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Volume 1

Compiled and Edited by Greg Crofford & Linda Braaten

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

Welcome to the inaugural edition of the *Africa Journal of Wesleyan Theology*.

This volume presents the early fruit of the African Theological Think Tank of the Church of the Nazarene, a group of our key thinkers and writers. The Think Tank was established in 2011 under the leadership of Rev Mark Louw, former Regional Education Coordinator, to foster roundtable discussion among African Nazarene theologians with practical experience in front-line ministry. To-date, two week-long meetings addressed some of the most perplexing issues facing pastors in Africa.

These are not easy subjects, thus I would like to commend the members of the Think Tank for being bold in tackling the issues, even sensitive subjects, and for spending time in research, prayer, and dialogue in the formation of a solid biblical response in each paper.

It is my hope that, beyond the publication of these papers as part of the *Africa Journal of Wesleyan Theology*, they will also become tools that encourage intentional preaching and teaching on the critical subjects discussed, and that they will be used as resources for the development of disciples and leaders.

Rev. Filimao M. Chambo, D Litt et Phil
Regional Director for Africa

EDITOR'S NOTE

No effort, no matter how meticulous, can answer all questions. Readers should not consider these articles an official pronouncement of denominational policy. Rather, the papers are designed to graciously and intelligently advance a broader conversation among Wesleyan-Holiness churches in Africa. It is also hoped that they will provide a practical "road map" for pastors and lay leaders seeking to devise workable and biblically faithful solutions in the local church.

Volume 2 of the *Africa Journal of Wesleyan Theology* is scheduled for publication in March 2015. Those interested in contributing articles may write to the editor for guidelines at: rec@africanazarene.org. The deadline for article submissions is 1 September 2014.

ANCESTRAL CULT AND THE CHURCH IN AFRICA

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Introduction

Even after one hundred and fifty years of Christian missions in Africa, the ancestral cult is still a reality. This is not only the case among the un-churched but among Christians as well. A good number of African Christians pledge allegiance to both the ancestors and Christ. Some sympathetic critics hold that there is no such thing as the ancestral cult, but ancestral veneration, i.e. proper respect given to one's elders. This position cannot stand the evidence taken from various African communities, particularly those south of the Sahara. The ancestors occupy a place of prominence among the deities of Africa, and in some cases, they are the only ones that are invoked. The practice is against the Christian scriptures, tradition, reason, and experience. The African Christian must say no to the cult of the ancestors or anything that competes for the allegiance that rightly belongs to Christ.

This paper will look at who are the ancestors, their place among the African people, whether or not they are worshipped, and the Christian perspective on the subject of ancestor veneration. It will offer some recommendations for the African church. Particular attention will be given to the cult of the ancestors.

The Reality of the Ancestors

The *New Oxford American Dictionary* defines an ancestor as "a person, typically one more remote than a grandparent, from whom one is descended." The same dictionary goes on to define ancestral as "belonging to, inherited from, denoting an ancestor or ancestors." For our purposes, ancestral worship will be defined as engaging in worshipping and praying to one's relative who has died either in the distant past or recently.

Before we can look at the subject of worship, let us understand the reality of the ancestors in the African context. Johannes Triebel in his article *Living Together with the Ancestors: Ancestor Veneration in Africa a Challenge for Missiology* gives a story that presents the reality of the ancestors in a clear way:

> During 1980 in the district of Njombe, we met Rev Yudah Kiwovele who had just returned from study leave in Germany. In our discussions we asked how long he had been living in Njombe. He answered in a typical African way, saying for 400 years. We looked at him somehow confused. He explained his answer to us Europeans, who were not able to understand the African way of thinking: Yes, we have been living here for 400 years, we Kiwovele, that is, my family, my forefathers—and therefore also myself—we have been living here for 400. Here is my home because here are my ancestors' home.[1]

Even though this story was told in 1980, ancestor worship is still a reality among Africans today. Critics will say that the ancestral cult and its influence are rapidly waning due to the encroachment of westernization, urbanization, and modern forms of education. Undoubtedly these forms of modern life are bringing about great changes. But the reality is that the cult is alive in modern Africa in spite of forces against it. This is not only the case among traditionalists but also those who convert to Christianity and Islam. In a study done in April 2010 by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life entitled *Islam and Christianity in Sub Saharan Africa*, it was observed that:

> … sizable minorities (roughly 20% or more) in 12 countries say they possess traditional African sacred objects, such as shrines to ancestors, feathers, skins, skulls, skeletons, powder, carved figures or branches, spears, cutlasses or animal horns. Roughly one-third or more of the population in South Africa (32%), Senegal (35%) and Guinea Bissau (41%) says they possess such items. In most other countries, 15-30% of the population owns traditional sacred objects. Substantial minorities (roughly 20% or more) in many countries also say they participate in ceremonies or rituals to honour their

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[1] Johannes Triebel, "Living together with the ancestors: ancestor veneration in Africa as a challenge for missiology." *Missiology* 30, no. 2 (April 1, 2002): 187-197. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed September 21, 2011).

ancestors.[2]

What was shocking in this report was that "…traditional African religious beliefs and practices are common in predominantly Muslim countries, in countries with a more even mix of Christians and Muslims, and in predominantly Christian countries. These beliefs and practices are most prevalent in religiously mixed Tanzania (where 62% of the population ranks high on the scale)."[3]

Obgu Kalu – talking about the pervasiveness of ancestral spirits in Africa – quotes the Senegalese poet, Birago Diop, who observed that in Africa:

Those who are dead are never gone:
    they are there in the thickening shadow.

The dead are not under the earth:
    they are in the tree that rustles,
    they are in the wood that groans;

Those who are dead are never gone:
    they are in the breast of the woman,
    they are in the child who is wailing
    and in the firebrand that flames.

The dead are not under the earth:
    they are in the forest, they are in the house.[4]

It is clear from the evidence presented that ancestor worship is not a thing of yesteryears but is alive among contemporary African people. More disturbing is the fact that even among practicing Christians it is still a reality. This is the reason why this issue needs to be revisited in order to find lasting solutions.

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[2] Sandra Stencel, ed. *Islam and Christianity in Sub Saharan Africa* (Washington DC: Pew Research Center, 2010), 34 [cited 22 May 2011]. Online: http:// www.pewforum.org

[3] Stencel, *Islam and Christianity*, 34.

[4] Birago Diop, "The Dead are not dead," quoted in Ogbu U. Kalu "Ancestral Spirituality and Society in Africa," in *African Spirituality: Forms Meanings and Expressions* (ed. Jacob K. Olupona; New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000), 54.

Understanding the Ancestors in the African Context

The subject of ancestors in the African setting requires us to look at the African community. This is because ancestors are considered part of the African community. They have a say on what the living can and cannot do. Different names have been used to talk about ancestors. Some like John Mbiti prefer the term *Living Dead*[5] in talking about the same. Benezet Bujo holds the same position when he says "the dead are not really dead but are to be regarded rather as the 'living dead.' "[6] Mbiti says that "they are still part of their human families, and people have personal memories of them…the living dead are still 'people' they have not yet become 'things', 'spirits' or 'its'. They return to their human families from time to time, and share meals with them, however symbolically."[7] In some communities (i.e Shona of Zimbabwe and Shangani of Mozambique) when food falls on the ground when eating, it is believed that the ancestors have asked for it.

Even though most communities believe that the ancestors are not very far from them every day, there are times when they actually come or appear to the members of their family. This appearing has qualifications; ancestors will not appear if among the family members there is one who is not a member of the family. According to Mbiti, "When they appear, which is generally to the oldest members of the household, they are recognized by name as 'so and so'; they enquire about the family affairs, and may even warn of impending danger or rebuke those who have failed to follow their special instructions."[8]

The ancestors have a responsibility of being the guardians of morality in the community. They have earned this position due to the fact that they themselves are ancestors because they lived a good life. In the words of Bujo, they have lived a "virtuous life in accordance with certain norms which were issued and confirmed by a common ancestor and his successors."[9] According to Mbiti they "act as the invisible police of the families and communities."[10] Among the Akan of Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, for one to be an ancestor he must have been an elder, since ancestors they

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[5] John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd Edition (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1989), 81-82.
[6] Benezet Bujo, *The Ethical Dimension of Community* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa: 1998), 15.
[7] Mbiti, *African Religion*, 82.
[8] Mbiti, *African Religion*, 82.
[9] Bujo, *The Ethical Dimension*, 16.
[10] Mbiti, *African Religion*, 82.

function like eternal saints.[11] Alward Shorter says that ancestors were "men of integrity and worth, successful men who sired male children to continue the lineage. The living speak[s] of them in vivid detail, as examples they are called upon to follow."[12] The primary reason most Africans will not do something immoral is because of the belief that the ancestors are watching, they are known to see what other members of the community cannot see.

