

## **Genotype Phenomenon and Marriage Compatibility among Nigeria Pentecostals: An Ethical Response of Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries**

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**Abstract.** The issue of blood group and genotype compatibility has received various attentions of scholars in different fields of endeavour. Many Christians believe in the power of God to change blood group with the confession of the biblical statement that with God nothing is impossible (Luke 1:37). By this belief, many Christians have made choices in the area of marriage especially with regard to blood and genotype compatibility in a bid to putting God to test. However, this paper focuses on the ethical response of Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries to the issue of genotype as an essential aspect of marriage. The Church is now trying to re-orientate people on the need for checking on the compatibility of spouses before marriage. The issue of genotype compatibility is discussed under the ambit of utilitarian theory of ethics. This theory postulates that a right action is the one that produces much pleasure and less pain for those who are affected by such action. It places values on an action benefitting majority of population affected by the action than the pain that could be associated with that action. The research also seeks to use the observation and focus group discussion method in carrying this research as this provides a wide range of information on subject matter. The response

of the Church to genotype compatibility of spouse and their intervention by means of carrying out the medical examination by themselves have also helped in sensitizing the members on the essence of checking their compatibility in order to reduce the number of children born with ‘SS’ genotypes and also reduce other social and economic problems tied to taking wrong genotype and blood compatibility in marriage.

**Keywords:** Genotype, marriage compatibility, Nigerian Pentecostals, Ethics, Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries

### **1. Introduction**

Before the advent of modern medicine, there was high mortality and infant death rates, as a result of ignorance. People referred to this as “abikus” born to die. All these happened because there was no knowledge of blood group or genotype. People that got married as at this time, irrespective of their genetic makeup should not be blamed for their ignorance. But with the advent of medicine, biological explanations are now being made on the causes of infant death rates, this led to the discovery of sickle cell in Africa and in Nigeria in particular. Nigeria has the largest

population in Africa with one in every six Africans being Nigeria. Nigeria therefore is strategically important (Jegede).

There have been recently many write-ups on the issue of genotype and blood compatibility due to high rate of infant mortality. However, the Church is taking it upon herself as well as social and public health workers on the need to sensitize the general public on the importance of genotype and blood group. The issue of genotype compatibility is one that has received lots of attention from scholars from the field of science, arts, social science, gender studies to mention a few. These scholars have viewed the subject matter from their different perspectives, however, this paper intends to give an ethicist response to the teachings of Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries on issues relating to genotype compatibility. It is in this light that the issue of genotype compatibility as regards marriage and child birth will be reviewed. Data will be collected from oral interview respondents and also data obtained on issues bothering on genotype and its compatibility were analyzed within the theory of utilitarianism.

## 2. Theoretical framework

This paper seeks to implore the use of utilitarian theory of ethical approach which considers the best action as one that maximizes utility that is, all pleasure that results from an action, minus the suffering of anyone involved in the action. It places values on an action benefitting majority of population affected by the action than the pain that could be associated with that action (Ayantayo). In other word, an action is right or wrong according to the result it produces especially as such result affects individual, group of individual and society at large positively. This shows that every action is consequential and this has tendency to affect

directly or indirectly, overtly or covertly and consciously or unconsciously the person who performed the action, the person to whom it is directed at and the environment or society where the action in question is performed

## 3. A Retrospect on genotype and genotype compatibility

The term genotype can refer to an organism's entire genetic makeup, not just its alleles for as single genetic locus. Genotype simply refers to hemoglobin gene constituents (Neil, Jane and Lisa ). Genes are always in pairs and overall expression depends whether dominant, recessive or Xlinked. So there is no problem when one of the genes is abnormal e.g. AS, AC. This is called a carrier state (sickle cell trait) only when the two are abnormal that there is a great problem.

There are four genotypes in humans are AA, AS, AC and SS. The AC genotype is not so common and popular unlike the other three.

