



Ifá Guiding Principles in Pre-Marital Counselling Towards a Happy Family

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Abstract

The high rate of divorce among both young and older couples is on an increase with several unhappy families living in frustration and uncertainty. This is tied to their unpreparedness before going into marriage and their incompatibility as destiny may not permit the union of both couples in the first place. Though, physical or psychological counselling are important these have not proved effective enough to solve marital problems. The spiritual dimension of views, the unseen, as a way of guidance before going into marriage has become imperative in solving marital situations that have atrophied the family settings and the society at large. It is on this basis, that the essence of *Ifa* divination in enquiring into the fate of a couple coming together as one in holy matrimony cannot be undervalued. In other words, it is a structural foundation towards building a happy marriage. The Christian Orthodox worldview on counselling is also touched upon as a means of comparison with the oldest Christian denomination. The spiritual compatibility of the couple is important, and far more than the physical understanding of blood group genotype, temperament, sexual compatibility, communication skill etc. This paper, therefore, aims at establishing the place of *Ifa* divination in a couple's pre-marital counselling, as an important requirement before going into marriage. Twenty (20) *Ifa* priests were interviewed across southwestern Nigeria. Collections of information were content analysed, resulting in a recommendation for spiritual enquiries into the compatibility of couples before going into marriage.

Keywords: *Ifa*, Divination, Divorce, Compatibility, Couples.

Introduction

The concern for failed marriage is largely an effect on the society rather than an individual one. The single parental upbringing, psychological imbalance in the attitudes of children from a broken home and unproductivity on the society are resulting effect of a failed marriage. There are many wrong reasons for going into marriage and most modern marriages are products of selfish motives from benefits that one hopes to get from marrying the other. The material gains and other gains often sought such as: maintaining a social status of the rich getting married to the rich; love at first sight; internet connecting marriages without couples knowing each other; going into marriage for the fear of getting old or ageing; the desire to marry at any expense; marriage base on beauty; physical appearance; religious sentiment, cultural and educational achievement, are all often problematic. All these reasons are temporal and are not strong reasons enough to go into marriage. If most failed marriages had a pre-knowledge of an imminent failure, they might not have been held in the first place.

Man over time has a desire to see beyond his limited human ability. The indecisiveness in making an important decision at a major junction of his life has made him handicapped and he often seeks a deeper eye beyond his. It is important to know and understand the philosophy



of going into a venture physically, but most importantly, spiritually. Wandé (1976:113)¹, stated that the belief in predestination explains the success or failure of every man on earth. Wandé also agreed that while human efforts cannot rule-out achieving success, the greater part of it can be ascribed to the spirituality of predestination. In the same vein, Clarke, (1939:79)² opined that *Ifa* has been consulted in understanding predestination in various areas of life inclusive the choice of a life partner. However, the need to make the right choice before marriage via the *Ifa* guiding pre-marital principles are important, as the modern premarital counselling method is failing with an uncontrollable increase in divorce and frustrated homes.

In this study, the qualitative survey research method was adopted to gather information from *Ifa* priests and traditionalists as well as a limited literature review relating to Orthodox Christian views on marriage. The qualitative type of survey research method involves describing in detail specific situations using research tools like interviews. This research method was adopted primarily to explore the in-depth understanding of *Ifa* pre-marital counselling as a method in ensuring a better marriage. It also provides insights into the statement of the problem by helping to develop ideas or hypotheses. Hence, qualitative research was used to uncover trends in thoughts and opinions, and dive deeper into the psychology associated with *Ifa* pre-marital counselling. The research instrument for this research included unstructured or semi-structured interviews of respondents by means of a purposeful sampling method technique. The primary data elicited from the respondents were subject to narrative analysis.

Ifa Divination: A Binocular into the Unknown

The search for a man to know the unknown is in the craving to locate God. Man feels lost when there are questions without answers. Therefore, man seeks to understand the unknown through God who he believes knows everything. According to Rula, (1999: 1)³ Man is intrinsically frightened of what we don't know or comprehend. His thoughts have confidence if they can apprehend to some degree the unknown, it can influence the essential existential fear the world has presented to him. Rula expressed further that, two main engagements of man's mind are the quest for pleasure and the avoidance of pain. Man over time, has sought to understand principles that will align his world to favour his existence. The journey of a man is made up of individual choices. Thus, man has the responsibility to ensure the right choice is made based on lenses greater than his or her own worldview.