Ancestors also fulfil the function of being the intermediaries between humans and God. They are considered to be closer to God and also related to the people who are their children. In John Mbiti's understanding, "the living dead are bilingual: they speak the language of men, with whom they lived until 'recently'; and they speak the language of spirits and of God, to whom they are drawing nearer ontologically."[13] Mbiti goes on to say that "they are the closest links that men have with the spirit world."[14]

The question that needs to be answered is, Why is it that Africans hold on to their ancestors even when they convert to other religions like Christianity or Islam or even when they get a higher education and become 'urbanized'? Johannes Triebel captures the reason, noting:

> It is the responsibility of everyone to further and strengthen the life of one's own community. One has to take care that the stream of life will not be interrupted or ebbed. In order to fulfill this basic commandment of African ethics, one has to know about the origin of life, that is, the ancestors. They are the spring of the stream of life; they are the source of life. Only the ancestors can guarantee that life will continue, that the stream of life will not be interrupted. Therefore the relationship to the ancestors is important. Without the ancestors there is no life. Without the ancestors I would not exist; I would be a nothing. Therefore the dead are part of the family. Indeed, they are the foundation, the reason for our being. Only in relation to them will I be able to understand the present time. The relationship to the ancestors therefore influences the thinking, the life, and the behaviour of the living. This view finds its corresponding expression in ancestor veneration. Everyone who neglects the relationship to his or her

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[11] Antony Ephirim-Donkor, *African Spirituality: On Becoming Ancestors* (Asmara: African Word Press, 1997), 129.
[12] Aylward Shorter, "Conflicting attitudes to ancestor veneration in Africa," AFER 11, no. 1 (January 1, 1969): 27-37. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed September 21, 2011).
[13] Mbiti, *African Religion*, 82.
[14] Mbiti, *African Religion*, 83.

ancestors endangers his or her life, indeed the life of the whole community. The wrath of the ancestors can cause misfortune, illness, hunger, and death. It is therefore necessary to ensure their favour and benevolence towards the living and thus to preserve the stream of life.[15]

This captures the crux of Bantu Philosophy as taught by Placide Tempels in his *Bantu Philosophy.* Tempels argues that the main concern of the Bantu people is vital force or life force, what everyone does or does not do, has to enhance or continue life. The Ancestral belief is tied to promoting and continuing the family life.[16] When one fails to honour the ancestors, it is equivalent to placing the life of the family in danger. This could be the reason behind the continuing existence of the cult even among those who have converted to other religions.

This brings us to the idea of fear that goes with ancestor veneration. Ancestors in most societies are feared because of what they can do to the living. No one wants to be on their bad side, and when they are offended they retaliate not just to the person who has wronged them but everyone in the family. Triebel says "Living together with the ancestors means fear and hope at the same time".[17] In Mbiti's words "…the living dead are wanted and yet not wanted. If they have been improperly buried or were offended before they died, it is feared by the relatives or the offenders that the living-dead would take revenge".[18] Misfortune, sickness, or even death are ways in which the ancestors demonstrate their anger.[19] It is indeed a terrible thing to fall in the hands of angry ancestors. When ancestors are angered there is hope since they can be appeased by use of food and libations. Reconciliation with one's ancestors is a possibility for those who care to have harmony in the network of relationships.[20]

We have discussed the reality of ancestors in Africa. The African people saw the importance in placing emphasis on ancestors, since they were the guardians of morality. Anything we do that removes ancestors from the religious landscape of Africans, we need to have a proper replacement for them so that we safeguard the morals of the people. For Christian tradition Jesus is the one who can occupy the place of the ancestors, he is the one who

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[15] Triebel, "Living together with the ancestors," 189.
[16] See Placide Tempels, *La Philosophie bantoue* (Elizabethville, Congo: Lovania, 1945).
[17] Triebel, "Living together with the ancestors,"187.
[18] Mbiti, *African Religion*, 83.
[19] Triebel, "Living together with the ancestors," 189.
[20] Triebel,"Living together with the ancestors,"189.

is constantly watching his followers and therefore our moral example. However this is not to say that Jesus is our ancestor.

Do Africans Worship Their Ancestors?

This is a critical question for this paper: *Do Africans worship or simply give due respect to their ancestors?* This is a controversial subject among African scholars. Some theologians are of the opinion that there is worship that is due only to God and respect that is due to the ancestors.[21] Jomo Kenyatta in his book *Facing Mount Kenya* where he outlined the beliefs of his tribal community the Gikuyu of Central Kenya does not believe that the *Gikuyu* worship their ancestors. He preferred to use the term "communion with ancestors" instead of ancestor worship.[22] Kenyatta makes the same claim not only in connection with the *Gikuyu* but also the *Maasai* and the *Wakamba* of Kenya. Concerning these communities he categorically states that they have different ceremonies of communing with the ancestors' spirits from those of the Supreme Being.[23] Kenyatta concludes "the relation between [the] living and the dead, established in the manner described can hardly be called a worship or prayer but only communion between [the] living and [the] dead".[24]

Other theologians who hold the position that ancestor veneration is not the same as worship that is given to God believe that "ancestor veneration is not a religious act but just an expression of social behaviour."[25] It is believed that the family is the root of ancestor veneration and in the family the parents and grandparents are shown respect. The respect due to them does not end when they die; they are still considered members of the community. This way ancestor veneration is seen as an extension of family relationships.[26] This position is best represented by Nigerian theologian Bolaji Idowu:

> Certainly, the cults of the ancestors do not constitute African traditional religion; and it is a gross error to equate them with religion. The proper meaning of the ancestral cults derives from the

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[21] Jean-Marc Ela, Bolaji Idowu, and Jomo Kenyatta are some of those who believe that worship for God and ancestors are different realities.
[22] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya: The Traditional Life of the Kikuyu* (Nairobi: Kenway Publications, 1978) 265.
[23] Kenyatta, *Facing Mount*, 266.
[24] Kenyatta, *Facing Mount*, 268.
[25] Triebel, "Living together with the ancestors," 192.
[26] Triebel, "Living together with the ancestors," 192.

belief of Africans that death does not write "finish" to life, that the family or community life of this earth has not only become extended into the life beyond in consequence of the "death" of the ancestors. Thus the cults are a means of communion and communication between those who are living on earth and those who have gone to live in the spirit world of the ancestors.[27]

Triebel, quoting Jean-Marc Ela, observes that "…the offerings given to the ancestors are 'signs of respect,' 'symbols of the continuity of family' and 'simply a command of the love of children' towards their parents. They are 'only an anthropological reality' and not related to the religion at all."[28] These scholars make a distinction between veneration and worship. As regards ancestors they hold that it is veneration or 'honouring of the ancestors" to use Triebel's phrase.[29]

The problem with this view is that it fails to take into consideration the fact that ancestors as we have already mentioned are sort of intermediaries between humans and God. In some communities, there are no prayers that are said to God except those said to the ancestors. This is in line with the African understanding of protocol, i.e. one has to communicate to those who are close to them and those who are close will communicate with those closest to them yet higher. If we take this view seriously then what we have are prayers to ancestors and even worship. Pongweni in his article on The *Chimurenga* (War of Liberation) Songs of the Zimbabwe War of Liberation gives an example of a prayer to ancestral spirits:

> Our Guardian Spirit We Pray to Protect them [the fighting faces] our Guardian Spirit we pray to you to protect them. Oh *Takawira*, our Guardian Spirit! Protect us as we fight our way back to Zimbabwe. Our Guardian Spirits we Pray to you to please watch over us…[30]

Ancestral Spirits are even referred to as angels:

> We cry to you *Nehanda* Our Guardian angel, Yes you are that to us (x2). Please guide our steps in this struggle until we return to a liberated Zimbabwe. We appeal to you too *Chaminuka* You are our

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[27] Bolaji E. Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (London: SCM Press, 1972), 186.
[28] Triebel, "Living together with the ancestors," 192.
[29] Triebel, "Living together with the ancestors," 192.
[30] A.J.C Pongweni, *Songs That Won the Liberation War* (Harare: College Press, 1982), 51-53.

Ancestral Sprit (x2) guard and protect our cadres in The field, their victory will pave the way to our journey home. ….Please protect them until we all return safely to Zimbabwe (x2). We appeal to you our titular Spirit. We depend on you entirely![31]

There is no doubt that this was an important prayer for the people of Zimbabwe in their struggle against colonial power. This prayer is not telling the ancestors to tell God but the ancestors to do something to protect their children. It is clear that an invocation to God is missing in this prayer. The last statement of the prayer says it all: "we depend on you entirely." For the one you depend on, the only proper response is worship.

Among the Akans the dirges done during the funeral of an elder indicates that prayers are not only offered to ancestors who are long gone but even ancestors in the making.

"Bestow your blessings upon us, and protect us."
"Send us money; we need money to defray your expenses."
"Repay all who caused you harm, and are responsible for your death."
"Go and prepare a place for us."[32]

It is very clear in this prayer that the Akans believe that the dead, the ancestors in the making, possess power that they did not have while here on earth. There is no forgiveness in this prayer as harm is repaid with harm. The last dirge is "Go and prepare a place for us." This sounds like the words of Jesus in the gospel of John when he said that he would go to prepare a place for us (John 14:3a). This is a prayer, and the expectations are that the one to whom it is addressed has what it takes to do what is being requested.

The ancestral cult among the Akans and other African people groups involves the pouring of libations on to the ground or earth. These libations are drinks for the ancestors.[33] I have personally observed people in my village pour alcohol on the ground for the ancestors before drinking it. Among the Shonas of Zimbabwe, during a post burial ceremony for bringing the dead spirit home called *Kurova Guva* (literally, "to beat the grave"), alcohol is poured on the grave and that is considered to be for the ancestors.

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[31] Pongweni, *Song that Won*, 51-53.
[32] Donkor, *African Spirituality,* 133.
[33] Donkor, *African Spirituality, 138.*

Johannes Triebel rightly identifies the other issue that the first position does not take into consideration which is the fear that goes with cult.[34] If ancestors are relatives, or elders to whom Africans are showing respect, then why fear them? It would make sense if they feared God and the ancestors would help to calm God's anger towards their people. But it's the other way around - African people fear ancestors more than they fear God. It is believed that ancestors are "immortal and endowed with omniscience and ubiquity."[35] Even someone like Jomo Kenyatta who does not believe that Africans worship their ancestors does agree when he says "that the Spirits of the dead, like living human beings, can be pleased or displeased by the behaviour of an individual or a family group, or an age group."[36] He also agrees that people live in fear of these ancestors.

Theo Sundermeier believes that the cult of the ancestors is "really the central aspect, the centre of African Religion."[37] Ogbu Kalu rightly observes that "…the reality of the dead-among-the-living attracts so much religious devotion that in many African societies the ancestors occupy more devotional attention than God/Supreme Being. In some communities, no cultic attention is paid to the divinities; in others the divinities are scions of the ancestral spirits for prediction and control of space-time events."[38]

There is nothing wrong with showing respect to those who have departed and African can continue to honour and draw inspiration from their fathers. This is not unique to Africa since many people from around the world will visit the graves of their relatives and sometimes have a picnic there. However when worship is given to one's ancestors, it becomes worship that is misdirected. It is clear from the evidence presented that the issue here is not just showing respect to one's relatives but worship of one's ancestors, rightly called an ancestral cult.