### Possible Outcome of different genetic combination

AA+AA= AA, AA, AA, AA  
 AA+AS= AA, AS, AA, AS  
 AA+SS= AS, AS, AS, AS  
 AA+AC= AA, AA, AA, AC  
 AS+AS= AA, AS, AS, SS  
 AS+SS= AS, SS. SS, SS  
 AS+AC= AA, AC, AS, SS  
 SS+SS= SS, SS, SS, SS  
 AC+SS= AS, AS, SS, SS  
 AC+AC= AA, AC, AC, SS

## 4. A brief background of Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries (MFM)

The Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries (MFM) is a Pentecostal denomination founded in 1989, at

Yaba, Lagos State, Nigeria, by Dr. Daniel Kolawole Olukoya at a prayer meeting in his living room. MFM has Churches in several English-speaking and non-English speaking countries. A lot of publications mainly on deliverance has been credited to the founder, especially the popular prayer book known as the Prayer Bible.

The prayer group purchased a large site at an abandoned slum near the University of Lagos, and converted it into the International Headquarters of the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries of which Olukoya is the General Overseer. The first service there was on April 24, 1994. At the new location, worshippers and those seeking help keep coming leading to a very large congregation. This situation posed a challenge of crowd, growth and expansion management to the leadership of the church. Thus, MFM created a network of branches in every state capital, local government headquarters, senatorial district and localities.

Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries is committed to the Revival of Apostolic Signs, Holy Ghost fireworks and the unlimited demonstration of the power of God to deliver to the uttermost. Absolute holiness within and without as the greatest spiritual insecticide and a pre-requisite for Heaven is taught openly. MFM members describe themselves as "a do-it-yourself gospel ministry, where your hands are trained to wage war and your fingers to do battle." This militant tone is reflected throughout the teachings of MFM, where it calls upon members to become aggressive Christians (<http://www.mountainoffire.org/about>).

The organizational structure of the Church includes the following positions, the General overseer, AGO(s) (Assistant General

overseer) which are about four in numbers, they specialize in administrative, training and research, recruitment and accounting and finance, the Senior Regional overseer (SRO), Regional overseer (RO), the Pastors and zonal Pastors, Administrators and various Heads of Departments and then the workers and general congregation of the Church.

All women are required to wear skirts and head covers. Prayers tend to be repetitions of faith-based claims, spiritual decrees and commanding prayers often directly from Scriptures and proclaim that safety lies within Jesus Christ. Although prayers tend to be aggressive, it is noteworthy that the church preaches against resorting to physical violence, typically alluding to Paul's teachings on Christian warfare.

##### **5. The leading role of Mountain of fire and Miracles Ministries on the issue of genotype compatibility**

The teachings and doctrines of Mountain of Fire and Miracles are expressly spelt out on her mission and vision statement. Dr. D.K Olukoya the General Overseer of the ministries have written over 300 books on spiritual warfare and has several academic publications on molecular genetics. In examining the subject of genotype and genotype compatibility in more details, Olukoya in his book titled "**34 laws of courtship**" gave an outline of 34 laws in which couples-to-be must ask themselves and answer rightly before entering into marriage. Law 27 "visit the hospital and carry out medical analyses" which relates to the subject of this paper states:

*"This is another important part of the preparation towards marriage. You should go for tests to know your blood group, genotype, HIV status, fertility etc. it is pertinent that both you and your partner know your status on all these issues. For*

*example, in the past, a lot of couples went through untold agony due to ignorance about genotype. You had two people with genotype AS (carriers of sickle-shaped red blood cells) getting married and they began to have children with genotype SS (sickle cell anaemia victims). For many of them, they went through a lot of pains to bring up these children only to have them die. Since medical science has been able to discover this, there is no need for you to suffer foolishly in the name of love. If for example, both of you are carriers, it is better to pray until that genotype is changed before getting married. It is true that with God, all things are possible, but in this case, it is not advisable that you proceed with marriage without seeing a confirmed change in genotype. Unless God specifically assures you to go on; ..... Don't allow blind love to push you into foolishness. This will prevent you from having unnecessary headache in marriage” (Olukoya).*

“By this he means that AS must not marry AS because of the crisis with giving birth to children with SS. He further emphasized that should there be any claim of an incompatible partner hearing from God, then the genotype must be changed first before they proceed to marry. Many Christians hide under the belief that God can do all things and that with God nothing is impossible. It is on this premise that this paper seeks to implore the theory of utilitarianism in ethic to assert this claim of the Church.