The *Ifa* divination among the Yoruba people had a legendary record as a system of oral tradition passed on from one generation to another. Therefore through this tool, man has a better understanding of his world and the invisible realm of the deities with the aid of sacrifice to balance the cosmos. *Ifa* divination process starts when the client speaks out silently, his or her secretive problem to *Ifa*. Pogoson and Akande, (2011: 15)⁴ explained that there are several ways this can be done; the commonest is the client whispering the problem to a coin or sometimes an amount to be given as an offering. After the whispering, it is then thrown inside the paraphernalia of *Ifa*. Some *Ifa* priests will prefer the client taking the paraphernalia of *Ifa* divination as he or she whispers the problem bothering his or her mind. However, the

¹Wandé, A. (1976). *Ifa, an Exposition of Ifa Literary Corpus*. London: Oxford University Press. 113.

²Clarke, J. D. (1939). "Ifa Divination". *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. LXIX: London. 79

³ Rula, M, (1991). Why do humans always seek the unknown? In Quora Retrieved 19th Nov 2021 From: <https://www.quora.com/Why-do-humans-always-seek-the-unknown>. 1

⁴ Pogoson, O. I and Akande, A. O. (2011). *Ifa Divination Trays from Isale-Oyo* in *Cadernos De Estudos Africanos*. Retrieved 11th Nov 2021 from www.researchgate.net/publication/262669858_Ifa_Divination_Trays_from_Isale-Oyo



priest is not allowed to hear any of the issues the client has raised to *Ifa*. After the client has whispered his concerns, the priest processes it with a chant of praise to the Orunmila, raising the supremacy of Gods' doggedness to solve all issues brought before him, and sometimes, another *orisa* is included in the praise chants. After the chant praise, the *Ifa* priest chooses to use the divination chain as he takes it from the middle and casts it on the ground; he then looks carefully at the signs displayed on the ground and immediately begins to read out the *Odu* that came up. Some *Ifa* priests will further give a broad explanation of the *Ese Ifa* that appears on the *Odu* to the client, as well as the most representative character in the *Odu*. An issue that relates to the choice of a wife or husband is narrowed down to the use of *Ibo* to spell out further details. As explained by Babawo, (2021)⁵ that *Ibo* is used by *Ifa* priests to narrow down the complex issue to a 'yes' or 'no' answer. The lot is believed to be accurate as revealed by the *Ori* (Inner head) of the client which knows the beginning of man's destiny and the right path to take.

Wande, (1976:33)⁶, acknowledges the fact that man's destiny could be said to be successful in life as a result of the type of 'head' such an individual brought from heaven. After divination has been consulted for the client, it is the *Ori* (Inner head) which to the Yoruba is a deity that will always stand by the man at all times compared to another *orisa*. The divination could come up with a positive or negative result. Regardless of the predication, the client is admonished to offer a sacrifice according to the *ese Ifa* the divination revealed. It is a general tradition and belief of the Yoruba that if the prediction of *Ifa* is good, a sacrifice will help enhance it to come to pass without hindrance and that if the predictions are not good, a sacrifice will help the client to dispel the evil associated with the bad intending marriage if amendable. If the prediction is bad, the client is warned not to go ahead with the marriage.

Premarital Counselling: Traditional and Western

The western point of view based mainly on the Christian religion, holds the definition of premarital counselling as a form of therapy or way of preparing couples for marriage. Its goal among other things, is to ensure that partners have a strong healthy relationship thus giving a better chance for a stable and satisfying marriage. Such programmes help in identifying weaknesses that might result in a failed marriage (Nicolaidis, 2003). With the help of well-trained licensed therapists mostly known as marriage counsellors, many marriages are being strengthened and improved. Walter et. al, (2010: 11)⁷ alert that within premarital counselling, the topic or issue being raised ranges from finance, communication, beliefs and values, roles in marriage, affection and sex, desire to have children, family relationships, decision making, dealing with anger and time spent together. Premarital counselling aims at assisting the intending spouse to improve their ability to communicate, set realistic expectations for marriage and develop conflict resolution skills. Such a structure put in place help establish a positive attitude, therefore, building a foundation before marriage. Mayo, (2018:2)⁸ reinforces this further by saying that the western process of premarital counselling usually precedes separate answers to the questionnaire to determine the prior knowledge about each other in the relationship. The idea is to identify any strengths, weaknesses and complications that might affect the marriage both negatively or positively. After questionnaires have been filled, both counsellors and intending spouses will interpret the results thereby analysing the area of

