditional marriage customs in Nigeria are deeply rooted in cultural and ancestral heritage (Okuwoh, 201). These customs vary across ethnic groups, but share common elements such as family involvement, ritual ceremonies, and communal celebration (Nwachukwu, 215). Traditional marriage customs emphasize family and community over individualism, and often involve extended family members in decision-making processes (Uchendu, 16). Christian marriage in Nigeria on the other hand is shaped by biblical teachings and church doctrine (Adeboye, 218). Christian marriage emphasizes monogamy, fidelity, and mutual submission between husbands and wives (Ephesians 5:22-33). Christian marriage practices in Nigeria often blend with traditional customs, leading to a syncretic approach to marriage (Oduro, 217). This study assesses traditional marriage customs and Christian marriage practices in Ogugu, Olamaboro local government, Kogi State, Nigeria.

Marriage as a Socio-Cultural and Religious Institution

Marriage is an important social institution, deeply entwined with culture and religion, and it serves as a cornerstone of societal structures around the world. In the context of Ogugu, a tribe characterised by its extraordinary cultural uniqueness, the union of marriage takes on a unique form. Marriage, as a fundamental institution, plays a pivotal role in the social fabric of societies worldwide (Cherlin 7), it also stands as a testament to the core human desire for companionship, procreation, and social stability. This universal bond between individuals transcends cultural, religious, and geographical boundaries, offering a lens through which to understand society's dynamics and transformations. The significance of marriage is underscored by its inherent role in providing a structured framework for the formation of families and the nurturing of future generations (Giddens 40). This foundational institution is deeply interwoven with cultural norms, religious beliefs, legal frameworks, and individual aspirations, therefore, understanding the sociological implications of marriage is vital, as it sheds light on the power dynamics, gender roles, and expectations that influence relationships within a given society. Furthermore, as societies evolve in response to globalisation, migration, and changing norms, the institution of



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marriage undergoes transformations that impact social dynamics. Thus, this exploration of the ethno-sociological inquisition of marriage in Ogugu is not only a reflection of her past and present but also a valuable tool for predicting future societal developments. The profound impact of Christianity on marriage practices in Ogugu, with a major of the population identifying as Christian (Pierri and Barkindo 133-153), and the influence of Christian doctrine on marital unions cannot be overstated. Meanwhile, the Christian sacrament of marriage in Ogugu introduces a distinct set of norms, expectations, and rituals that coexist alongside indigenous traditions (Okonkwo 521-538).

However, the traditional African marriage rituals is very vital in Ogugu traditional African marriage customs by exploring the myriad rituals, ceremonies, and symbolic elements that define these unions (Njoku 289), and in a Nigerian context, a marriage ceremony in the contemporary times is an elaborate performance that occurs in several phases while the fundamental aspect is the traditional (Ololajulo 8). Moreover, marriage is seen as a social institution which needs a societal structure for its effective administration (Gallagher 18). In the light of these mentions, understanding the intricacies of harmonising faith and tradition in Ogugu marital unions is crucial. This paper embarks on a comprehensive exploration of the relationship between Christian marriage and traditional marriage custom, focusing on Ogugu traditional marriage custom as an exemplary case study.

Scriptural Understanding of Marriage

The scriptural understanding of marriage is of a God-given, voluntary, sexual and public social union of one man and one woman, from different families, for the purpose of serving God (Ash, 23). According to Christopher Ash, Marriage was first instituted by God in the order of creation, given by God as an unchangeable foundation for human life. Marriage exists so that through it humanity can serve God through children, through faithful intimacy, and through properly ordered sexual relationships. This union is patterned upon the union of God with his people who are his bride, Christ with his church. Within marriage, husbands are to exercise a role of self-sacrificial headship and wives a posture of godly submission to their husbands. This institution points us to our hope of Christ returning to claim his bride, making marriage a living picture of the gospel of grace. (7) When cultures debate marriage-related questions and discuss the ethics of sexual relationships, there is a fundamental divide between those who consider marriage to be, in its essence, a thing "given" from God, and those who regard it as a cultural construct.



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In Matthew 19, when Jesus is asked a question about divorce, he begins by affirming the teaching of Genesis I and 2: "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female (Gen] and said, Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, Gen. 2)8; Mitt./9:4-5), and they shall become one flesh Gen. 2:18" (Matt. 19:4-5). By going back to Creation account, Jesus affirms what Genesis teaches, that the two-part sexuality of humankind (created male and female) and the institution of marriage are a "given" from God. This is "given" in the double G or "given and non-negotiable" and given as gift." Oliver O'Donovan writes that created order is "not negotiable within the course of history" and is that which neither the terrors of chance nor the ingenuity of art call Overthrow, It defines the scope of our freedom and the limits of our fears"(61).

