

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES OF CHILD ADOPTION AMONG CHRISTIAN COUPLES IN AFRICA

Nwankwo, Samuel Chibuzo, PhD

Department of Theology Wesley University, Ondo

&

Makinde, Michael Olusola

Institute for Advanced Theological Studies Wesley University, Ondo

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Abstract: This article examined the predisposing factors that challenge the practice of adoption amongst childless Christians in Africa. Childlessness in African cultural context is seen as a misnomer. In the extreme, it is considered a tragedy that comes with stigmatization, psychological and emotional pains, grief, anxiety and depression to married couples, families and especially, the women. However, opportunities abound for Christian couples who are experiencing involuntary childlessness to enthusiastically welcome and embrace adoption, but this is not generally so, in spite of the ease, permanency and cost involved. The reason being that myriads of challenges bedeviling child adoption have given rise to its non-acceptance even among Christians in many quarters. Using phenomenological method and secondary sources of data collection, the research discovered that many coping strategies like surrogacy, Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART), guardianship, fostering and adoption are available to childless Christian couples. It recommended that Church leaders should educate their couples to see adoption as a viable option with biblical support, which should be embraced to close the yearning gap of childlessness. That government should remove all the bottlenecks hindering and discouraging childless couples from adoption. This done, the much eluded joy of parenthood which is the major essence and key to marriages will significantly be restored.

Keywords: Adoption, Child, Childlessness, Marriage, Christians, Infertility, African culture.

Introduction

Africans see marriage as a union between a man and a woman for the purpose of maintaining a family. One of the cardinal reasons for marriage is procreation. Children are usually believed to be God's gifts. However, in African society, the absence or inability of a woman to give birth often generates several issues, some of which have the tendency to break homes and cause dissatisfaction in a marriage. This is because Africans greatly value children as means of continuing a family lineage. Therefore, a union without at least a child is considered an unfruitful union and such marriage most often than not runs into problem. So, children are crucial to a happy and stable home in African culture.

As good as children are, not every family has them, and not everyone who has them value or can adequately provide for them. While some are constantly in prayer for the gift of at least a child, some abandon, neglect, or persistently abused or ill-treat theirs. It is an irony, Anu and Oluwatoyosi¹ wonders, that in view of the joy that the birth of a child brings to parents and family members that some couples are ready to go to any length to have at least a child, it is therefore puzzling and really difficult to comprehend why a woman who has gone through the agony of childbirth would engage in child abandonment, an act that without doubt endangers the life

¹Anu Thomas & Oluwatoyosi Ojo, "Nigeria and the changing face of child adoption Nigeria and the changing-face of child adoption", Retrieved from

[https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.vanguardngr.com/2019/05/nigeria-and-the-changing-face-of-child-adoption/amp/Nigeria and the changing face of child adoption](https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.vanguardngr.com/2019/05/nigeria-and-the-changing-face-of-child-adoption/amp/Nigeria%20and%20the%20changing%20face%20of%20child%20adoption) on August 23, 2022.

of a child.

Many of such abandoned children always end up undergoing alternate child care process like guardianship, fostering, and adoption. Adoption as one of the alternative child care mechanisms provides a means by which such children are re-integrated into the society while it also provides an avenue or alternative for distressed couples to have children.

The main thrust of this research among other things, is to examine issues and challenges militating against the appropriation of child adoption by infertile Christian couples in Africa as a means through which the gap of childlessness is closed, thus, restoring the hope of continuity and the joy of being in marriage. Using phenomenological method which according to Ritzer² (2008), is concerned with everyday life in which people create social reality and are constrained by the existing social and cultural structures; the work discovered that various societies react to challenges affecting them differently. In respect of childlessness and adoption individuals concerned are at liberty to adopt workable mechanisms for dealing with such challenges given the available options to them. To further give this study the necessary attention it deserves, relevant literature were reviewed to get some data, in addition to data collected using the primary method of data collection. This method of data collection was executed through interviews and observation. Structured interview was conducted in this work, to find out those issues and challenges arising from the practice of adoption by Christians who are experiencing childlessness. Personal interaction/observation by the researchers afforded them the opportunity of seeing events as they unfolded.

Conceptual Analysis

Childhood is a stage of development between infancy and puberty; a child is therefore a person in between these two stages. Encarta (2001)³ defines a child as a person who is in an age of minority or below age of responsibility; a descent from a lineage, race or people; a seed, born or considered a product of culture or place. However, Article 1 of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child⁴ categorically states that a child is a minor below the age of eighteen.

Childlessness is defined as the absence of children in a couple's life (Miettinen et al, 2015)⁵. Buhr⁶ classified childlessness into three types: voluntary, involuntary or circumstances determined. It is said to be involuntary when an individual is unable to have children for medical reasons; voluntary when a man/woman intentionally chooses not to have children or delay child bearing. It is considered "determined by circumstances" or situation induced when the person desires to have children, but the pregnancy is not forthcoming and, in the long run, the person involved takes his/her mind off childbearing. According to World Health Organization (WHO)⁷, infertility in male is, most often than not as a result of problems in the ejection of semen and low sperm count, among other causes. It may be caused in the female by a variety of abnormalities of the reproductive organs like the uterus, ovaries, fallopian tubes, and the endocrine system, among others. Infertility can be classified as primary or secondary: primary when a woman has never conceived and secondary when at least one prior pregnancy has been experienced.

Infertility is a common health problem that has devastating social and psychological consequences on the affected couples; this is especially true in Africa where great value is placed on a woman's ability to procreate

²Ritzer G. (2008), *Sociological Theory*. New York: McGraw Hill.

³Microsoft Encarta (2001)

⁴United Nations. 1989. "Convention on the Rights of the Child." Retrieved on Nov 12, 2022 from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>.