⁵Ajala Ifaleye, Interview Respondent, 45 years, Ifa Priest, Akure, 27th October, 2018.

⁶Wande, A. (1976). *Ifa, an Exposition of Ifa Literary Corpus*. London: Oxford University Press. 33.

⁷Mayo, C. (2018). *Premarital Counseling*. Retrieved on the 28th November, 2018 from Mayo foundation for Medical Education and Research. 2

⁸Walter, R., Anthony, B., Roudi, N., Darwin, A. et al. (2010). "Predicting the Short and Long-Term Helpfulness of Premarital Counseling: The Critical Role of Counseling Quality". In *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy*, Vol. 9. Innovations in Clinical and Educational Interventions. 11



agreement and disagreement. Most times, counsellors assist partners in setting goals to ensure a balance towards a healthy relationship in marriage.

However, with the well-structured programme put in place for intended couples before marriage, the great turnouts of divorces are still on the increase. Reasons for the high rate of divorces are infidelity, impatience, and lack of trust, extramarital affairs, domestic violence, unfaithfulness, and sexual abuse in marriages. The turnaround effect of these displeasures in marriage always leads to a societal imbalance, poor upbringing of children, increase in sexually transmitted disease, high rate of drug abuse, disunity in the family, just to mention but a few (Nicolaidis, 2003).

In the traditional setting, it is important to understand the spiritual realm of a purpose that guides day to day living especially among the Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria. In the pursuit of earthly things, it becomes important to know what the future holds. These are exemplified in the type of occupation to venture into; the choice of a wife or husband; the purchase of a property; a journey into a destination; what kind of food is a taboo or not; what kind of cloth one should put on; the destiny of a new-born child; what trade would be profitable etc. Tradition is not throwing away the place of preparedness in life accomplishment, but on the contrary, seeks to enhance a stress-free sail to one's destination. The traditional practice of *Ifa* divination is the method adopted by those who wish to walk without a blind on their faces. *Ifa* divination as a tool to test the compatibility of an intended wife or husband can save the stress awaiting unforeseen tragedy in the future journey of marriage. The *Ifa* compatibility test can reveal to the intended couple's negative situation that is imminent e.g. early death after marriage, lateness in childbirth, bareness, difficulty in life, likewise, the positive benefit in finding the right person e.g. prosperity, financial increase, long life and fruitful children.

The Eastern Orthodox Church view of Marriage

In the Mystery of Marriage, God the Holy Spirit by His grace unites two people, man and woman, for the special purpose of replenishing the Church of God according to His commandment (Genesis 9:1). This Holy Mystery was ratified by Jesus Christ (Matthew 19:5-6). He sanctified the spiritual and physical bond of marriage through His presence at the marriage in Cana of Galilee (John, 2:1). The Apostle Paul also declared to us that marriage is a great mystery (Ephesians, 5:32). The Mystery of Marriage of the Eastern Orthodox Church is steeped in symbolism and ritual, and each act has special significance and meaning. The body of Christ is seen as the absolute model of the relationship between spouses in a marital union (Nicolaidis, 2015; 2003). Pre-marital counselling is used to function so as to prepare Christian individuals to better understand their expectations about marriage based on Biblical values and address any significant differences between future spouses.