Scripture and Christian Tradition on Ancestral Worship

Ancestor worship is not compatible with the biblical faith. If the cult of the ancestors is indeed the centre of African Religion, it is contrary to the worship of *YHWH* the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Triebel rightly observes: "Ancestor worship does not fit with worshipping the one God.

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[34] Triebel, "Living together with the ancestors," 192.
[35] Donkor, *African Spirituality,* 139.
[36] Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya,* 266.
[37] Theo Sundermeier, *Wir aber suchte Gemeinschaft: Kirchwedung und Kirchentrennung in* Triebel, "Living together…", 193.
[38] Kalu, "Ancestral Spirituality," 54.

Every form of ancestor cult is an offense again the first commandment: 'You shall have no other gods before me' from whom you expect help, life and wellbeing. The ancestor cult is therefore mainly a religious practice as it shows what I depend on in my life and from where I expect help and protection."[39]

If indeed ancestors served the function of mediating between their children and God, now Christians have no need for such mediation. The Bible is clear when it says that Christ is the only mediator between God and humanity in Paul's words to Timothy: "For there is one God and one mediator between God and human beings, Christ Jesus, himself human…" (1 Timothy 2:5, TNIV). The author of Hebrews emphasizes Christ's mediatory role when he says: "For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance--now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant" (Hebrews 9:15 NIV). For Christians to go through another person or to pray through another person is a mockery of the work Christ accomplished for humanity. In Yusufu Turaki's words, "All the 'intermediaries' of African theology or of any other religion or culture are inferior to the person and work of Christ. He is the superior mediator by virtue of this deity and his work of redemption. And just as he fulfilled, transformed and supplanted the Jewish religious system, so he has fulfilled, transformed and supplanted the ancestral cult and traditional religions of Africa."[40]

The Bible is also very clear on the subject of consulting with the dead. Ancestors are people who have died, and to invoke them is consulting with the dead. Two Scripture passages that address this subject are Leviticus 19:31 and 20:27. The author of Deuteronomy declares:

> Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD, and because of these detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you. You must be blameless before the LORD your God (Deut. 18:10-13 NIV).

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[39] Triebel, "Living together with the ancestors," 193.
[40] Yusufu Turaki, "The Role of the Ancestors" in African Bible Commentary (ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo: Nairobi: Word Alive Publishers, 2006) 480.

The New Testament makes it clear that the Holy Spirit is our teacher and counsellor. Whatever we need to know, the Spirit of God is in us to give guidance. The Gospel of John affirms: "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come" (John 16:13 NIV). The job of the ancestors is being carried out by one who is more qualified and hence we just have to let them rest. Yet we also affirm the value of remembering one's ancestors—the living can indeed learn vital life lessons from those who have gone before us. These can indeed form the great cloud of witness the author of Hebrews talks about.

A look at Christian tradition reveals that Christians have always been opposed to anything or anyone who claims the place that only belongs to Christ. The early church refused to worship the emperor because Christ is the only Lord and not Caesar. Many of them chose death rather than to bow before the emperor or any pagan gods of the Roman pantheon. The Christian understanding of communion of saints is the closest we get to the idea of ancestral worship. There is indeed no opposition between the African concept of community in its inclusion of those who are dead and the idea of communion of saints-the living and the dead are part of the church of Jesus Christ. Even though the early missionaries who came to Africa rightly rejected the practice of ancestral worship as idolatry[41] they did it without taking time to understand the practice.

Reason and Experience on Ancestral Worship

Here we will seek to answer the question: *What does reason and human experience tell us about ancestral worship?* From an African perspective it is understood that those who lived a good life on earth join the Spirits when they die and hence are close to God. It is on this basis that they act as intermediaries between humans and God. In an African worldview, this logic makes sense. However this way of thinking is based on a faulty understanding of the afterlife; one does not cease being a human being when they die. Simply because one has died does not make them any better than the rest of us. In fact they are still in the same predicament as all of humanity. Ancestral worship does not stand the test of reason; it is a superstitious belief system that needs to be abandoned by all. In some communities food is left under certain trees so that the ancestors can help

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[41] Aylward Shorter, "Conflicting attitudes to ancestor veneration in Africa." AFER 11, no. 1 (January 1, 1969): 27-37. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed September 21, 2011).

themselves with it, yet the food is eaten by wild animals with the belief that the ancestors come in the form of these animals. This practice is also very costly since the ancestral cult requires the adherents to offer sacrifices— these sacrifices are mostly animals which could help the family members. It is reasonable to learn from those who have gone before us rather than to pray to them.

Human experience tells us that the practice of ancestor worship is deeply ingrained in the lives of the African people. After more than a hundred years of Christian missions in Africa, the practice is still common. African people show fear for the dead; this is often shown by the way eulogies are done in most African funerals. Even when one was an evil person, good things will still be said about them. This makes it difficult to do away with ancestral worship since most people fear their ancestors and they do not desire to offend them by not worshipping them. Triebel rightly concluded: "Africans, whether Christian or not, still believe in ancestors. Living together with ancestors is part of their African identity. If they would ignore that belief, they would no longer be Africans."[42]

The other side of our experience of ancestral worship is that there are many African Christians who have abandoned the practice altogether. They have committed their lives to Christ and to him alone. Anything that demands the devotion due to Christ is rejected. They are often ostracized by their family members for refusal to participate in ceremonies that worship ancestors or to fund these ceremonies. Even though it is difficult to stop the practice—we do have Africans who have done it.

The experience of the ancestral cult is very real for most Africans. The cult is not an abstract idea. When an ancestor appears they speak in a way that their children have no doubt about the fact that their parent is here with them. In most cases ancestors will choose a member of the family who becomes the spokesperson of the ancestors. This person is considered special since they have been chosen to speak on behalf of the ancestors. In many cases these people speak different from the normal way and this is the way family members differentiate between the messenger and the ancestors. Many times when these persons come to Christ and they are prayed for, evil spirits have to be cast out of them. These chosen persons are actually possessed by evil spirits; these spirits are the ones that use them this way. This then becomes a case of Satan using the good (moral aspect of the cult)

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[42] Triebel, "Living together with the ancestors," 194.

of the African culture for his own ends.

Mashangu Maluleka[43] tells a story of a gentleman who operated a taxi and was involved in an accident and died. His wife—for years could not sleep. She believed that her husband came back every day and this was verified by the neighbours. When the dead person would appear his dog would jump; he liked a certain cigarette and people would smell that cigarette; his favourite chair would rock and many other strange occurrences would take place. Pastors and church members visited her and prayed for her and she accepted Christ and was delivered. All these strange happenings suddenly stopped.[44] This story and others clearly demonstrate a case where Satan had found a way to disturb and terrorize God's people. When homage is paid to the dead person, it becomes a case of misdirected worship—and it is Satan disguised as our dead relatives—then we have Satanism going on in the name of homage to the ancestors.

Christian Believers and Ancestral Worship

When one becomes a Christian, there needs to be a realization that Christ is the Lord of their life. Faith in Christ requires commitment to Him alone and not any other being dead or alive. All prayers must be done through Jesus Christ who is seated at the right hand of the Father. The sacrifice of Christ was done once and for all; African believers need not offer sacrifices as well as libations.

One can still remember his or her ancestors, those who have gone before. It is not wrong to remember one's departed relatives. Just like in the letter to the Hebrews, Christians are to be inspired by those who have lived faithfully; African Christians can look at their ancestors as role models on how to live ethically. The fear we once had for the ancestors ought to be the fear we have for God who alone is all knowing and all present, watching over us and our affairs.

African Christians ought not to participate in the ancestral cult. It has been reported and I have observed Christians who will not attend where these practices are done, but they will go ahead and fund the ceremonies. Funding the ancestral cult is the same as participating fully in the cult. Usually the ancestors in most communities will be told about those who

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[43] Rev Mashangu H. Maluleka is the Principal of the Nazarene Theological College in Muldersdrift, South Africa.
[44] Mashangu, Maluleka. 2012. Interview by Gift Mtukwa, 10 September.

were not able to come but have sent their resources, and even those ancestors are requested to remember them. There is indeed pressure from family for young Christians to give in, but through prayer and support from the church family one can stand firm and oppose this practice.

The Church and Ancestral Cult

The church of Jesus Christ has a responsibility to ensure the unadulterated worship of the Triune God. It is important for church leaders to understand the variations of the ancestral cult in the context were they do ministry. Equipped with knowledge of the cult, they also need to study the Bible and contextualize its message. Kalu's observation is important: "There is a feeling that the (Christian) message has not developed enduring roots and that the new covenant has not overthrown the old and that Christian spirituality has not supplanted the primal. The resilience, persistence, or endurance of the traditional covenants is palpable."[45] This will help to prevent the mixing of elements of African traditional religions and Christianity, what is commonly known as syncretism. As we have seen in this paper, there is evidence that a considerable number of African Christians engage in the ancestral cult.

The subject ought to be addressed in Bible studies rather than in sermons alone, the positive side of the cult being affirmed, especially the ethical aspect. According to Kofi Opoku, "Ancestral beliefs, therefore, represent a powerful source of moral sanction for they affirm the values upon which society is based."[46] In teaching morals Christian teachers need to be aware of this dynamic and use it to their advantage. Since it is believed that the goal of every African is to become an ancestor, reflections on the Christian doctrine of eschatology will prove to be helpful in this regard.