⁵Miettinen A., Rotkirch A., Szalma I., Donno A., Tanturri M.L. (Increasing childlessness in Europe: Time trends and country differences. *Families and Societies. Work. Pap. Ser.* 2015;33:1–46. In Gouni O, Jarašūnaitė-Fedosejeva G, Kōmürçü Akik B, Holopainen A, Calleja-Agius J. Childlessness: Concept Analysis. *Int J Environ Res Public Health.* 2022 Jan 27;19(3):1464. doi: 10.3390/ijerph19031464. PMID: 35162484; PMCID: PMC8834711.

⁶Buhr, P., Huinink, J. Why Childless Men and Women Give Up on Having Children. *Eur J Population* 33, 585–606 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10680-017-9429-1>. Retrieved on Dec 5, 2022.

⁷<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/infertility>

within reasonable period after becoming married. Any woman who fails to become pregnant and bring such pregnancy to maturity is termed barren and is often subjected to different unfavourable conditions; an infertile wife's picture is one of the most powerful images of sorrow and rejection, even in the Bible. Susanta⁸, commenting on Ryan's position on women's state of infertility opines that a wife who cannot have children is often the object of mockery because of her state of infertility, (Ryan, 2003)⁹. No wonder, when Rachel conceived and gave birth to a child she said, "God has taken away my reproach" (Gen 30:23). This was indicative of her predicament before her new state of motherhood.

Adoption is the legal and social process of taking a child born to one set of parents to become related to another parents and family, with the same right and roles as those that exist between children and biological parents. It is the severance and transfer of the parental ownership of a child from the biological parent to another set of parents (adopters). Chukwu¹⁰ sees it as a legal process whereby a person obtains judicial or administrative authority to take the child of another person as his own and parental rights and obligation are permanently transferred from the child's natural parents to the adoptive parents. Child adoption is a practice designed to assure a life of stability and dignity for children whose parents are unwilling, or for one reason or the other, unable to care for them (Cardarello, 2009¹¹). Olayinka¹² characterizes adoption of children as an act of compassion and humanitarianism.

Christian couples are parents who marriages were solemnized according the Christian standard of marriage. African culture encourages the practice of polygyny and is highly cherished;¹³in fact, marrying more than one wives used to be a show of wealth and high social class (Baloyi, 2013)¹⁴. However, Christianity prescribes one man one wife – monogamy (Owolabi, 2022)¹⁵. Christian couples have the foundation of their home on their belief in Christ. Christianity challenges such couples to stick together through thick and thin and weather the storms of life together. This is the hallmark of the traditional Christian marital vow which reads:

I take thee to be my wedded wife/husband to have and to hold from this day forward for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health to love and to cherish till death us do part¹⁶

The virtue of the vow, Christian couples are called to a life of lifelong commitment, faithfulness, sacrifice and unconditional love.

Theoretical Framework

This research on issues and challenges of child adoption among Christian couples in Africa is theoretically framed on two theories: Family Stress theory and Rational Choice theory. Family Stress Theory, (Hill's ABC-X Model) was developed in 1949 by Reuben Hill, a psychologist. His study examined the impact of separations and reunions

⁸Susanta, Y.K., 2021, 'Christian theological understanding of the handling of infertility and its relevance in the Indonesian context', HTS Theologiese Studies/ Theological Studies 77(4), a6508. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i4.6508>. Retrieved on Nov. 29, 2022.

⁹Ryan, M.A., 2003, Ethics and Economics of Assisted Reproduction, Georgetown University Press, Washington, DC

¹⁰Chukwu, L., 2012. Adoption of children in Nigeria under the Child's Right Act 2003. <http://www.law.2.byu.edu/chukwu.pdf>. Retrieved Nov 4, 2022

¹¹Cardarello, A. (2009), "The movement of the mothers of the courthouse square: 'legal child trafficking,' adoption and poverty in Brazil", The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology, Vol. 14 No. 1, pp. 140-161.

¹²Olayinka Modupe Onayemi, (2019) From humanitarianism to family building: Genres of security implications of child adoption as a management strategy for infertility. International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSSP-09-2018-0148>

¹³Wikipedia contributors, "Polygamy in Africa," Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polygamy_in_Africa. Retrieved December 17, 2022,

¹⁴Baloyi, Elijah M.. (2013). Critical reflections on polygamy in the African Christian context. *Missionalia*, 41(2), 164-181. Retrieved December 14, 2022, from http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0256-95072013000800006&lng=en&tng=en.

¹⁵Owolabi, Paul. "Why Christians Are Monogamists." The Renewed Mind, April 29, 2022. <https://therenewedmind.org/why-christians-are-monogamists/>.

¹⁶Focus on the Family Australia (2022). "7 Traditional Marriage Vows: What They Mean and Why They're Still Important," <https://www.families.org.au/article/7-traditional-marriage-vows-what-they-mean-and-why-theyre-still-important>. April 14

on families after World War II (Manijeh, 2017)¹⁷. Hill's model consists of variables A, the stress causing event - called stressor, B (the resources available to the family for meeting the crisis), C (how the family perceives the stressor), and X, the crisis or its likelihood (Hill, 1958)¹⁸. The occurrence of A as a crisis is dependent on the variables B and C¹⁹.

Hill's ABC-X model posits that major stressful events such as childlessness and infertility can destabilize a family; such stressful events are labeled "A" – the stressors. Hill notes that some types of resources are available to nearly every family; these serve as protective jackets against stress-causing events. These resources provide coping mechanism and can make the stressful event seem more tractable²⁰; these factors are labelled as "B". In African setting, kinship provides a support system for parents who do not have the wherewithal to provide basic needs for their children by accepting such children for fostering. In the same vein, infertile couples are supported by giving them children to foster while they are still waiting for their own biological children. Similarly, circle of friends and church membership provide other platforms for ameliorating the pains of childless couples. "C" refers to the perception of events as stressors by the society, culture, religion, race, or state; while "X" is what defines a crisis for any family. So, the interaction between the desire for a child, called "A" with the family support system (friend, religion, finance etc.), forms "B" while "C", society's perception of childlessness, religions and culture among other things defines the crisis (Patterson,2002)²¹.