This paper seeks to implore the use of utilitarian theory of ethical approach which considers the best action as one that maximizes utility that is, all pleasure that results from an action, minus the suffering of anyone involved in the action. It places values on an action benefitting majority of population affected by the action than the pain that could be associated with that

action. Therefore, this denotes that it is not all actions, steps or decisions that are all good or all bad depending on how it affects the majority in the society and the consequence of such action or decision. It is important to note that in the ethical evaluation of an action or decision, certain consideration must be bore in mind in other to evaluate the result in which is derived from such action. As an evaluator, there is a need to consider and be able to give a standard answer to the following moral question when trying to evaluate a moral problem. These include: who is the performer of the action? Which action was performed? When was the action performed? What is the motive or reason behind the performance of such action? To whom was the action performed? How does the action affect the performer of the action? How does the action affect the person to whom it is directed? How does the action affect the society or environment where it is performed and to also know determines the judgment of moral assessor of the action in question.

The fact is that every action performed by a person at one time or the other has tendency to affect directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously the person who performed the action, the person to whom it is directed at and the environment or society where the action in question is performed. It is however, on this premise that this paper seeks to use this ethical theory in evaluating the above assertion of Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries. The issue of genotype falls under the ambit of being consequential to three sets of being, firstly, the couples, secondly, the child who is the victim and then the society which comprises of extended family and relatives, friends, health care providers, the government and other institution at large who happens to be at the receiving end.

When a man or woman whose genotype is AS or SS marries another partner whose Genotype is also AS or SS, there is usually the probability that they will give birth to a child that would be a carrier of SS irrespective if he or she is the only child or there are more children. This is not to say that children who are carrier of sickle cells are not from God, but it is believed that the presence of SS (sickle cell) in the blood shortens the life span of an individual. Since God is the giver of children, it is possible such parent could be fortunate to have just one child in their life time, therefore, what becomes of the future of such marriage when the only child is SS. Kunhiyop in his work asserts that in Western societies the procreative purpose of marriage is not as important as companionship and sexual fulfillment. Thus, Westerners tend not to understand Africans' urgent need to have children. But for Africans, the lack of children leaves a void in the marriage union: the chief purpose of marriage is to provide opportunity for the unborn members of the family to spring forth. The person who fails, for various reasons, to have children, is one of the most miserable members of society (Kunhiyop).

Individuals with SCD have a shortened life expectancy (Quinn, Rogers and Buchanan). According to a research in the New England journal of medicine, among children and adults with sickle cell anemia (homozygous for sickle hemoglobin), the median age at death was 42 years for males and 48 years for females. Among those with sickle cell-hemoglobin C disease, the median age at death was 60 years for males and 68 years for females (The New England Journal of Medicine).

## **6. An Ethical response of Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries on Genotype Issues**

Going by the aforementioned, why then should partners take the risk of giving birth to children with "SS" genotype in the name of love or in a claim that God is leading them to go ahead with such marriage in order to endanger the lives of such children. We are not saying that it is not possible to hear from God, but the contention is how true is it that God is the one actually speaking. It is however, on this notion that Dr. D.K Olukoya holds that the partner should first pray for a change in the genotype before proceeding with the marriage plans. The bible is explicit on the scripture of true application of knowledge in Hosea 4:6, Proverbs 4:5-9, which can be gotten through reading and asking relevant questions.

More so, the birth of a SS child in the home can be very traumatic because of the different crises in which such child develops and hence this can hamper the joy of the family as both parents would not be at rest rather than attending to other life matters, they would be visiting the hospital frequently for medication and checkup in order to sustain the life of the victim. This also could affect the financial stability of the parents as much money will be spent for hospital bills, purchase of drugs among other expense which were supposed to be used for other family budget and expenditures in the home.

The child who is born with a genotype of SS is termed innocent as he or she is at the receiving end of the choice of decision taken by the parent. It is believed that one cannot determine to which family they should be born, hence it is an act of wickedness for a parent knowing that their genotype statue is

not compatible with their partner and still go ahead to marry and procreate, such child is left in the hands of fate and God to determine their survival.