Recommendations for the Church in Africa

The church needs to realize that the primal religions of Africa are an important aspect of life for Africans. Africans have subscribed to them since time immemorial and it will not be easy to just drop them. It will take time and a lot of teaching on the part of the church. It is recommended that:

- The church should discuss the subject of the ancestors and their place in the believer's life more often. We should not assume this

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[45] Kalu, "Ancestral Spirituality," 60.
[46] Kofi A. Opoku, *West African Religion* (Accra: FEP, 1978), 39.

is not an issue and ignore it.
- The church should listen and learn the beliefs of the host culture before dismissing them. There needs to be dialogue between the Christian message and the host culture.
- Effective discipleship must be done. Discipleship must focus on helping the Christian know that Christ is sufficient. The issue of fear which seems to be at the centre of the cult ought to be addressed. *Christus Victor* (Christ the Victor who defeats all our enemies) motifs must be used.
- The gospels must be presented as the way for experiencing real life. Issues of life must be made central in our preaching of the gospel.
- Support for individual Christians who are facing pressure from family to participate in the cult must be given.

Conclusion

The ancestral cult is a reality in Africa today. A good number of African Christians worship both the ancestors and the Triune God. The African church needs to address this problem as a matter of urgency. The cult of the ancestor cannot continue to exist among those who have embraced the gospel, those who affirm that "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12, TNIV). All other allegiances must be set aside by those who have decided to follow Jesus. The Christian must say "no" in categorical terms to the ancestral cult.

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A QUEST FOR AN AFRICAN CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

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Introduction

The twenty-first century African Christian can best be defined as a citizen of at least three worlds: the traditional African, the Western, and the church world. In most cases, he or she is forced to fulfil the expectations of all three worlds before being declared "married." Unlike a Western counterpart who has one wedding ceremony, an African Christian must get married three times before being considered married and before they are allowed to enjoy the benefits of their marital status.

This paper will attempt to deal with the crisis presented by the twenty-first century conception of Christian marriage in Africa, including the frustrations, confusion, uncertainties, and unfairness it presents to young African Christians. It will also present possible solutions.

An African Christian who wants to get married should first fulfil all the traditional expectations to be declared married by the parents and elders. Next, they should meet the legal requirements to be considered married by their government. Finally, the Christian must go to the church to be blessed by the Reverend and pronounced husband and wife. The crucial question behind this paper is at what stage of this marital marathon did God consider them married? Is it at the time when the parents and elders gave them their blessing, or when the magistrate issued them with a marriage certificate? Or rather when the church Reverend prayed for them and joined them as husband and wife? Maybe a better question could be to ask: *Who has the authority to declare people married or to pronounce them husband and wife*?

I am fully aware that there are many different tribes and cultures in Africa and therefore it will not be possible to come up with one particular practice that will incorporate all Africans. However, I think that there are principles that can be identified and applied to the majority of Africans. It is not necessarily uniformity that I am advocating but the practical incarnation

of the gospel without denying people their true identity. The intention for this paper is not to provide the answers for the questions surrounding the issue of Christian marriages in Africa, but to begin a dialogue on the matter.

My Marital Journey

In an attempt to provide the reader with an understanding of where this quest for an African Christian marriage comes from, I have chosen to share the story of my personal marital journey. In August 1981, my uncle and the rest of his delegation visited my in-laws to present the cow and the rest of the outstanding things needed for the African traditional wedding. I accompanied them, and at the end of that ceremony my in-laws considered their daughter married to me. I was traditionally married, meaning that I was free to take my wife home with her parents' blessing. A hand written certificate signed by elders from both families was issued to my delegation team and a copy was also given to my in-laws' delegation. My uncle requested that my in-laws keep my wife until the time when we would be ready for the church wedding.

In December 1981, my father escorts us to the magistrate's office for our civil marriage. Marriage vows are exchanged, the marriage register is signed, and the magistrate pronounces us husband and wife and issues us with a marriage certificate.

On 6 March 1982, three months after the civil marriage and seven months after the traditional marriage, only then could we afford a church wedding. The man of God prays for us and joins us as husband and wife. Now I can kiss the bride and only now can I take her home as my wife.

Our parents pronounced us married in August and about four months later the government through the magistrate pronounced us husband and wife, yet it was only in March of the following year – seven months after our parents considered us married – that the church Reverend blessed us and pronounced us "husband and wife."

So I repeat, *When was I married in the eyes of God?* At which stage of the process could I have slept with my wife without being considered to have engaged in premarital sex? It is impossible to answer that question until we provide a genuine answer to this question: *Who has the God-given authority to bless and declare a couple married*? Is it the parents, the magistrate, the church reverend, or all three?

If I were asked to label and classify the process of our marriage, it would probably be an African-civil-church marriage. This classification reflects the views of many African Christians who got married according to the expectations and teachings of the church just as we did. It will be misleading to assume that because the third part of my wedding took place in the church – with the church Reverend officiating and a sermon preached from the Bible – that this qualified the marriage to be classified as Christian. That in itself would be to suggest that the first part of my wedding which involved our parents' blessing was not Christian even if our parents were Christians and we also were Christians. What makes a marriage Christian?

Defining Key Words

African

This paper does not intend to provide a politically correct definition of what an "African" is. Rather, it gives a working definition of a Christian of African origin whose culture is influenced by the traditions and cultures of those who have originated from Africa, the majority who are black/brown African. No words better define the African I am referring to than those of former South African President Thabo Mbeki:

> I owe my being to the Khoi and the San whose desolate souls haunt the great expanses of the beautiful Cape – they who fell victim to the most merciless genocide our native land has ever seen, they who were the first to lose their lives in the struggle to defend our freedom and independence and they who, as a people, perished in the result.
>
> Today, as a country, we keep an audible silence about these ancestors of the generations that live, fearful to admit the horror of a former deed, seeking to obliterate from our memories a cruel occurrence which, in its remembering, should teach us not and never to be inhuman again.
>
> I am formed of the migrants who left Europe to find a new home in our native land. Whatever their own actions, they remain still, part of me.
>
> In my veins courses the blood of the Malay slaves who came from the East. Their proud dignity informs my

bearing, their culture a part of my essence. The stripes they bore on their bodies from the lash of the slave master are a reminder embossed on my consciousness of what should not be done.

I am the grandchild of the warrior men and women that Hintsa and Sekhukhune led, the patriots that Cetshwayo and Mphephu took to battle, the soldiers Moshoeshoe and Ngungunyane taught never to dishonor the cause of freedom.[1]

The true identity of the African to which this paper will refer – as you can deduce from the words quoted above – is influenced by western, eastern, and other different cultures borrowed from other African tribes. For our purposes, "African" will refer to all my brothers and sisters who have to fulfil some kind of African traditional ritual such as the bride's price for them to be considered married.

Christian

A second key word is "Christian." This word has come to mean a lot of things to different people; however, this paper will limit the definition to those who have made a conscience decision to attempt to live their lives under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, who seek to imitate his lifestyle as spelled out in the Holy Scriptures.

The best place to look for the meaning of "Christian" is to go back to Antioch, where the term originated. Acts 11:25-26 explains: "Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch, so for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. *The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch*."[2]

According to the *New International Bible Dictionary*, the word "Christian" is taken from the Greek word, *Christianos*, meaning an adherent

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[1] Excerpted from the "Statement of Deputy President TM Mbeki, on behalf of the ANC, on the occasion of the adoption by the Constitutional Assembly of The Republic of South Africa Constitution Bill 1996, 8 May 1996," n.p. [cited 14 November 2013]. Online: http://info.gov.za/ aboutgovt/ orders/new2002_mbeki.htm

[2] Italics added. All quotations are from the New International Version (Zondervan, 1984).

[3] See "Christian" in J.D. Douglas et al., *New International Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids,

of Christ.[3] If King Agrippa's understanding is anything to go by, then Christianity is to believe what the Apostle Paul was preaching or presenting as his defense to the court: "Then Agrippa said to Paul, 'Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?' " (Acts 26:28).

Marriage

A third key word is "marriage." The definition of marriage will vary according to different cultures and religions. The African definition will generally be understood to be the time when a young man and a young woman are allowed by their parents to live together as husband and wife according to the norms of their community. This act is commonly referred to as customary marriage.

On the other hand we have the civil definition of marriage. Civil marriage takes place when a man or a woman with the consent of the parents, if they are below age, exchange vows and sign a marriage register under the direction of the marriage officer and at least two witnesses.

John Stott defines marriage as informed by the Genesis 2 account. He quotes the words of Genesis 2:24 – "That is why a man leaves his father and his mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh." Stott notes: "From this we may deduce that marriage exists in God's sight when a man leaves his parents, with a view not merely to living apart from them but to 'cleaving' to his wife, and becomes one flesh with her."[4] J.D. Douglas, on the other hand, defines marriage as "formalization and sanctification of the union of man and woman for the procreation of children."[5]

Traditional African Perspective of Marriage

Because of the size of the African continent and the different cultural practices it is impossible to find a common marital practice that will represent everyone. However, the example given below represents the majority of African tribes even though with slight differences in minor details:

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[3]See "Christian" in J.D. Douglas et al., *New International Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1987); hereafter *NIBD*.
[4] John Stott, *Issues Facing Christianity Today* (Worcester: Billing & Sons, Ltd., 1990), 288.
[5] See "Marriage," in Douglas, *NIBD*, 624.

The first step in the wedding process is the first meeting involving both families where they investigate each other. At this occasion the groom's family donates some gifts to the bride's family, consisting mostly of cattle, yams or money. After this ceremony the bride comes to live with the groom and his family, and if that turns out to work out a wedding feast is held; after the ceremonial feast the bride is considered married to the groom and his family.[6]

John Mbiti echoes this description, noting about African marriage customs:

The custom of presenting a gift to the bride's people is practiced all over Africa, though in varying degrees. Different names are used to describe it, such as 'bride-wealth,' 'bride-gift,' 'bride-price,' dowry (wrongly in this case) and 'lobola'…the gift is in the form of cattle, money, foodstuffs and other articles.[7]

The following common practices seem to be what binds it all together. First of all, the involvement of both the groom and the bride's parents seems to be very central in the process. Secondly, there is some kind of exchange of gifts usually from the groom's family to the bride's family that comes in the form of a bride price. Thirdly, marriage arrangements have always been heterosexual, i.e. between a young man and a young lady. Lastly, sexual relationships are only allowed after marriage.