Rational choice theory states that individuals use rational calculations to make rational choices and achieve outcomes that are aligned with their own personal objectives. These results are also associated with maximizing an individual's self-interest. The use of rational choice theory is hinged on the expectation that its result will lead to outcomes with the greatest benefit and satisfaction to the people concerned, based on the limited options available²².How individuals decide what will serve them best is dependent on personal preferences. There are various options that are available to infertile couples to meet their needs of childlessness and infertility. Among such options are surrogacy, fostering, Assisted Reproductive Techniques (ARTs) and adoption. Rational choice theory states that the choice made by an infertile couple is peculiar to them and is influenced by factors such as religious belief, socio- cultural orientation, level of education as well as financial capacity, and such choice may not tally with that of another couple. In such situation, the couples must take a rational action or decision that is most suitable to them irrespective of how others around perceive it, as far as it meets their need (Chukwuma, 2019)²³.For instance, a childless couple may decide to go for guardianship or fostering because the foster child's parent is their kinsman and is well known to them. To such couple, that is a rational decision based on their preference. However, another couple could decide to go for adoption to tighten any loose end that could make their joy to be cut short should a foster child decides to go back to his/ her parent in the near future. Each of the couples has taken a decision that is rational with respect to them based on their situation and preferences, and available opportunities. Although the choices are opposite, both individuals make these choices to get the best result for themselves.

These theories identify the crisis situation infertile couples live with within African society and the various choices that are opened to them to overcome their travails or manage their predicament. However, there is no one-jacket-

¹⁷Manijeh D (2017), Examining Family Stress: Theory and Research. Quarterly of Clinical Psychology Studies Allameh Tabataba'i University Vol. 7, No. 28, Fall 2017, Pp 1-7 Retrieved from https://jcps.atu.ac.ir/article_8150_9ca50c365a10d993dc09284126944a85.pdf on Dec. 4, 2022

¹⁸Hill, R. (1958). Generic features of families under stress. *Social Casework*, 49, 139–150. In Manijeh D (2017), Examining Family Stress: Theory and Research. Quarterly of Clinical Psychology Studies Allameh Tabataba'i University Vol. 7, No. 28, Fall 2017, Pp 1-7

¹⁹Michael, R. (2016), ABC-X Model of Family Stress and Coping. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119085621.wbefs313>

²⁰Jeanne G., (2022), How to Use a Family Stress Theory to Manage Setbacks. Retrieved from <https://www.lovetoknowhealth.com/well-being/family-stress-adaptation-theory> on Dec 26, 2022

²¹Patterson, J. M. (2002). Integrating family residence and family stress theory. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, (64) may 2002. Pp349-360.

²²Rational Choice Theory - <https://www.onlinemswprograms.com/social-work/theories/rational-choice-theory/>

²³Chukwuemeka E.G. (2019) Child Adoption and Surrogacy from the Baby Factory: A Flux of Reproductive Health Care in the South East of Nigeria. *African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research* ISSN: 2689-5129 Volume 2, Issue 3, 2019 (pp. 47-53). Retrieved from <http://www.abjournals.org/> on Nov.17, 2022

fits-all approach; solution adopted is individualistic, as what works for an individual may be loathsome to another even when they are in seemingly the same situation. However, child adoption is one of the mechanisms for averting crisis in African families experiencing infertility.

Why Adoption?

Several reasons have been adduced for the rationale behind adoption by those who have subscribed to it; these included desire to give a child who is in an irreversible situation of abandonment, neglect or ill-treatment a loving home, to relieve parents who are unable to take care of their child, or to meet up with the desire to have a child with particular gender (Chike et al, 2022)²⁴. Some other reasons may include a desire to acquire a companion for an only child, to replace a dead child, to stabilize a marriage, and to legitimize the status of a child born out of wedlock (Tajudeen, 2003)²⁵. However, the most pre-eminent and common reason for resorting to adoption is involuntary childlessness. Despite the high regard for children in African society, there are couples who are childless. Some of these couples may have sought medical, spiritual and traditional solutions to their predicament without anything to show for their effort. Involuntary childlessness may result from infertility or any other medical condition. In some cases, either partner may have a medical condition that can make it dangerous for them to reproduce. So, adoption may be a way to avoid the potential of pregnancy and delivery complications.

One of the general cultural beliefs in most African settings irrespective of religious biases is that procreation is the basic aim of marriage, for them marriage and procreation are Siamese twin that are delicate to separate. According to Owo (1994)²⁶, having many children makes one feel fulfilled, important and also respected by others. Marriages which fail to produce children, or even children of a particular gender often end in dissatisfaction, depression especially for women, marrying of second wife, and in extreme situation, divorce. As a form of child care, adoption provides permanent care and parenting for adopted children. It also offers a lifeline to families in a state of distress and as well serve as a panacea to child abandonment by placing such children in another family where they can be given parental and family support necessary for the holistic development of a child. Unlike fostering and guardianship, adoption creates a permanent parent-child relationship between the adoptee and the adopting parents, unless there is any recognized reason to break the contract.

The Theological Foundations of Child Adoption

The term 'adoption' is rarely found in the Old Testament; nevertheless, there are instances that point to its practice. In the Old Testament there are three direct instances of adoptions: Moses (Exod.2:5 – 8), Esther (Esther 2:5), and Genubath, (1 Kgs 11:20). Outside these three accounts, there is the one between Israel and God in which Israel is referred to as God's son (Exod. 4:22; Deut. 14:1; 32:6; Jeremiah 31:9); however the concept 'adoption' was fully used in the New Testament²⁷.