Every human being is a member of a family and the product of some marriage, with the exception of illegitimate children. Within this mystery of marriage, man enters the dimension of biological and eternal life. Marriage is a gift to be accepted or rejected by man. It can be freely lived. Love will never fail (1 Corinthians 13:8), and is not broken by physical death. Marriage is not broken by divorce or remarriage. Christian Orthodox marriage remains a unique union of two people in love who are able to transcend their own humanity and be united with each other and with Jesus Christ

The notion of marriage as a sacrament, presupposes that Christians are not only beings with physiological, social and psychological functions, but that they are also citizens of God's Kingdom and that their entire lives involve eternal values and the Triune Godhead of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and God the Father. At the start of Divine Liturgy, the Eastern Orthodox Church, which is a gathering of people, ceases to be a human body and it becomes the "Church of God" or His "*Ekklesia*". Christ



personally leads the gathering which transforms into His Body (Meyendorff, 1975). Marriage is a sacrament as it happens within the framework of the Eucharistic Divine Liturgy. There are partnerships in every covenant (Nicolaidis, 2015; 2003). This is true also in marriage but the covenant between man and woman is very fragile. Nonetheless, as the couple is in the image and likeness of God, they are called upon to live in faithfulness. Their spirituality and sexuality must be so aligned to God's word that the task of living in faithfulness becomes far easier. According to Jesus Christ, in order for the love of a couple to be what God has created it to be, it must be unique, unending, indestructible and divine (Meyendorff, 1975). Jesus teaches of the uniqueness of Marriage as the most perfect natural expression of God's love (agape) for mankind. Christ also teaches that if spouses are to love each other as God intends, their marriage is to be indestructible, unique and eternal. It is especially, to be Divine. Jesus has given this teaching as well as the power to fulfil it in the Mystery of Christian Marriage in the Church. The Eastern Orthodox Church believes and accepts all these teachings and regards very highly, especially the teachings of John Chrysostom. The Orthodox Church also believes that in the Mystery of Marriage, the spouses are given an opportunity to become one spirit (*pneuma*) (Nicolaidis, 2015; 2003). At some point in their lives, couples will need the support of a mental health professional. The priests offer counselling for some unique challenges in personal, marriage and family life. Sometimes the support of the spiritual father and/or mother is sufficient in helping couples to navigate the challenges; at other times they may need the knowhow of a mental health professional to complement the support they receive in the life of the Orthodox Church.

The Place of *Ifa* Divination in Marriage

Ifa divination as a process explains the essential needs for sacrifice towards a cosmological balance to straighten up or maintain a positive pace. Various *Ifa* divinations regarding marriage or taking a wife or husband are geared towards warning to avoid a bad marriage or a process of having a blissful marriage recorded in the ancient tradition. The act of *Ifa* divination in pre-marriage is to ensure that the destiny of both individuals is compatible. In other words, the *Ori* (Inner head) of both couples agrees in holy matrimony. Therefore, there are some *Ori* (Inner head) that are not compatible and *Ifa* will not approve of such a union to avoid a failure in the future. An example was narrated by Ayo, (2002: 126)⁹ it is an *ese Ifa* from *Iwori Ogunda* that narrated a story of a man called *Asa* who wanted to take over a woman that is planning to divorce her present husband *Awodi*. Divination was done for *Asa*, *Ifa* advised him to think deeply so that it would not turn to bad move.

<i>Iworiwonda</i>	Iworiwonda
<i>Iworiwonda</i>	Iworiwonda
<i>Iwori wohun rere da</i>	Iwori, look for something good to create
<i>A dia fun Asa</i>	Cast divination for Asa
<i>Eyiti n lo ree gba kutelu obinrin Awondi</i>	That was going to take over Kutelu, the wife of Awondi
<i>Kutelu o lee K'Awodi</i>	Kutelu cannot divorce Awodi
<i>Ironi won n pa</i>	It is all lies they are telling
<i>Kutelu o lee K'Awodi</i>	Kutelu cannot divorce Awodi
<i>Eke ni won n se o</i>	They are only backbiting
<i>Kutelu o le K'Awondi</i>	Kutelu cannot divorce Awodi

There are cases in *Ifa* divinations where a woman's destiny is tied to marrying a Babalawo or a husband with a specific occupation. When such a warning is heeded to, the marriage

⁹Ayo, S. (2002). *Ifa A Complete Divination*. Lagos: IDD Publishing and Printing Limited. 126.