It is important to note that after the two families have met and agreed and the customary requirements are met, the couple is considered married by the two families. Is marriage a cultural affair or a religion issue? How should the church treat those who come to the faith married in this arrangement? Maybe the larger question is: Does God consider them married?

Marriage as Portrayed in the Bible

Bible scholars understand Genesis 2:18-25 as the initiation of the institution of marriage by God. It was God who saw that Adam needed a wife; God provided a wife by giving the woman to the man. That was the first and last time in the Bible that God became so personally and directly involved in arranging marriage.

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[6] "African Wedding Cultural Traditions," n.p. [cited 14 November 2013]. Online: http://africanmarriage.info.
[7] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Great Britain: Biddles Ltd., 1990), 137.

Reflecting on Genesis 2:18-25, the *New International Dictionary* of *the Bible* concludes regarding marriage:

> At its deepest level, marriage is a personal-sexual-spiritual companionship ordained and instituted by God. This interpretation of marriage rests upon the biblical experience of marriage in the light of the biblical faith in the God who is both Creator and Redeemer. This faith is affirmed, as far as marriage is concerned, in clear terms: 'A man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.'[8]

The story of Isaac's and Rebecca's marriage (Genesis 24) introduces some interesting trends, some of which are fascinatingly similar to African practice. First, we see that Abraham (the groom's father) and Bethuel (the bride's father) are key decision makers in this marriage. J.D. Douglas observes: "The father was responsible for finding a suitable bride for his son, and the wishes and feelings of the young people were largely irrelevant to this decision."[9]

Secondly, the role of the father falls under the role of the bigger father (God). The teaching of the Old Testament puts God at the centre of choosing one's life partner. A good example is both the prayer of Abraham's servant and the response of Laban and Bethuel (Gen. 24:42-44, 50). Abraham's servant prayed for God's intervention when he was searching for a wife for Isaac, and God guided the servant. Solomon in the book of Proverbs echoes the same belief when he said: "He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord" (Proverbs 18:22). Likewise, "Houses and wealth are inherited from parents, but a prudent wife is from the Lord" (Prov. 19:14).

Thirdly, Isaac's, Jacob's, and Moses' marriages among others reveal that – just as in Africa – the father gave the daughter away in marriage. The father seems to have played a similar role as that played by God in Genesis 2. It is very interesting to compare the words of the three fathers:

> Bethuel – "Here is Rebekah; take her and go, and let her become the wife of your master's son, as the Lord has directed" (Gen. 24:51).

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[8] *NIDB*, 286.
[9] *NIBD*, 624.

Laban – "So Laban brought together all the people of the place and gave a feast. But when evening came, he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and Jacob made love with her" (Gen. 29:22-23).

Reuel – "Moses agreed to stay with the man, who gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses in marriage. Zipporah gave birth to a son…" (Exodus 2:21-22a)

Both Jacob's and Moses' marital arrangements show that in the case where the groom's father or parents were not available to negotiate marriage arrangements they could represent themselves, but the parents of the bride will be involved (see Gen. 29 and Ex. 2). Alex Varughese observes: "Marriage was arranged by the groom or by the family. Marriage custom included the payment of the dowry by the groom or the family in the form of gold and silver or through labor (Gen. 24:52-53, 29:16-31).[10]

Fourthly, in all three cases the giving away a daughter to a young man in marriage is synonymous to giving them permission to sleep together. An example comes from Genesis 24:67 – "Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah, so she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death." Later is the account of Jacob, Leah, and Rachel: "…and Jacob made love to her…Jacob made love to Rachel also, and his love for Rachel was greater than his love for Leah" (Gen. 29:23, 30).

The fifth common aspect between marriages in the Bible and African practice is what is introduced by Laban when he was arranging for Jacob's and Leah's marriage in Genesis 29:22 – "So Laban brought together all the people of the place and gave a feast." The concept of feasting and the involvement of the broader community in the celebration is the theme that runs through the gospels in the teachings of Jesus. Think of the first wedding that Jesus attended in Cana of Galilee (John 2), the wedding banquet parable (Matthew 22) and the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25). Feasting and community involvement for the celebration was a common practice.

Marriage in Western Perspective

Studying the evolution of the institution of marriage is very interesting and helps us to understand the origin of some of the practices that

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[10]Alex Varughese, ed., *Discovering the Bible* (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press, 2006), 74.

we observe and treat as divine. We need to have a full understanding of such a background if we are going to be able to preserve the essence of marriage as God intended it to be, from the pollution and influence of sinful cultural practices. In the definition below, we begin to see the inclusion of the legal element in marriage, a Western building block brought into this institution:

> Marriage is the relationship between a man and a woman who have made a legal agreement to live together. When a man and woman marry, they become husband and wife. Marriage is also an important religious ceremony in many of the world's religions. [11]

The next step is to look at the contribution of both the church and the state toward continuing to shape the understanding and the celebration of marriage:

> As part of the Protestant Reformation, the role of recording marriages and setting the rules for marriage passed to the state, reflecting Martin Luther's view that marriage was a 'worldly thing.' By the 17th century, many of the Protestant European countries had a state involvement in marriage.[12]

The introduction of the church wedding with the priest now being the authority to declare people married and the concept of the two witnesses are some of the building blocks introduced by the church, and then spread into other cultures including African cultures through the missionary role of the church:

> In England, under the Anglican Church, marriage by consent and cohabitation was valid until the passage of Lord Hardwicke's Act in 1753. This act instituted certain requirements for marriage, including the performance of a religious ceremony observed by witnesses. As part of the Counter-Reformation, in 1563 the Council of Trent decreed that a Roman Catholic marriage would be recognized only if the marriage ceremony was officiated by a priest with two witnesses.[13]

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[11] World Book International, M Volume 13, 217

[12] "Marriage History – Time for Inquiry into the Marriage Act Itself." Online: http://www.celebrants.org.au/national-celebrant-emagazine/articles/2090

[13] "Common-Law Marriage." Online: http://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/Common-Law+Marriage

Even the South African Marriage Act testifies to the influence of the Lord Hardwicke's Act, it says: A marriage may be solemnized in a church, other building used for religious purposes, public office/private dwelling house with open doors and in the presence of the parties and at least two competent witnesses"[14]

Before 1837 only churches recorded birth, marriage, and death information in England (see England Church Records). In the early 1800s, Parliament recognized the need for accurate records for voting, planning, taxation, and defence purposes. Legislation was passed to create a civil registration of births, marriages, and deaths for England and Wales and, for registering the same for British subjects abroad. England and Wales registration began on 1 July 1837.[15] These laws weakened the roles of parents and church.

Moving back in time, a close look at the Greek and Roman marriage arrangements brings us to the conclusion that the set-up was very similar to that observed by most of the cultures of the world. Just as it was the case with the cultural practice in Bible times and the African practice, the role of the father was also found in ancient Greece:

> Ancient Greek marriage was seen as a fundamental social institution…a father arranged the most advantageous marriage for his son and then had a contract signed before witnesses. Shortly thereafter a wedding celebration was held and the young couple (who might never have met before) was escorted to bed.[16]

Part of the reason for the similarities in cultural practices on marital issues was the influence that cultures continued to have as nations were interacting with each other:

> Marriage in Western civilization is the product of the influence of the different historical civilizations which happened as a result of political and religious influences over the years. Marriage, as we know it in our Western civilization today, has a long history with

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[14] "The Marriage Act 25 of 1961." Online: http://Slamatlaw.co.za/Articles/ Marriage Act 1492011.pdf

[15] "England Civil Registration." Online:https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/England_Civil_Registration

[16] "History of Marriage in Western Civilization. " Webcache.googleusercontent.com/search html version of file http://www.teacherweb.com/NM/BosqueSchool/Cummints/HISTORY-OF-MARRIAGE-IN-WESTERN-CIVILIZATION.doc

roots in several ancient cultures, of which the Roman, Hebrew, and Germanic are the most important. Western marriage has further been shaped by the doctrines and policies of the medieval Christian church, the demands of the Protestant Reformation, and the social impact of the Industrial Revolution.[17]

The historical struggle for power between the state and the church has played a major role in shaping the western marriage as it is seen today. The major change that took place during that era resulted in what we could call the hijack of the institution from the family to either the state or the church at different times:

> The Protestant Reformation of the 16th century rejected the prevailing concept of marriage along with many other Catholic doctrines. Martin Luther declared marriage to be a 'worldly thing…that belongs to the realm of government,' and a similar opinion was expressed by Calvin. The English Puritans in the 17th century even passed an act of Parliament asserting 'marriage to be no sacrament' and soon thereafter made marriage purely secular. It was no longer to be performed by a minister, but by a justice of the peace…The Catholic Church, in response to the Protestant challenge, took its stand in the Council of Trent and, in 1563, confirmed its previous doctrines. Indeed, it was now demanded that all marriages take place before a priest and two witnesses…In most of Europe marriages continued to require a religious ceremony until the French revolution introduced the compulsory civil marriage. Germany followed suit in the 19th century when Bismarck diminished the influence of the Catholic Church. Eventually, marriage before some magistrate or government official became the only valid form of marriage in most of the Western world. Religious weddings were still permitted, but only after the civil ceremony had taken place.[18]

The bottom line is that while there are probably good arguments for the important roles played by both the church and the civil marriage, there is however no biblical ground to declare them as Christian and superior to customary marriage. The truth is that God accepted and blessed marriage long before the state and the church got involved and it will be naïve to think that in the 21st century God will not accept people as married because they did not tie the knot at the church or at the magistrate's office; and if that is

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[17] Cited 1 March 2014, online: www.akademediasrbija.com/index.php
[18] Cited 1 March, 2014, online: www.stdenishf.org/index.php/content/article/14

the case what then gives the church the authority not to accept customary marriages as valid marriages?