Biblical account of the adoption of Moses and Hadassah reveals the mindset of Pharaoh's daughter and Mordecai.

*Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, and her maidens walked beside the river; she saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to fetch it. When she opened it she saw the child; and lo, the babe was crying. **She took pity on him** (Exo. 2:5-6)*

Now there was a Jew in Susa the capital whose name was Mor'decai, the son of Ja'ir, son of Shim'e-i, son of Kish, a Benjaminite, who had been carried away from Jerusalem among the captives carried away with Jeconiah

²⁴Chikwe, P.C, Obiageli F.E. and Okoye, O. C (2022). "A Review of Perceptions, Challenges and Prospects of Child Adoption In Nigeria". Global Journal Of Social Sciences Vol 21, 2022: 113-125. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/364725167_A_review_of_perceptions_challenges_and_prospects_of_child_adoption_in_nigeria on November 1,

²⁵Tajudeen, O. I. "Adoption Practice in Nigeria- an Overview". Journal of Law, Policy and Globalization ISSN 2224-3259 (Online), Vol.19, 2013

²⁶Owo, C. (1994). Introduction to Sociology. Enugu: Dulacs Press Ltd

²⁷John Piper Adoption: The Heart of the Gospel, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/adoption-the-heart-of-the-gospel>

*king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had carried away. He had brought up Hadas'sab, that is Esther, the daughter of his uncle, **for she had neither father nor mother**; and...Mor'decai adopted her as his own daughter. (Est. 2:5-7)*

Above passages reveal that according to the Holy Scripture, the basis of adoption is first and foremost about children. God loves children and has a special concern for orphans. James 1:27 has it that true religion in the sight of God the Father is the one that cares for orphans and widows in their distress.

The first adoption story in the New Testament, though indirect, is the account of relationship between Jesus and his earthly father, Joseph. Biologically, Joseph did not father Jesus. However, in Joseph's faithfulness and obedience to the Lord, he cared for, supported, and loved Jesus just as a natural father would. In this example, we see the extent to which an adopter loves an adoptee as his blood child.

Looking at Pauline epistles we have several allusions to adoption as a metaphor for what happens between man and God. In Gal.4:3 – 5, Paul explains that God through his magnanimity decided to shower his grace and love on man by adopting him as his son.

Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. (Gal. 4:3-5)

Thus, adoption sets man free (redemption) from his disadvantaged and helpless position of bondage. Paul went further to explain that this gave man every right as God's heir. By virtue of the adoption there was a change of status from a slave-like status to one of a son with full benefit, hence the expression "Abba Father" was introduced. According to *Dictionary.com*,²⁸ "Abba" is the defining term for father in the Aramaic language, spoken by Jesus and Paul as an intimate term to characterize their personal relationships with God. The term expresses affection, confidence and trust. Commenting on the word, *Gotquestions.org*²⁹ expatiates that "abba" denotes a very deep relationship a father has with his child, as well as the unalloyed trust that a child has in his father. So, adoption creates a relationship. Paul went further to explain that adoption opens channel of full privileges to the adoptee such that he has right to inheritance of the adopter as other sons; in essence he is a joint heir.

And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" Therefore, you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. (Gal 4:6-7)

However, aside from the intimacy element in 'abba', *himpublications.com*³⁰ introduced another element – obedience, which he claims is often ignored in the meaning of "abba Father". This second element is indeed significant as it embeds the responsibility/obligation of the adoptee to the adopter. It therefore implies that by virtue of the grace of adoption God has given every Christian the privilege of sonship while this privilege lays a duty on the adoptee (believers in this case) to be obedient and submissive to the adopter.

The Concept of Child Adoption in African Culture

Judith (2013)³¹ opines that throughout history, societies have developed customs for the care and nurturing of children, including orphans and those whose biological parents cannot care for. Families in Africa are closely knitted together, hence the idea of kinship and extended family syndrome. Aroh (2011)³² sees kinship as the relationship between individuals based on blood ties or marriage, adoption or any other means by which a given society recognized such. According to Salawu (2007)³³ in Aniche (2017)³⁴, the term kinship has two aspects,

²⁸ "Abba", <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/abba>

²⁹ "What does it mean that God is our Abba Father??" Got Questions Ministries, Retrieved February 15, 2017, [<https://www.gotquestions.org/What-does-it-mean-that-God-is-our-Abba-Father.html>]

³⁰ The Biblical Meaning of "Abba", <https://himpublications.com/blog/meaning-abba/>

³¹ Judith L. (2013). Adoption And Fostering: Traditional and Contemporary Child Welfare Strategies In Sub-Saharan Africa

³² Aroh, A. (2011). Basic dictionary of sociology and social sciences. Enugu: infinity publications.

³³ Salawu, B (2007). Sociology, concepts and themes: an introduction. Ibadan: cresthill publishers ltd.

namely: the biological point of view and the socio-cultural aspect. The former is a relationship which is obtained through two major means like blood or descent, while the socio-cultural aspect of kinship is man-made. From the biological aspect, two people are kinsmen if one is descended from the other. In other words, two people are kinsmen when the two of them have a common progenitor. Also, from the socio-cultural point of view, one's brother-in-law, mother-in-law and sister-in-law are one's kinsmen. With the idea of kinship, we have relations like cousins, aunts, siblings. All these are indicative of the operation of extended family. Eteng (2008)³⁵ recognizes the fact that there is limit to which the immediate family can cope with the provision of the needs of its members, hence the support system provided by the kinship; extended family often provides supportive and loving environments for children as well as childless women.