becomes more balanced and free of chaos. Popoola's, (2008:22)¹⁰ narrative on *Odu Eji Ogbe*, appropriately exemplified the place of pre-marital counselling as the verse talks of *Orunmila* who was in love with *Orilewa*. Both independently seek the divination of an *Ifa* priest intending to understand what the future holds. The divination result came up with good news about the relationship, spelling out clearly how harmonious both will be happy together; live long in blissful loving affection of each other. The consultation reveals the blessing of children in the marriage together with a happy life. The relevance of the counselling was to avoid unnecessary negative happening in the marriage. After such counselling as revealed by the *Odu*, sacrifices are usually advised to be performed to ensure a right footing or a cosmological balance in the future of the union. *Orunmila* identified the need for this compatibility test before he decided to take *Orilewa* as a wife. Likewise, *Orilewa* understood the importance of the compatibility test before committing her life into the relationship as both independently sort the counselling of their *Awo* (Priest), who with their help confirmed the inner cravings.

In a similar trend Ifakolade, (2012:4)¹¹, also recounted a verse of *Ogbe* and explains the process of *Orunmila* in pursuit of another wife. *Orunmila* has first consulted *Ifa* and the result showed that *Iya* the daughter of *Oniwoo* will be a great prospective wife and decided to go in pursuit of *Iya*. However, he was advised to be patient and be very slow to anger, particularly in the early stage of the relationship. True to the word of *Ifa*, it was not easy getting *Iya*. *Oniwoo* decided to test *Orunmila's* endurance and persistence in marrying *Iya* by accommodating him in his pigsty. *Orunmila* endured the smell from the animal excrete and after a while, he was given a room close to the kitchen. Other hard labour like clearing the farmland and other tedious workaround was used to test *Orumilar*. During the *Oniwoo* test, *Orumilar* remained extremely patient and never complained. In the end, he was given *Iya*, and since that day all wives would be called *Iya-Iwo* or *Iyawo* (wife). This name *Iyawo* is translated as "the reward of the suffering at *Iwo*".

The Benefit of *Ifa* divination on pre-marital counselling

Ifa divination on pre-marital counselling as a way of ensuring compatibility of both partners before marriage comes with various benefits, especially concerning avoiding future marital chaos. The premarital counselling of *Ifa* guidance, ensure a blend between the unseen and a build-up of a psychological expectation already foreseen. It prepares the mind of both couples to the goal of enduring obstacles and a step by step divine principle towards a perfect home. Sola, (2018)¹² in an interview explained her experience when her parents' sort to know the compatibility between her and the intended husband, and *Ifa* revealed that they were not compatible because the fiancé will be short-lived. She never believed the whole process but rather insisted on going ahead with the marriage. Unfortunately, her husband developed a health problem that led to his death six months into the marriage leaving her with a pregnancy of four months. She regretfully said she should have accepted the information passed across by her parents via *Ifa* divination. Some *Ifa* pre-marital counselling might suggest remedies enshrined in the place of sacrifice. These sacrifices are measures taken to ensure the marriage works and are blessed with children, prosperity, long life and to avoid unwanted circumstances in the marriage. Scholars like Taylor (1958:461)¹³ articulate that sacrifice, serves as a means of bribing the *orisa* or paying homage to them in the same way as men

¹⁰ Popoola, S. (2008). *Ifa Dida an Invitation to Ifa Divination Volume One*. London: Asefin Media,22

¹¹ Ifakolade, O. A. (2012). *A brief glance at Ifa on the subjects of Love and Relationships* in universal collective of Spiritual though and process. <http://oyansoro.com/OyaSpeaks/love-and-relationships/4>

¹²Sola Daramola, Interview Respondent, 28 years Business Woman, Ogbomoso, 28th November, 2018.

¹³Taylor, E. B. (1958). *Religion in Primitive Culture*. New York: Harper, Vol. 2. 461.



pay homage to their overlords, while Van (1963:351)¹⁴ sees it as a gift to enable the receiver 'orisa' to give something in return or as a means of teasing the *orisa* to act favourably. For Awolalu, (1979:141)¹⁵, sacrifice meets certain basic needs and aspirations of man. However, when *Ifa* pre-counselling test is narrowed to a 'yes' or 'no' answer, the Babalawo will most times say '*kò sòná níbẹ̀*', meaning, 'there is no way in it' and may advise on the need to carry out some sacrifice to straighten out the future.