Marriage: The Christian Perspective

One of the difficult assignments is to answer the question: *What constitutes a Christian marriage*? The tendency has been to associate church weddings with the colour white, sermon, candles, and sometimes the sharing of Holy Communion with the pastor's blessing. All of this constitutes a "Christian" wedding. Unfortunately, such a narrow-minded understanding will imply that there was no Christian marriage until around the 16th century.

During the 2006 General Assembly of the Uniting Presbyterian Church, the following statement defining Christian marriage was adopted:

> The Executive Commission affirms that Christian marriage is defined within the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa as an ordained covenant that exists between one man and one woman under God for life, and holds this definition to be consistent with the authoritative rule of Scripture as well as the tradition of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.[19]

The union of a man and woman who are both Christians and committed to arrange their marital life according to the teachings of the Bible under the Lordship of Christ constitutes a Christian marriage, irrespective of whether the marriage is the result of the blessing of the parents, the pastor, or the magistrate.

The following are some of the basic biblical values that should characterize a Christian marriage:

1) A Christian marrying a fellow Christian (2 Corinthians 6:14);

2) Sexual purity (Hebrews 13:4);

3) Living according to instructions for Christian households (Ephesians 5:21-33).

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[19] "Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa Statement on Marriage," n.p. [cited 15 November 2013]. Online: http://www.upcsa.org.za/docs-docs/statement_on_marriage.pdf.

Crisis Facing the African Christian Marriage

The crisis facing the African Christian marriage is similar to the crisis facing the African rhino. It could be wiped out. Because of the failure to recognize traditional marriage as acceptable and complete in itself, both the church and governments might find themselves being used as instruments of colonization.

Marriages are a reflection of cultures and should be preserved and respected. It is wrong for the church or any institution to impose a different culture on any group and thus to steal their identity. The Great Commission is not about changing cultures but is about making Christ Lord of all cultures. We are sent to make disciples of all nations, not to make all nations Jewish or Western. The failure of the church to recognize the African marriage arrangements and find a way to purge unchristian elements in them is a big mistake that can hinder the acceptance of the gospel by Africans. Christianity should not be seen as a tool to destroy cultures and traditions but rather to enrich them. It is also becoming very difficult to give a clear direction and instruction to young people on this subject because they begin to see themselves treated differently than their counterparts from different cultures, a feeling that can encourage promiscuity under the cover of culture if clear answers are not provided.

The church in Africa is presented with many challenges resulting from the lack of clarity on this matter. I have been invited to sit at several church discipline hearings of different districts related to members who were alleged to have violated the law of God because they were sexually intimate before they were blessed at the church. The following are some of the issues raised by this problem.

Morality and church discipline

The Bible teaches that sex outside of wedlock is sin (Hebrews 13:4). It is difficult to guide our Christians to live up to the biblical expectations on sexual purity if we fail to provide a clear answer to this question: *At what point is an African Christian considered married in the eyes of God?* This is a question that forces us to spell out what we understand marriage to be.

Commercialised Lobola (Bride-Gift)

The practice of lobola (bride gift) was never meant to be a bride's price but a token of appreciation to the bride's parents. However, it is

currently open to commercial abuse. Many African Christian parents charge a lot of money for the bride-gift, depending upon the educational level their daughter might have attained, making it difficult for the groom to afford. It creates a temptation for greed on the part of the girl's parents. John Mbiti captures the true spirit of the traditional African bride-gift:

> The gift elevates her value and the marriage contract. The gift legalizes her value and the marriage contract under no circumstances is this custom a form of 'payment,' as outsiders have so often mistakenly said. African words for the practice of giving the marriage gift are, in most cases, different from words used in buying and selling something in the marketplace.[20]

There is a need to keep a healthy balance between the three pillars of an African marriage, namely, the economic, social, and religious pillars. The economic pillar especially needs to be protected against greed and selfish gain. Mbiti rightly notes: "Marriage is a complex affair with economic, social and religious aspects which often overlap so firmly that they cannot be separated from one another."[21]

Unchristian practices during the traditional wedding

Like with any other culture and customs, there will always be both good and bad practices that will surface during a marriage ceremony, hence the importance of the involvement of the church during the traditional wedding to influence the proceedings away from this wrong practice. John Mbiti observes: "There are as many customs of the wedding procedure as there are African peoples. In some societies the ceremony lasts many days and is full of rituals…There are other societies in which the boy takes the girl so that they can live together until she bears a child, and then the wedding rites are performed."[22] Another rite that is sometimes performed is the bridegroom sitting four times on his father's lap then four times on his mother's lap. This action is repeated by the bride but only in another house that has been prepared for the occasion.[23]

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[20] Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 137.
[21] Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 130.
[22] Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, 130.
[23] Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, 135.
[24] Cited 1 March 2014, online:
www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=397.

The Shangaans – the majority of which are found in the northern and eastern parts of South Africa and in Mozambique – have a practice called "Ku tlhavisa Vhakongwana," or slaughtering for the in-laws. During this ceremony, a goat will be slaughtered and the meat will be eaten in fellowship with the new in-laws. However, the main objective of the practice is to use the shedding of the blood to introduce the marriage to the ancestors. On the other hand, the Zulus of South Africa have a practice where the bride is taken by her father to the cow kraal (a place where traditionally the head of the family is buried) to ask for her release and blessings from ancestors.

Commercialised church weddings

Church weddings, like Christmas and other important events of the church, are highly commercialised. Wedding gowns, suits, wedding cakes, special cars, photographs, video recordings, a reception venue, catering and venue decorations – all these have added to making the church wedding to be increasingly expensive, especially for someone trying to recover from paying a huge amount of money for a commercialised bride-gift. Church weddings have become a booming business to the extent that they are very fast becoming the luxury of the rich and the middle class.

Cohabitation

Partly because of costs, it takes longer for young people to get married. More and more young people move from the protection of their homes into cities in search of better education and better employment. It is becoming very common to see young people sharing a flat and living together as if they were husband and wife. Some of them go to the extent of even buying a house jointly and partners and yet are not married. Others have and raise children under this arrangement. Their argument is that they are still raising money to be able to pay for the bride-gift and prepare for a proper wedding but in the meantime they cannot abstain any longer since they think they are adults and know what they want. The Catholic Kansas Bishops say: "The church does not believe that cohabitation before marriage is a moral or acceptable preparation for this sacred bond. Rather, the church sees cohabitation as a threat to the marital happiness that engaged couples so desperately seek." [24]

Delayed marriages

The high cost of the lobola and the high costs associated with western white weddings which have unfortunately become synonymous with church weddings – plus the need for one to finish their education – results in many African Christian males getting married at a very late age. That creates a situation where most of them marry ladies much younger than they and start families very late. This robs them of the opportunity of growing with their children and many times even robbing the children of the best education, because by the time the children go to tertiary education, the father will be going on pension.

Legal (defiance) marriages

Because of the high expectations and requirements placed on couples by both the parents and the church, young people who are of age to the magistrate and get legally married, since they do not need the approval of either the marriage of the church to do that. This is a practice that is accepted legally, but it creates a weak support base from family and friends for such a marriage.

Recommendations for the Church in Africa

The church should teach Christian parents not to commercialise the dowry price and rather let the prospective son in-law provide what he can afford as a token of appreciation, not as a price based on the daughter's education level or their clan of origin. The church must find a way of being part of the traditional wedding ceremony to help curb some of the traditional practices rooted in the culture of ancestral worship. Sussy Gumo Kurgat, commenting on the work of the Roman Catholic Church in the Busia district in Kenya, noted: "The local churches have taken upon themselves as their duty to inculturate customary marriage. Good African customs have been integrated into the Christian rites, in view of effecting appropriate inculturation."[24]

The Church of the Nazarene must be willing to learn from other churches that have already taken some steps towards speaking to this reality. I propose that in acknowledgment of the different social structures of our

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[24]Sussy Gumo Kurgat, "The Theology of Inculturation and the African Church," in *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, Vol. 1 (5), September, 2009, 96 [cited 18 November 2013]. Online: http://www.academicjournals.org/ijsa.

people we must consider introducing something similar to what the Roman Catholic Church introduced in Uganda:

> In the Roman Catholic diocese of Jinta, Uganda, a practice was started six years ago that has the Bishop's private approval. It is known as *Okikakasa abufumbo* as a regularization of customary marriage before the Church by renewal of consent in canonical form (before the parish priest and two witnesses) in a private ceremony. The ceremony takes place usually in the couple's home and is followed by the blessing of the priest and the entry of the marriage in the church register. The main reason for the private character of the ceremony is the avoidance of and expensive wedding feast which might otherwise be demanded if the marriage were held in church.[25]

The other lesson that Nazarenes can learn from the other denominations on this matter is how to handle those who come to church after they are married according to custom. Benezeri Kisembo notes: "The Lutheran and Moravian Churches in East Africa invite Christians who have married according to custom to receive a blessing in the church, and Roman Catholics sometimes have a similar practice when it is a question of regularizing a customary marriage."[26]

The other advice we need to consider as a church is finding a way to get the church to be part of the entire process through teaching, guiding, and officiating where necessary. The church's role should not be seen as just providing the priest or the venue for the wedding. Rather, Kisembo affirms, "the church community must create its own structures for marriage preparation and marriage counselling, and it must be actively involved in all the stages by which marriages are arranged and finalized."[27] As a pastor, I have always seen my involvement and availability during customary marriages as part of my ministry. I have even been involved in negotiating a fair bride gift for young men in my church.

The other advantage of the presence of the church during the traditional aspect of the marriage is the opportunity to be salt and light to the other traditions and cultures. The church can then use her influence to examine the positive aspects of the different stages of traditional marriage and incorporate such in the church marriage, examining the negative aspects

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[25]Kisembo, *African Christian Marriage*, 54.
[26]Kisembo, *African Christian Marriage*, 54.
[27] Kisembo, *African Christian Marriage*, 55.

and correcting them. Further, the church must educate its youth about the principles of good stewardship and teach them to plan their weddings to be within their means and to avoid starting their marital life with debts. Young African Christians need to be taught that they don't necessarily need a white wedding to be declared married.