Marriage is a good and stable institution. Human cultures may seek to reinvent it or reshape it, but under God it stands as an unchangeable foundation for human life. God's basis for marriage is found in His work of creation. By understanding His plan in creation, we can understand His purpose for marriage (Smith, 3). When the Pharisees ask Jesus about the permanence and holiness of marriage (Matthew 19:3-12), He answered by reminding them of the teachings from creation account in Genesis and I and 2. At first this seems like an unusual answer. It would have been easy for Jesus to explain ideas about marriage that were taught by the great thinkers and Jewish religious leaders. He could have argued for or against their different ideas. He could have amazed the Pharisees by explaining the great variety of marriage traditions found in different cultures. Instead, He talked about how God made man and woman. His answer gives us starting point for finding a biblical view of marriage and family life.

Looking at marriage in the light of creation account or narrative, the first passage Jesus Christ quoted in His answer to the question about marriage was Genesis 1:27. No doubt His answer surprised some of His listeners. Many of them May not have seen a direct relationship between this verse and marriage. Yet because Jesus use this passage in His answer, it is clear that Genesis 1:27 will help us understand the divine nature of marriage. Let's note the parts of this verse that relate to marriage. (Smith, 3).

Purpose of Marriage

It is both theologically important and pastorally helpful to ask the question, "of what purpose is the institution of marriage?" We naturally begin by asking what hopes and ambitions a particular couple may have as they into marriage. But before then, it is foundational to ask why God has created the marriage institution. The Bible teaches many reasons which God created the marriage.



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Companionship

From the Genesis record, we see that the first purpose of marriage is companionship. «Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone: I will make him a helper fit for him." (Genesis 2:18. God observed the loneliness of man and provided for him a companion, a help mates, a friend, someone to live with. He provided the male with a female to love, care and share their lives together. In our generation the order of love is usually sexual first, if there is sexual compatibility then it moves to affection, affection gives way to commitment (sacrifice and service) and then finally an attempt to make a friendship out of the already intimate relationship. In Christianity the order is first to be friendship, then affection, then commitment, then once commitment (marriage) has been made then sexual love comes (Stegeman, 27).

Procreation

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, «Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the 1sn OT the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over o living thing that moves on the earth" (Genesis 1:27-28). God's original intent is that the Creation would be filled with his image hearers who would rule over his good creation as male and female. Male and Female sexual relationship in marriage usually results in children. Family, communities, culture all of this has come from the mandate to procreate.

The Public Good

God created marriage for the good of society. Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 teaches that, because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. Emphasizing chastity in our singleness and marriage relationships, Christopher Ash says, "This public good encompasses the benefits of ordered and regulated sexual relationships in human society (marriage). Undisciplined and disordered sexual behavior must be restrained, for it carries with it a high social and personal cost in family breakdown, destructive jealousies, resentments, bitterness, and hurt. Ordered behavior (chastity) is to be encouraged because this has benefits that extend beyond the couple to the children neighbor and the wider networks of relational society."

To Be a Sign

Paul the apostle in the book of Ephesians make it in Ephesians 5: Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the



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church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands, Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does to the church, because we are members of his body. Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. (Ephesians 5:22-32).

This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. Ephesians 5 tells us that marriage is not ultimately about sex or social stability or personal fulfillment; rather, marriage was created to be a human reflection of the ultimate love relationship with the Lord. This High view of marriage, also, shows us that marriage is one of the best way in which human shows the love of God. It points to the true marriage that our souls need and the true family our hearts want. No marriage can ultimately give us what we most desire and truly need. Christ is the only spouse who can truly fulfill us and God's family the only family that will truly embrace and satisfy us.

According to Ephesians 5, even Christians married to Christians will do a terrible job of conducting their marriage if they lack a love relationship with Christ. If we don't have that, married people will put too much pressure on their marriage to fulfill them, and that will always create pathology in their life. Similarly, if singles don't have the sane fulfilling love relationship with Jesus, they will put that pressure on their dream of marriage, which will create pathology in their life as well. But if singles rest in and rejoice in their marriage to Chrt and the Church then we need to get our clues from Jesus who did not seek his own self ist, they will be able to handle single life without devastating loneliness.

Types of Marriage

To this point, the institution of marriage has been discussed as if all marriages were the same a living arrangement legally contracted by or for two people of the opposite sex. However, this description has been limited in so far as it describes monogamous marriage. There are other types of marriage, which include more than one husband or wife at the same time (plural marriage or polygamy), several husbands and wives (group marriage), or ones that are not



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contracted on the basis of the state's rules and regulations specified earlier (common-law marriage) and levirate marriage (marriage by inheritance).

Monogamy

Monogamy is a type of marriage that is between one man and one woman, in other word, when a man is legally married to one woman as a wife is called monogamy.

In many Nigerian cultures, including potentially Ogugu, polygamy has been a common practice, often tied to social status, economic stability and family alliances. However by the influence of Christianity and western values, monogamy has gain acceptance among the younger generation in Ogugu today.