The benefits of *Ifa* divination on pre-marital counselling before going into marriage has been viewed as demonic and unchristian. Even when the traditional parents seem right, the younger generation sees it differently and objects to it. The modern generation does not understand or believe in the *Ifa* oracle system of divination and how it has preserved the marriage institution in time past. A summary of the benefits of pre-marital counselling previously discussed are as follows:

- The *Ifa* Pre-marital Counselling will reveal the fruitfulness in the marriage and in case where sacrifices can be done to remedy the situation.
- The *Ifa* Pre-marital Counselling also will unveil the lifespan of intended couples to see if the marriage will result in early death, and sometimes recommends sacrifice to take care of the situation.
- If the marriage will bring good fortune, wealth or prosperity because marrying the wrong person may attract negative circumstances like loss of business, bad luck or make life miserable.
- *Ifa* Pre-marital Counselling can help intended couples to avoid divorce, waste of time, because not all *Ori* (Inner head) is compatible to marry.
- *Ifa* Pre-marital Counselling before marriage helps in maintaining cosmological balance, a way of ensuring things are put in their proper place to avoid chaos or negative effect, to forestall dire consequences not only to the couples but to the society as a whole.
- The *Ifa* divination and pre-marital counselling will enlighten the blend of both destinies. It will analyse the strength and weaknesses of both couples.
- The *Ifa* divination and pre-marital counselling will reveal characters that both couples should develop or embed that will sustain the home e.g. patient, hard work, giving, forgiveness and loving.
- The *Ifa* divination and pre-marital counselling will also show imminent dangers, what to do to avoid or win victoriously, indicating areas to avoid and capacities to embrace.
- The *Ifa* divination will instruct, guide and advice when necessary the place of in-laws, friends and relatives to accommodate or reject.
- The *Ifa* divination can reveal the place of unforeseen powers and their activities e.g. witches, wizards, spirits their involvement in the marriage and how to avoid or pacify them.

¹⁴Van de Leeuw, (1963). *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*. New York: Harper and Row. Vol. 2, 351.

¹⁵Awolalu, O. (1979). *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*. UK: Longman. 141.



- *The Ifa divination in pre-marital counselling can disclose expectations at the early stage of the marriage the middle and the later path of the marriage also reveals each expectation at every period.*

Conclusion

The relevance of *Ifa* divination across different spheres of life e.g. health, business, leadership, politics, society and traditions, just to mention but a few cannot be overemphasised. Its usefulness in determining a life partner is not an exception. The *Ifa* guiding principles assist spiritually in enquiring into the future what the marriage will bring to ensure proper decision making. The modernised approach to pre-marital counselling is intelligent, brilliant and helpful in its regards. However, limited in a way to resolving the increase in divorce rate and broken homes. The *Ifa* guiding principles of pre-marital counselling examines the fundamentals of understanding the *Ori* (Inner head) of both partners. It seeks to access the compatibility of both couples in a binary pattern accompany via the tools in *Ifa* divination.

The process psychologically embroils an African traditional philosophy as it presents the spirituality of digging deep into the unknown. As important as pre-marital counselling is in churches or circular platforms, the need for a traditional approach to understanding what the physical eyes cannot see is considered germane to life to secure a better marriage that is free of divorce or broken homes.

The principle of *Ifa* divination for pre-marital counselling ensure a balance of harmony in the development of a sane society. The *Ifa* divination guiding principles for pre-marital counselling includes virtues like patience, sacrifice, endurance, hard work, perseverance, tolerance and courage. Each divination is unique to couples depending on what is highlighted during enquiries into the *Ifa* oracle. The work recommends a tap into the spirituality in *Ifa* divination to promote good marriages. It encourages a blend of modern pre-marital counselling with the African traditional counselling via the *Ifa* oracle. The African traditional counselling encompasses a range from attitudinal behavioural patterns of good character to spiritual understanding which explains the realm of the unknown.

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