The idea of kinship has made extended family system to be well rooted, and one of the characteristics of extended family is that a problem to one is considered as a problem for all; this is because blood relationship counts so much. No wonder in the African traditional setting one finds a situation where a man gifts out his child to a kinsman to be taken as his own very child, especially if the kinsman has some challenges having his own biological children. Such way of raising children is what Hrdy (2007, 2009)^{36,37} calls *alloparenting* or cooperative breeding strategy, the care of children within a community by people other than their biological parents. In some settings, children are even seen as a community asset and therefore it is the responsibility of the community to take care of that child whenever the parents are unable to do so. Kinship foster care is an out-of-home arrangement for full-time care by relatives such as grandparents or uncles and aunts, or tribe members, or others who are not a child's biological parent but have a blood relationship with the child. So, giving a child to another family is perceived as an act of generosity and sharing (Etienne, 1979)³⁸

Several factors have been found to encourage kinship child fostering. Judith submits that most often, but not always, children are handed over to close or distant kin for the purposes of establishing or strengthening kinship relations. Fostering may also ease weaning (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1985)³⁹ and afford children opportunities to obtain further education, learn skills, and become better disciplined and more independent (Bledsoe, 1990⁴⁰; Castle, 1996⁴¹). In some instances, it also provides avenue for children to also receive religious training.

Kinship fostering is playing a greater role in alleviating the travails of childless couples. It is evident from personal interactions and observation that even though Anu & Oluwatoyosi⁴² opines that adoption is relatively gaining acceptance, many childless Christian couples especially women, prefer to foster their nieces and nephews pending the time when they would have their own biological children than to go for the option of adoption. Such arrangement can be on temporary basis, in which case both the birth parents and the foster parents have shared responsibilities over the child. The child sees the foster parents as his/her guardians and can still freely relate with his/her birth or biological parents and the child's birth parents remain an active part of the child's life. In some other cases, the release from the birth parents, usually the father, to the foster parents is permanent; in such a case, the child is permanently given to the foster parents as their 'biological child'. This is similar to what is called

³⁴Anieche A., Dwindling Impact of Kinship/Extended Family System Among The Ndi Igbo of South Eastern Nigeria, Online Journal of Arts, Management and Social Sciences (OJAMSS); Vol.2 No.1, March 2017, pg.247 - 252 (ISSN: 2276 – 9013)

³⁵Eteng, Inya (2008). Fundamentals of Sociology, Vol. 2. Abakaliki: Lorry and Caleb.

³⁶Hrdy, S. B. (2009). *Mothers and others: The evolutionary origins of mutual understanding*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.

³⁷Hrdy, S. B. (2007). Evolutionary context of human development: The cooperative breeding model. In C. A. Salmon & T. K. Shackelford (Eds.) *Family relationships: An evolutionary perspective* (pp 39-68). New York: Oxford University Press.

³⁸Etienne, M. (1979). The Case for Social Maternity: Adoption of children by urban Baule women. *Dialectical Anthropology*, 4, 237-242

³⁹Isiugo-Abanihe, U. C. (1985). Child fosterage in West Africa. *Population and Development Review*, 11, 53-73.

⁴⁰Bledsoe, C. (1990). 'No success without struggle': Social mobility and hardship for foster children in Sierra Leone. *Man*, 25, 70-88.

⁴¹Castle, S. E. (1996). The current and intergenerational impact of child fostering on children's nutritional status in rural Mali. *Human Organization*, 55, 193-203

⁴²Anu Thomas & Oluwatoyosi Ojo, "Nigeria and the changing face of child adoption Nigeria and the changing- face of child adoption", Retrieved from [https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.vanguardngr.com/2019/05/nigeria-and-the-changing-face-of-child-adoption/amp/Nigeria and the changing face of child adoption](https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.vanguardngr.com/2019/05/nigeria-and-the-changing-face-of-child-adoption/amp/Nigeria%20and%20the%20changing%20face%20of%20child%20adoption) on August 23, 2022.

relative adoption in some clime only that most times in African setting, there is usually no formal or legal documentation, only a mutual consent between the two families. Though this arrangement may not be a permanent solution to the issue of the couple's childlessness but it is relatively comforting in the sense that they have a child in the house they look upon as theirs. The fact that the lineage of the child can be traced to them makes the foster child not to be a complete stranger to them. This result aligns with other studies that have shown that the couples that adopt grieve less about their childless challenge and also have better emotional support compared with their peers (Adesina et al, 2009)⁴³

Child Adoption by African Christian Couples

Child adoption in the modern sense is a western culture that was transplanted to Africa but is strongly resisted by communities that are still holding strongly to their traditional religious values and world view. Most Christian couples in Africa are still holding on strongly to their traditional religious values, it is only natural to expect that syncretism will be the order of the traditional religious life of such people (Chukwuma, 2019)⁴⁴.

Christianity is described as the worship and access to God through Jesus Christ. The guiding principle is the law of Christ as contained in the New Testament of Holy Bible (Madu, 1999)⁴⁵. Madu observed that in its cradle, Christianity picked up the torch of civilization, cherished by all that was good in Greek and Roman culture and changed the entire moral character of the ancient world. This perhaps explains the similarity and use of child adoption principles as found in Ancient Rome and Greece (UN, 2007)⁴⁶. Chukwuma (2019,) citing MacDougall⁴⁷, noted that, "child adoption was used metaphorically in the New Testament to emphasize the permanence of man's relationship with God, rights of Gods children and Christ's redemptive act."

On the other hand, More (2009)⁴⁸ sees adoption as a culture in Christianity that presses for the Great Commission mandate which joins Christ in advocating for the helpless and abandoned children abandoned on the streets needing help. Christianity preaches on the sanctity of human life which should be preserved rather than abortion. Such lives also must be helped further through adoption.