It should be emphasized that marriage is the first institution that was established by God between a man and a woman as a place of love, intimacy, procreation, and the raising of children (Genesis 1:28, 2:21-24; Ephesians 5:21-6:4). When Christ came to earth according to the Gospel of John, he prioritized marriage by attending and performing his first miracle at the wedding in Cana of Galilee (John 2:11). When Christ had his Last Supper with his disciples, he told them they would not drink of the fruit of the vine until at the wedding of the lamb, implying that this will be one of the first things to take place at his return (Matthew 26:29, Mark 14:25, Luke 22:17, Revelation 19:7, 9). It is also clear that love making was reserved for married persons, to be practiced by a man and his wife (Gen. 29:23, 30; Matt. 1:18, Heb. 13:4) and adultery was declared as sin and even punishable by death (John 8:3). Though adulterous and fornicators cannot be stoned today by the practice has life threatening results.

Both the African, biblical and Western marriage perspectives have similarities. First, the parents of both the bride and the groom are seen to be at the centre or wedding arrangements. Secondly, marriages have historically been heterosexual. Therefore, it is proposed that the church partner with the traditional parental role and where possible assist with the incorporation of civil requirements, attempting to bring everything under one roof, if it is so desired by the couple. In this way, the church's presence becomes part of the traditional wedding. When the pastor is a registered marriage officer – in countries where that is possible – or where he or she can arrange for a marriage officer to be present, then the minister can positively influence the traditional practices and also bless the couple in partnership with parents. Benezeri Kisembo notes:

> Marriage is a human institution, belonging to the human community, and the churches have no right to undermine such institutions. Their aim is to strengthen them and build them up. The churches therefore must work with the community, not in opposition to it. Everything

must be done to minimize the distinction between the customary celebration of marriage and its Christian celebration.[28]

If a couple is still wanting white church wedding celebration, that should not be discouraged but it should not be treated as a wedding ceremony, but declared a wedding celebration.

The church should teach her members its official position and expectations on this matter to minimize confusion and chaos. As for the couples that come to faith after they are married, the church should accept those who are traditionally married as married and assist them to live as a Christian couple. If the church or the couple asked to be blessed by the minister, that should be accepted as a step of dedicating their marriage to God as children of God, not as getting married.

The African, Biblical, and Western perspectives of marriage must be harmonized, producing what may be called the African Christian perspective. This approach will help to minimize the confusion among our young people. It will also help minimize the long period that young people have to wait between the three phases of their marriage journey before they can be declared married. According to Sussy Gumo Kurgat, other Christians have already done this, so we can follow their example:

> Christians are also educated on ways to integrate Christian marriage and African Christian marriage. The progressive stages leading to African marriage have been refined to suit Christian marriage starting from when a spouse is introduced to the parents of the interested party but also subsequently in accompanying the married couple in their married life.[29]

A couple that still wants to wait until their church wedding to be declared husband and wife during that ceremony should be allowed to do so, provided that they are prepared to stay single and faithful until the day of their church wedding; otherwise it makes the minister a liar to declare people who were already living as husband and wife before the ceremony as husband and wife on the day of the church wedding. Even then, it is advisable that the waiting period between the customary and the church wedding should be as short as possible. Kisembo points to what he calls frequent "anomalies" in the Christian celebration of marriage. These include

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[28] Kisembo, *African Christian Marriage*, 53.
[29] Kurgat, 96.

church marriages being celebrated "long after the couple began to live together and long after the birth of children."[30]

Conclusion

The words of Benezeri Kisembo regarding the role of the church in providing guidance to the youth and society are very helpful:

> Young people must feel that they have the backing of their church community, as well as of their family, in embarking upon married life. This means that the churches must draw the threads of society together again at a time when traditional structures are breaking down and when the family itself is threatened by rapid and far-reaching social change.[31]

The issue must be handled in such a way that at the end of the day the good in the African culture and tradition shall be upheld and sanctified, while their unchristian practices as in any other culture should be removed. Both the dignity of the African culture and the authority of the parents should be restored in the African Christian marriage.

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[30] Kisembo, *African Christian Marriage*, 53.
[31] Kisembo, *African Christian Marriage*, 55.

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WHAT OF HOMOSEXUALITY?
A SOUTH AFRICAN NAZARENE PASTOR'S RESPONSE

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Introduction

The subject of this inquiry is the tension that exists between same-gender orientation and the biblical mandate to pastors (in particular those in the Church of the Nazarene in Africa) to minister and evangelise. The dilemma lies in how the pastor deals with the reality of gay and lesbian individuals or same-gender couples who profess faith in Jesus Christ and concur with the doctrinal statement of the Church of the Nazarene. Note that the issues of church membership and leadership roles in the church relating to homosexuals will not be raised – they are for another paper. The objective of the study – once the biblical teaching on homosexuality and its social dynamics have been considered at some length – is to provide in the final section of the paper guidance on how Nazarene congregations can compassionately minister to homosexuals without adopting positions contrary to the broader Church's historical understanding of Scriptural parameters.

Manual Statement on Human Sexuality

Paragraph 37 in the 2009-2013 *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene is labelled "Human Sexuality" and the section on homosexuality is listed below:

> We view all forms of sexual intimacy that occur outside the covenant of heterosexual marriage as sinful distortions of the holiness and beauty God intended for it. Homosexuality is one means by which human sexuality is perverted. We recognize the depth of the perversion that leads to homosexual acts but affirm the biblical position

> that such acts are sinful and subject to the wrath of God. We believe the grace of God sufficient to overcome the practice of homosexuality (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). We deplore any action or statement that would seem to imply compatibility between Christian morality and the practice of homosexuality. (Manual, 56-57)

There is on-going discussion around this statement. CA-703, a resolution to change the wording of paragraph 37 to reflect a stronger stance, was submitted to the 2013 General Assembly of the Church of the Nazarene held in at Indianapolis, USA.[1] The resolution was referred by the General Assembly to the Board of General Superintendents for further study and response.[2]

The problem of homosexuality is an age-old one for which the Church of the Nazarene has just recently formulated a guided response. The *Manual* statement cited above, together with a number of others contained in the same *Manual* as well as the denomination's position stance entitled "Pastoral Perspectives on Homosexuality" give some guidance. Nonetheless, this does not necessarily mean that the pastor has thought it through, so when he or she is confronted with the reality of homosexuality in his or her congregation or community, the pastor is often at a loss how to deal with it. The dilemma further draws in the heterosexual members of the congregation with their own prejudices and/or experiences with homosexuals and these would generally be transferred into the church. What are the expectations placed on the pastor? Is he or she expected to preach against homosexuality in all its perceived forms because it is generally accepted to be condemned in the Bible and what would the congregations' response be should he or she choose to do otherwise?

At least six elements need to be investigated if an adequate response to the issue under discussion is to be offered:

1. What is meant by "homosexual"? The distinction between attraction and behaviour must be defined.

2. What is the Bible's stand on the practice of homosexuality? The Bible is used to substantiate the majority Christian stand on

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[1] The original resolution and several others addressing homosexuality may be accessed online at: https://sp.nazarene.org/gar/SitePages/Home.aspx.
[2] See the Calendar of Resolutions, online: https://sp.nazarene.org/gar/ Shared% 20Documents/2013%20Calendar%20of%20Resolutions.pdf

homosexuality and the danger exists that pastors may glibly quote the relevant passages with little attentiveness to the counter-arguments from proponents of homosexuality. The writer will discuss the Bible texts in light of the debate and offer conclusions based on the biblical evidence.

3. How deeply is homosexuality entrenched in Africa and what are the common political responses? It is not feasible, considering the limitations of the paper, to investigate the prevalence of the issue on a country-by-country basis. For this reason, the writer will present a broad study on the scope of the matter because the Church of the Nazarene on the continent is growing exponentially and reports of pastors being confronted with the predicament in question are frequent.

4. Is homosexuality purely and exclusively a matter of "choice" as we are inclined to believe? There is a differing view that would be of benefit to explore in order to gain clearer insight.

5. How do the families and churches of homosexual individuals and couples respond when they come to learn of their homosexuality? The foundation of the problem facing the church is ultimately personal in nature.

6. What is the Church of the Nazarene in Africa to do about the matter? Careful consideration of the rudiments of the problem must lead to a conclusion and a stance. A position must be suggested and clearly communicated to the pastors and leaders who in turn, must apply it with good judgment.

It is important to note that this article does not represent an attempt in any way to belittle the experiences of gay men and lesbians who experience discrimination on a continuous basis. Rather, it is an attempt to assist Nazarene pastors and congregations to deal sensibly with the matter at hand, without biblical compromise.

1. Meaning of the term "homosexual"

Long before any discussion on Nazarene polity may be pursued, there has to be consensus on what it means to be homosexual. The word "homo" means same, and "sex" refers to gender. German psychologist Maria Benkert

during the late 19th century was the first to use the term "homosexual."[3] She defined a homosexual as a person attracted to another person of the same sex, whose "...sexual relationships and fantasies occur basically with people of his own sex."[4] Conversely, the term "homosexual" can be understood as merely one who – through no conscious choice of his or her own – is sexually attracted to persons of the same gender.[5] This paper will employ the term in both ways, but consistent with the doctrinal statement of the Church of the Nazarene and the "A Pastoral Perspective on Homosexuality" document released by the Board of General Superintendents, a distinction will be drawn between orientation (attraction) and behaviour (or practice).[6]

2. Homosexual practice in the Bible

Sodom and Gomorrah

Two Old Testament texts relate to incidents of homosexual activity (Genesis 19:1- 11; Judges 19:1-30). These raise the question about the tension that exists between seeing same gender orientation purely as an act of sexual intercourse and the concept of it being a committed relationship between two people of the same gender. It is argued by some that what is being referred to in these passages points to homosexual gang rape, perverted lust, and sexual abuse and has nothing to do with a loving, committed relationship between two people of the same sex. In the Genesis account, "No sex act took place but Christians have long assumed that God's judgement on the city [Sodom] reflects his extreme displeasure with homosexual intercourse – even the threat of it"[7] and "...there is nothing in the passage pertinent to a judgement about the morality of consensual homosexual intercourse."[8] Furthermore it was not *only* the threat of homosexual gang rape in the Lot incident that led to Sodom and Gomorrah's

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[3] See Brent Pickett, "Homosexuality", in Edward N. Zalta, ed., *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2011Edition), no pages; cited 6 June 2013, online: http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/homosexuality.