In addition, we consider the emotional trauma in which such child would go through, he sees himself as inferior compared to his friends and colleague at work, school and in the society. More so, the health trauma is another one painful experience in which the child would likely suffer from. Sickle hemoglobin (Hgb S) causes a group of related blood disorders called sickle cell disease (SCD) (Quinn, Rogers and Buchanan). Sickle cell anaemia commonly affects growth, leading to low mean weight, low mean height and decreased height velocity (Akodu, Diaku-Akinwumi and Njokanma). Children with genotype of SS are prone to having bone pains and develop crises at interval which makes them not to compete healthily with their colleagues in school and at workplace because of health challenge which demands more time from them to attend to.

It is not an understatement to say that some of these children who are carriers of SS genotype maybe brilliant and also having a promising future in their career and academics, but might not be able to attain that maximum height because of their health condition. This is not to say, that children with SS genotype do not live long, but this ratio is on the average compared to children who are not born with the SS genotype. For example, according to a research in the Mediterranean Journal of Hematology and Infectious Disease, in Nigeria, Sickle cell anaemia accounted for 8.2% of all admissions and 24.6% of those who had severe anaemia in a study at the children's emergency ward, University College Hospital, Ibadan. This confirmed that sickle cell anaemia is an important cause of severe

anaemia and of hospital admissions (Akodu, Diaku-Akinwumi and Njokanma).

The choice of whom to marry also has immense effect on the society. The society here includes friends, extended family members, neighbours, colleague at work, Church members health workers, government to mention a few. Often times than not, children with this type of genotype also sometimes suffer and face the challenges of being pitied and sympathized by members of the society. Sometimes, they become burdens to their colleagues at work and in school because they are prone to crises at any given point in time. Sometimes, a person who is carrier of SS may be alienated from certain sensitive positions in life due to their health statue. They are also faced with stigmatization and discrimination from the society. For example, for some of them who could scale through the crisis to adulthood, finds it difficult to get a suitable life partner of their choice on time in life because the only available choice is for them to marry someone with the AA genotype. Africans thus value procreation far more than other aspects of marriage such as love, companionship and sexual pleasure (Kunhiyop:195).

It is as a result of these obstacles and dilemma, that the Church (MFM) and also among other African Pentecostal denominations (Anderson) deems it fit to educate her members on the need to take preventive measure and precaution on the choice of a partner with regards to genotype statue so as not to become victims of such circumstances. This measure has also brought about the need for medical examination test conducted by the Church herself at an assigned Laboratory of their choice, in other to confirm the authenticity of the compatibility of partners before proceeding further with the marriage plans.

On the other hand, the stand and decision of MFM is not to eradicate the visibility of the power of God to deliver and to save through the medium miracles, but as a precautionary measure. Although it has been recorded in the past of how many testified to a change in their genotype status from SS to AA or from HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) positive to HIV negative. However, this is not to put God to a test. It is better for there to be a change in the genotype before you get married to that fellow who you feel God is directing you to marry, as some conservative Christian has said that this would amount to testing God.

## 7. Conclusion

Going by the brief illustration of the term genotype and its compatibility, one could assert that scientifically, the consequence of any action taken in this regard is obviously spelt out irrespective of whether one is a liberal or a conservative Christian. The result of the action in which is inherent in couples with incompatible genotype trying to marry for any reason(s) best known to them is not for the majority good, including the partners who are the performer of the action, the child who is a carrier of SS (Sickle cell gene) and the society who suffers from such dilemma and loss of life. This could be termed as against the rule of sanctity of human life.

In summary, it is belief for Christians to put their trust and confidence in God, however, it will only be testing God for couples to know their genotype status as incompatible and still go ahead to marry and procreate in the name of God can do all things. What must be avoided should be avoided. Therefore, the submission of this paper lies in the fact that before marriage, partners should be aware of their genotype

compatibility as the society no longer provides an excuse for this ignorance. It is a common belief that what the society forbids, God also detests, according to the scriptures which holds that the time of ignorance God winked at (Acts 17:30 (The Holy Bible (King James Version)). Parents should check the genotype of their children during pregnancy and immediately after birth. This will help to know the health status of a child early enough for diagnosis, if need be and also, in other to prevent unplanned and unprecedented situations.

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