Jesus' example of adopting John in John 19:26-27, is regarded as an example worth emulating. To Moore, John was not Jesus brother but he shared a mother with him. Jesus was deemed to have adopted John into his family at the cross, mandating him to perform the role of a son to a mother in distress by caring for her.

Child adoption among Christians Couples demands that the believers should love what God loves. God loves children. Jesus qualified candidates to enter into the kingdom of heaven when they are like children (Math. 18:5-6). Serving a child through adoption is therefore serving God. Specifically, God loves and cares for orphans as exemplified in James 1:27.

Adoption is a scriptural metaphor that guarantees the legal entitlement of believers as heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17), (Chukwuma, 2019). And Christian couples are encouraged to bridge the gap of childlessness by embracing it. Adoption into the Christian faith is likened to child adoption which unites persons not related by blood; in Christ to share a common family name (*Pater familias*), children of God. Consequently, they are all heirs apparent (*suiberedes*) and joint heirs with Christ. Paul therefore employed the "*adoptio sensu strictu*" of the Roman culture to portray the image of salvific work of Christ to mankind (Stibbe, 2005)⁴⁹. This alludes to

⁴³Adesina O., Oyedunni A., Regina O., Imran O., Elijah A., Isaac F. and Oladosu A.(2009), Acceptability of Child Adoption as Management Option for Infertility in Nigeria: Evidence from Focus Group Discussions African Journal of Reproductive Health Vol 13 No 1 March

⁴⁴Chukwuma, E. G. (2019).The Challenges of Child Adoption: A Socio-Religious Discourse on the Ebonyi Christian Couples' Experience. A PhD Dissertation submitted to Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra State p. 81.

⁴⁵Madu, J.E. (1999). African Traditional Religion. Calabar: Literamed p. 125.

⁴⁶United Nation (2009). Child Adoption, Trends and Policies, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. New York: United Nations.

⁴⁷MacDougall R.S. (2009). Seeing God in Adoption: A Christian view of Adoption. A seminar paper presented at North American Association of Christians in social work (NACSW) Indianapolis Oct 2009.

⁴⁸Moore, R. P. (2009). Adopted for life. Wheaton Illinois: Crossway books.

⁴⁹Stibbe, I. (2005). From Orphans to Heirs. United Kingdom: Bible Reading fellowship

approval of the practice.

In Africa and elsewhere, Christianity is fragmented within denominational bounds. Child adoption seems to be favourably disposed to, by members of the mission or mainline churches because of their affiliation and allegiance to the authority of the church in Europe, America and the Western World, where child adoption apparently originated. The philosophy behind child adoption is secularization (Madu, 2003). It is therefore not difficult for Christian couples in Africa, whose church historical background is traceable to the West, to appropriate adoption as an option to childlessness.

The Catholic Church, in her Catechism recognizes and respects a child as a person from the moment of his conception. Number 2379 states that “physical sterility is not an absolute evil” and legitimate medical solution can be sought. It further recommended that spouses who still suffer from infertility after all efforts at finding solution should, “give expression to their generosity by adopting abandoned children” (Chukwuma, 2019).

The Pentecostals and the Evangelicals in the mission churches like the Evangelical Fellowship of the Anglican Communion (EFAC) and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal derive their names from the apostles’ experience on the day of Pentecost that is evident by the descent of the Holy Spirit. Faith in the healing power of the Holy Spirit is one of the attributes of the Pentecostals (Ndiokwere, 1994)⁵⁰. Consequently, infertility is regarded as a condition which God can remedy, through faith against child adoption. In Madu’s (2003) view, theological and moral issues like polygamy which is the Africa’s antidote to childlessness, has persisted in some new religious movements. The teachings of Christianity are imbued in doctrines held by Christianity and its various denominations that are noticeable in Africa. These teachings can be found in Christian theology that is held uniformly by the various denominations, indicative of the oneness of the faith.

Challenges of adoption among childless Christians in Africa

Despite the high regard for children in African society, there are couples who are childless as a result of infertility or medical challenges. Some of these couples may have sought medical, spiritual and traditional solutions to their predicament without anything to show for their effort. In spite of this predicament, this group of people sees adoption as a no-go area (Ezeugwu, Obi and Ona, 2002⁵¹; Omosun and Kofoworola, 2011⁵²). There are several factors that could be responsible for such a position. First is the stigmatization and belief that a child brought from outside is a bastard. Traditionally, most people do not have regard for a child adopted into a family, and such adopted child is often seen as an outsider or a stranger in the community. He is regarded as a stranger since his roots cannot be traced within the kinsmen (Nwaoga, 2013)⁵³. The stigmatization associated with adoption is a social condition in which the adoptee is identified and discriminated against based on a perceived difference as not being an authentic member of the lineage, or as not being able to produce biological child, in the case of the adoptive parents. It is the disqualification from complete social acceptance, and social stigma is a process through which others’ reactions damage the average identity of the person involved; this includes negative social judgement, exclusion, and rejection. Some of the extended family members of the adoptive parents do not treat an adopted child well because he is not seen to be like a blood relation. They often see the child to be an alien and not part of them, such that the way they treat the child usually causes problems between the two parties. This usually leads to the issue of secrecy in adoption. A participant interviewed shared his experience that he and his wife had to relocate out of town for over a year, only to come back after the adoption had been perfected. In such way, the extended family members and friends did not suspect that the baby was not his biological child.

⁵⁰Ndiokwere, N.I. (1994). *The African Church Today and Tomorrow; Prospects and Challenges* vol. 1. Onitsha: Effective Key Publishers

⁵¹Ezeugwu, F. Obi, S and Onah, E. (2002) *The Knowledge, Attitude and Practice of Child Adoption among infertile Women*. *Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* vol 22, No 2.