Monogamy is the most recognized form of marriage in many Western countries. In the Christian Society, a "one man one woman" model for the Christian marriage was advocated by Saint Augustine (354- 439 AD) with his published letter *The Good of marriage*. To discourage polygamy, he wrote that it was lawful among the ancient fathers but may not be lawful now. For there is not now necessity of begetting children, as there was then when, even when wives bear children, it was allowed, in order to a more numerous posterity, to marry other wives in addition, but is now certainly not lawful." (Chapter 15, paragraph 17) Sermons from St. Augustine's letters were popular and influential. In 534 AD Roman Emperor Justinian criminalized all but monogamous man/woman sex within the confines of marriage. The *Codex Justinianus* was the basis of European law for 1,000 years. Several exceptions have existed for various Biblical figures, incestuous relationships such as Abraham and Sarah, (Genesis 20:11-18), Nachor and Melcha, Lot and his Daughters, (Genesis 19:31-36).

Amram and Jochabed (Exodus 6:19-20) and more. Christianity for the past Several years has continued to insist on monogamy as an essential of marriage. (Pomeroy, 46).

This form of marriage encourages early marriage because the attention of the husband wili Concentrate only on the wife which on a long run give a girl a happy life.

Polygamy

Polygamous marriage, also known as plural marriage, is a type of marriage where one person is married to more than one spouse simultaneously. It exists in two main forms: polygyny (one man with multiple wives) and polyandry (one woman with multiple husbands). A less common form is group marriage, where multiple men and women are married to each other.



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Polygamy has been a practice for ages. Various reasons may lead to Polygamy: Custom, show of affluence, childlessness of one first wife, the desire for male children (where the first wife has only female kids), and the desire for many children (in those days when the number counted for labour on farm lands). Some people take Polygamy at of greed while some inherit wives of their deceased relations. They are some religion which naturally permit polygamy e.g Islam.

Polygamy may have its benefits but the negative effects are more Noticeable, effects like, distrust, competition, hatred, suspicion, envy, quarrels, favourism, and general unease in the home, etc. It must be noted, however. That these problem or challenges are not the exclusive preserve of polygamous homes, as Onogamous homes do manifest these problem and even more. One Single wife maybe more terrible at times than three good wives. (Asaju, 178)

Critically examined, there is no direct biblical teaching against polygamy. Also, it is uncondemn practice by the Israelite patriarchs (e.g. Abraham, Jacob examples to support its permission, even if not etc.) and Kings is used as recommended. This may also be an invalid position to justify polygamy. That it was done then in the Old Testament does not make it consistent with Christian principles. The real problem is judging it, which maybe correct or incorrect Christian ethics must address this problem of contextualization of Christian indeed in Africa culture. While maintaining, advocating and recommending monogamy as Christian idea, caution should be maintained in dealing with existing polygamists who are in Christian faith. Resorting to forceful excommunication, induced divorce and consequent prostitutions of discharged wives and children and inimical and unsupported by the Bible. Christian ethics remains perhaps the only model and solution for restoring families (as well as societies) to idea social, economic and political order (Asaju, 179).

The above types of marriages enumerated Christian marriage and traditional marriage customs in Ogugu (or any other African culture) share some similarities, but also have distinct differences. Here are some key differences and similarities:

Differences:

Spiritual foundation: Christian marriage is built on Christian principles and values, while traditional marriage is rooted in cultural and ancestral beliefs.

Monogamy: Christian marriage emphasizes monogamy, while traditional marriage may allow for polygamy.



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Ceremony: Christian marriage involves a church wedding, while traditional marriage involves customary rites and rituals.

Family involvement: Traditional marriage often involves extensive family involvement.

Similarities:

Complementarity: Christian and traditional marriage customs can complement each other, with Christian principles enhancing traditional values. Involvement, while Christian marriage emphasizes the couple's autonomy.

Divorce: Christian marriage views divorce as a last resort, while traditional marriage may have more flexible divorce customs.

Cultural integration: Christian marriage can incorporate traditional customs and rituals, making the union more meaningful and culturally relevant.

Respect for heritage: Christian marriage can acknowledge and respect traditional marriage customs, promoting cultural understanding and harmony.

Evolution: Traditional marriage customs can evolve to incorporate Christian principles, reflecting the changing values and beliefs of the community.

In Ogugu, Christian marriage and traditional marriage customs may coexist and influence each other, reflecting the community's cultural and spiritual diversity.

Conclusion

This article has briefly assessed the traditional marriage customs of the Ogugu people in relation to Christian marriage values. The traditional marriage customs among the Ogugu people are rich and diverse, and are deeply rooted in their cultural and social norms. However, Christianity has had a significant impact on traditional marriage customs among the Ogugu people. Many Ogugu people have adopted Christian marriage values, such as monogamy and the importance of love and respect in marriage. Despite these changes, traditional marriage customs remain an important part of Ogugu culture and identity.

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