African Marriage Ritual and Christianity: A Social Anthropological Study of Igbo Society

John Chidubem Nwaogaidu

University of Nigeria, Nsukka

ABSTRACT

The peculiar nature of African traditional ritual of marriage, which is fundamentally communalistic, has remained in conflicting terms to the understanding of Christian notion of marriage. While Christianity emphasizes the individualistic content of marriage, the Igbo customary system as a case study recognizes the 'communal ownership' of wives initiated through different rituals. Besides, the structure of kinship relationship and the manner it endures through the marriage alliance in Igboland gives meaning to the society and its people. The major interest of the study is to evaluate the rituals that define marriage system in African traditional religion and the impact of Christianity. Placed in the changing circumstances as a result of Christian influences, the work attempts to analyze how the ritual practices in Igbo marriage systems have transformed in the recent time and the effect they have both on the people and their culture. It addresses the question on what influence does Christianity have on the social relations as constructed through the Igbo marriage ritual? The study is carried out through a field research. The gathered materials is presented as a reflection of different ideas, opinions and ethnographic evidences from different informants.

Keywords: adultery; beliefs; conflicts; integration; kinship.