⁵²Omosun, A. and Kofoworola, O. (2011) *Knowledge, Attitude and Practice Towards Child Adoption amongst Women Attending Infertility Clinics in Lagos State, Nigeria*. *African Journal of Primary Health Care and Family Medicine* Vol.3, No 1
Ritzer, G (2008) *Sociological Theory* New York: McGraw Hill.

⁵³Nwaoga, C (2013) *Socio-Religious Implications of Child Adoption in Igboland, South Eastern Nigeria* *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*. Vol. 4 No 13. November 2013. Pages 705- 710.

Another dimension to the aversion to child adoption by Christians is that belief that delay is not denial. This implies that the fact that a woman or family has stayed for several years without a child does not mean that the situation cannot be reversed. Therefore, adoption is often perceived as not having faith in the miraculous power of God, or assisting God to bring His plan to pass. This idea is supported by Chukwuma (2019)⁵⁴ in his assertion that faith in God for a biological child that must come, irrespective of the age of the woman, is the solution held by Christianity. The story of Sarah, Elizabeth, and Hannah in the Scripture are often cited to show that delay is not denial. This group of people believes that helping God always carries grave consequence like regret later in life; in fact, they do not see themselves as childless but rather exercise their faith by confessing that they are awaiting mothers. Chukwuma further submits that Christianity promises solution to all of man's life needs, which includes infertility/childlessness. As a prequalification for solution to childlessness, Christianity demands uncompromising faith in God. Therefore, considering the option of child adoption seemingly amounts to faithlessness that disqualifies the Christian from receiving his heart desires. He sees this as a dilemma which some Christians will attempt to pursue by looking up to God for a birth child in exercise of their faith.

Added to the above is the fear of the unknown (Chukwuma, 2019)⁵⁵. In most cases, the adoptive parents do not know the birth parents, hence may not have any history about the child. What if the child has some inherited curses? What if the child has hereditary sicknesses/diseases? Will it not be a disaster in future if the child turns out to be a social outcast by exhibiting the vices inherited from his/her biological parents, will he/she not spoil the good name of the adoptive family? Another aspect of this is the fear according to *Nebraska Today*⁵⁶ is that the child may eventually choose to go away from his/her adoptive parents if/when he/she eventually discovered that they are not his birth parents. If such should happen, the childless couples often reason, that means that their hope of having a child is dashed and the investment so far made on the child is wasted. In such a situation, it means that their later end is worse than the beginning as the couple would have advanced in age. In such situation, people prefer to wait patiently on God until He answers their prayer rather than being put to shame in their old age. Many others questions that point to the fear of the unknown agitate the mind of childless people, especially Christians. All these conditions do constitute hindrance to a family accepting adoption with an open hand.

Another challenge of adoption is the prevalence of 'baby factories' in Nigeria. Baby factories are most often illegal facilities operating as private clinics or orphanages that specialize in impregnating women with the intent of turning babies borne by such women into object of merchandise (Isabelle, 2020)⁵⁷. The syndicate comprises of a well-established network of people including corrupt healthcare providers, middlemen, clients, and victims; the victims here are the pregnant teenagers.

Omeire et al (2015)⁵⁸ identified four principal sets of actors in the baby factory business; these are the factory owners who provide location and logistics, covering the maintenance of the girls for the pendency of the transaction, the girls who are carrying the pregnancies and produce babies for sales. The other two are the buyers who patronize the factory, and men who function as a sex machine with the mandate to regularly impregnate the girls. In addition to these groups of people, there are usually another group of middlemen charged with the responsibility of making initial contacts between prospective buyers and the baby factory. Usman and Ewere, (2016)⁵⁹, quoting from Royal Times Nigeria, May 27, 2013 paints a graphic picture of how the transactions are

⁵⁴Chukwuma, E.G (2019).The Challenges Of Child Adoption: A Socio-Religious Discourse On The Ebonyi Christian Couples' Experience(Ph. D Dissertation)

⁵⁵ Chukwuma E. G, 2019) Child Adoption And Surrogacy From The Baby Factory: A Flux Of Reproductive Health Care In The South East Of Nigeria. African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research ISSN: 2689-5129 Volume 2, Issue 3, 2019 (pp. 47-53)

⁵⁶ Nebraska Today | University of Nebraska–Lincoln (2013). "Study Finds Couples Who Want Children View Adoption as a Last Resort,". Retrieved from <https://news.unl.edu/newsrooms/today/article/study-finds-couples-who-want-children-view-adoption-as-a-last-resort/> on October December 1, 2022

⁵⁷Isabelle H. (2020)The Dirty Business Of Baby Factories In Nigeria, Organization for World Peace.Retrieved from <https://theowp.org/reports/the-dirty-business-of-baby-factories-in-nigeria> on December 22, 2022

⁵⁸Omeire, C.O, Iheriohanma E. B. J., Osita- Njoku, A. & Omeire, E. U (2019). The Challenges Of Child Adoption And The Emergence Of Baby Factory In South Eastern, Nigeria. International Journal of Education and Research Vol. 3 No. 8 August 2015

⁵⁹Usman O and Ewere N.O. Baby Factory Syndicates: An Emerging Child Adoption Racket In Nigeria in African Journal For The Psychological Study Of Social Issues access from

done:

A male child costs ₦450, 000, while a female is pegged at ₦400, 000. The teenage mother that delivers a baby boy earns ₦100, 000, while ₦80, 000 is the reward for a mother whose new born baby is a female. Twins are ostentatious goods, and only the affluent can afford the luxury to have them.

Kupoluyi (2014)⁶⁰ corroborates the narrative given above by pointing out that a baby from the hatchery could be sold for amount ranging from five hundred thousand naira (₦500,000) or more depending on the gender and sometimes the complexion of the baby, with males going for higher price. According to him, those who patronize the baby factories may be those who genuinely need babies for adoption while others are wicked people who may require human parts for ritual purpose. Babies who are not sold are usually forced into child labour, trafficked into prostitution or used as elements for sacrifice.

The activities of baby factory operators in Nigeria are against the spirit of Articles 3 and 21 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child⁶¹ which states as follows:

In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration (Article 3).

States Parties that recognize and/or permit the system of adoption shall ensure that the best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration and they shall(a) Ensure that the adoption of a child is authorized only by competent authorities who determine, in accordance with applicable law and procedures and on the basis of all pertinent and reliable information, that the adoption is permissible in view of the child's status concerning parents, relatives and legal guardians and that, if required, the persons concerned have given their informed consent to the adoption on the basis of such counselling as may be necessary (Article 21).

Of course, every sane mind knows that the paramount consideration of these syndicates is their financial gain from these hapless children as the children are turned to object of merchandise. Part of the worrisome aspects of their operation is that in order to beat the long arm of the law of the land, many of these baby factory locations are registered as maternity centres, orphanages or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as a decoy to perpetrate the nefarious act. The media is almost on daily basis awash with the news of the activities of these animals in sheep clothing. It is against the background of this abnormality that people tend to see every adoptee as a child bought from the black market. Except for desperate couples, especially women, who then will want to associate with such kind of toga of shame.

Many childless couples have heard about adoption but a huge gap exists between knowledge and practices as the knowledge has not translated into its practice because of ignorance about the nitty-gritty of the process of adoption. This ignorance has dovetailed into the assumption that every adopted child is a product of baby factory. Alichie (2015)⁶² in Chukwuma (2019)⁶³ affirms this in his submission that the ignorance of the operation of government agencies in charge of child adoption facilitates seeking help through the back door by the patronage of illegal orphanages and other adoption centres.

Poverty, procedure and time taken to actualize adoption are other challenges (Nachinab, 2019)⁶⁴. No matter what,

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349485030_baby_factory_syndicates_an_emerging_child_adoption_racket_in_nigeria on Nov 12 2022.

⁶⁰Kupoluyi, A (2014) Ending Baby Factory Menace. The Nation, Newspaper, April 15, 2014 page 13.

⁶¹United Nations (1989). "Convention on the Rights of the Child." Retrieved on Nov 12, 2022 from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>.

⁶²Alichie B.O. (2015). Baby Dumping and Evolving Baby Factories In Nigeria: Their Implication for Child Right and Social Protection. *International Journal of Religion and Human Relations* 7 (2) pp. 34-53 Onitsha: Department of Religion and Human Relations.

⁶³Chukwuma, E.G (2019). The Challenges Of Child Adoption: A Socio-Religious Discourse On The Ebonyi Christian Couples' Experience (Ph. D Dissertation)

adoption is not free. Many Christian families who may be financially poor cannot afford the cost of adoption, even when they choose to actualize it through the legitimate means. This set of people hide under the cover of waiting on God to run away from adoption just because they cannot afford the cost. In the same vein it is not everyone that has patience as a virtue. Most often than not, people who have been waiting for a long time for a child would want the miracle to happen suddenly. The waiting time specified in the Child's Right Act⁶⁵ and the processes often seems too long and cumbersome for awaiting couples, especially women. This process begins with the pre-approval from the State Welfare Agency, to application to court, investigation, and finally ends with the final documentation (LawPadi, 2022)⁶⁶. In between these, there are many other time consuming and energy sapping processing. The ease with which solutions are realized from the baby factories therefore makes it an attractive means of adopting children without laid down bottlenecks inherent in government regulated adoption process.

Conclusion

The heart of child adoption is the welfare of less privileged children. Irrespective of traditional/cultural belief, twisted religious outlook and fear of what the future holds, childless couples especially of Christian faith, should brace up and see adoption as an opportunity to better the lot of the less privileged children by giving them a chance to experience a home and the warmth of family affiliation. By doing this, the childless couples on their own part will experience the joy and fulfillment of parenthood. Society is bound to have different perspectives on issues but rising above societal pessimism on child adoption would go a long way in changing the narratives of child adoption by Christian couples in Africa.

Recommendations

Government should step up measures to curtail the proliferation of illegal adoption centres and baby factories. In the same vein, unnecessary bottlenecks should be removed from the procedures for adoption.

Similarly, members of the clergy should be encouraged to educate their members that adoption is not a sin or a matter of lack of faith, but could be another means by which God can make a traumatised family to have joy of parenthood while still meeting the need of a child who needs parental love and care.

The Church needs to pay attention to the practical application of her beliefs by encouraging childless couples to adopt children. By doing this, the Church will be achieving two things: the first is facilitating the caring for orphans and less privileged in the society, thereby creating a chance for homeless children to have a conducive and stable homes, and helping them secure a worthwhile future. On the other hand, the prayers for children by these families would be met through adoption when they give a chance to these homeless children to come into their life like their biological children. To this end, the Church's theology on marriage should be broadened to include practical ways of assisting childless Christian couples to live happy and fulfilled lives.

Sound teachings, through seminars, premarital counselling, sermon and other avenues should be utilized to create the awareness that adopted children could have same value as biological children, when given a chance.

Finally, public enlightenment should be increased to disabuse the mind of the public against stigmatization of adoptees and adoptive parents, especially, as it concerns the African society.

⁶⁴ Nachinab, G.T. (2019) Perceived Barriers of Child Adoption: A Qualitative Study among Women with Infertility in Northern Ghana. *BioMed Research International* Vole 2019 Article ID 6140285. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1155/2019/6140285> on Dec 24, 2022.

⁶⁵ Child's Right Act of Nigeria (2003)

⁶⁶ LawPadi. (2022) "Steps to Legally Adopt a Child in Nigeria," December 24. <https://lawpadi.com/steps-to-legally-adopt-a-child-in-nigeria/>.

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