[4] Jaime P. Stubrin, *Sexualities and Homosexualities* (London: Karnac Books, 1994), 80.

[5] The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines "homosexual" as "sexually attracted to people of the same sex." Cited 1 March 2014, online: http://www.merriam-webster.com /dictionary/homosexual.

[6] See "A Pastoral Perspective on Homosexuality" at the official website of the Church of the Nazarene, online: http://nazarene.org/files/docs/Perspectives_Homosexuality.pdf.

[7] David Field, "Homosexual Relationships and the Bible," n.p., cited 7 July 2013, online: http://www.theologian.org.uk/bible/homosexuality.html.

[8] Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996), 381.

destruction. The prophet Ezekiel made it clear: "Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy" (Ezekiel 16:49, NIV). The incident involving Lot and his guests may just have been the proverbial last straw.

The story as related in Judges chapter 19 points again to the threat of gang rape. Frederick Greenspahn noted that it was the old man's concubine who was ultimately abused, demonstrating that persons of either gender could satisfy the citizens' lust. He concluded: "The stories are about rape and humiliation, not homosexuality. The victims' gender is an incidental detail, not an essential element of the plot."[9] John Boswell concurred: "It is striking, for example, that although Sodom and Gomorrah are mentioned in about two dozen different places in the Bible (other than Genesis 19 where the story is first told), in none of these places is homosexuality associated with the Sodomites."[10]

However, Robert Gagnon contended that the stories cannot be limited to coercion only.[11] He claimed that historical and literary evidence point to the fact that the stories speak about homosexual practices "*per se*" and not just within the context of intimidation or threats. There was condemnation of homosexual practices on the whole. Ancient Near East cultures did not look favourably on male-male sexual intercourse and it is likely that the author to whom the Genesis text is ascribed would not have done so either. The men who wanted to rape the angels at Lot's house were after *males* not angels – their angelic nature was beside the fact. As for the argument that this incident was just one more feature in a string of sins that led to Sodom's destruction, Gagnon also referred to Ezekiel 16:49-50 but separated their "neglect of the needy" from "committed an abomination" claiming that the "abomination" refers to male-male intercourse.[12] As further proof that the incident points to

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[9] Frederick E. Greenspahn, "Homosexuality and the Bible," in *CCAR Journal: A Reform Jewish Quarterly* (2002): 42.

[10] John Boswell, "The Church and the Homosexual: An Historical Perspective, 1979," n.p.; cited 1 March 2014, online: http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/pwh/1979boswell.asp.

[11] Robert Gagnon, "Why We Know that the Story of Sodom Indicts Homosexual Practice *Per Se*." Cited 4 January 2013. Gagnon has conducted the most meticulous biblical and historical exegesis on homosexual practice to-date, which justifies his prominence in this study.

[12] Gagnon (2013), 3-4.

more than just coercion, Gagnon claimed that there is a clear distinction between the offences (Ezekiel 18: 10-13) and that the prophet was in all probability familiar with the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17-26) upon which the prophet based his interpretation of the Sodom incident. Turning to the New Testament, Gagnon argued that "Paul had in view not only the Levitical prohibitions and Gen 1:27 but also the cycle of traditions about Sodom. Romans 1:24-27 is a veritable echo chamber of the most important OT texts imping on homosexual practice: creation, Sodom and the Levitical prohibitions."[13]

The Holiness Code in Leviticus 18-20

The Holiness Code of Leviticus (18:23 and 20:13) in which same-sex intercourse is described as detestable and punishable by death raises more or less the same kind of issues as the Genesis and Judges texts. A first contention, raised by Derrick Bailey, is that these laws cannot be dated accurately, so there is no evidence relating to whether they are early or late attitudes to homosexual practice.[14] Moreover, he contended: "It is difficult to say whether they were dictated by the exigencies of some particular social situation, or whether they are simply terms of abstract legislation designed to provide against a future possible occurrence of the offences penalised."[15] Also, they only address same-sex intercourse conducted in the contexts of idolatrous cults, prostitution or adult-adolescent unions. Frederick Greenspahn argued that "... the law has nothing to do with homosexuality as we understand it today, and certainly not with most of the issues about which contemporary discussions have contended – marriage, leadership, community membership, and the like."[16] He contended that "the notion that some individuals' sexual instincts are directed, whether by birth or upbringing, toward members of their own sex simply did not exist prior to the middle of the nineteenth century."[17] In rebuttal, it should be noted that this argument conveniently overlooks the ancient Greeks, who included in their ranks men attracted exclusively to men, such as the well-known cases of Alexander the Great and the Stoic, Zeno of Citium.[18] The human

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[13] Gagnon (2013), 5-6.

[14] Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1975), 29.

[15] Bailey, 29.

[16] Greenspahn, 45.

[17] Greenspahn, 45.

[18] Brent Pickett, "Homosexuality," n.p.

condition has not changed significantly over the course of millennia, making claims like those of Greenspahn appear near-sighted.

The context of the Leviticus passages refers to purity regulations designed to prevent the Israelites from being influenced by the practices of the pagan nations surrounding them. If that is the case, some argue, then these laws have no bearing on the current debate on homosexuality since the Christian church itself no longer takes purity codes literally. According to Jon Boswell, "Early Christians had no desire to impose the Levitical law on themselves or anyone else. Most non- Jewish Christians were in fact appalled by most of the strictures of the Jewish law and were not about to put themselves under what they considered the bondage of the old law."[19] And if there is going to be insistence on focussing on homosexuality and God's proscription (Leviticus 20:13), then it would only be right that the entire Holiness Code be practised, including killing the person who consults with mediums, the child who curses his father or mother, and the individual who curses God (cf. Leviticus 20: 1-16; 27; 24: 15-16). Furthermore, some argue, the Leviticus prohibitions against homosexual intercourse only relate to the same Old Testament purity concerns as are found in Deuteronomy 23: 1-8 and Jesus overturns this in the New Testament by telling His disciples to "love your neighbour as yourself" (Mark 12:31).

Robert Gagnon enumerated six responses to such arguments, an extended rejoinder that may be summarized as follows:[20]

1) *The prohibition against same-sex intercourse is among types of sexual activities that are still considered illegitimate by the Church today, including incest, adultery and bestiality.*

Incest (Leviticus 18:6ff) is prohibited because of it being sex with the "flesh of one's own flesh" meaning that the two beings are too much alike while bestiality is wrong (Leviticus 18:23) because of the opposite reason: sex between two beings that are too different.

2) *The fact that purity language of ancient Israelite culture is attached to acts such as incest, adultery, male-male intercourse, economic exploitation*

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[19] Boswell (1979), n.p.

[20] Robert Gagnon, "The Zenith News Agency Interview: The Bible and Homosexual Practice: An Overview of Some Issues," (21 March 2002), 2-3; cited 1 March 2014, online: http://www.robgagnon.net/ articles/homozenitharticlerevised.pdf.

and so forth, actually affirms that these acts are degrading, with the result that they cannot ever be viewed as pure or positive.

3) *Same-sex intercourse was regarded by ancient Israel as a serious violation of God's will; singling it out and making it a punishable by death.*

It is true that the modern church does not apply the death penalty to this act, but it does not do this for adultery and incest either and still considers all of these immoral.

4) *The prohibitions of same-sex intercourse are unqualified and absolute.*

The general term "male" is used – not "cult prostitute" or "boy." Also, both the Israelites and the non-Israelites living among them are included. Furthermore, cult prostitution was the most acceptable context in which to practice homosexual intercourse but it was by no means the only way in which it was exhibited.

5) *The reason for the prohibition is evident in the phrase "lying with a male as though lying with a woman."*

What is wrong with same-sex intercourse is that it puts another male, at least as far as the act of sexual intercourse is concerned, in the category of female rather than male and this is considered a violation of God's created order (Genesis 1-2).

6) *The non-procreative character of same-sex intercourse and bestiality was not the primary reason for the prohibition.*

By the same token adultery and incest (Leviticus 18 and 20) were not prohibited due to the fact that children might arise. All of these are wrong because they constitute sex with another who is either too much of an "other" (sex with an animal) or too much of a "like" (sex with a near relation or sex with a member of the same sex).

David and Jonathan

Some cite passages in the books of Samuel (1 Samuel 18:1-4; 20: 30; 41; 2 Samuel 1:26) to argue that there is at least one account of a homosexual relationship in the Bible, that of David and Jonathan. Loren Johns observed:

David's relationship with Jonathan was clearly a very special and close relationship. In fact, this is one of the greatest love stories in the Bible.

2 Samuel 1:26 explicitly compares the love David had for Jonathan with the love between a man and a woman. Although nothing is said about whether this love was expressed in sexually explicit ways, it is clear that there was an intimacy and an emotional investment between the two that went beyond typical friendship. They loved each other so much that they made a "covenant" with each other (1Sam. 18:3). Jonathan even did what was common to most eastern Mediterranean love affairs: he gave David gifts (1 Sam. 18:4). As *The Message* puts it, 'Jonathan, out of his deep love for David, made a covenant with him. He formalized it with solemn gifts: his own royal robe and weapons: armour, sword, bow, and belt." When Jonathan died, David not only called Jonathan's love more wonderful than the love of women, he also called Jonathan "beloved" (twice) and "lovely" (2 Sam. 1:23, 26). If modern readers do not see 'sexual relationship' in this story, it is because they cannot accept the plain implications of the story itself.[21]

In response, Michael Houdmann is representative of many who discern in the David/Jonathan story not a homosexual relationship, but a deep friendship:

Rather than being evidence for a homosexual relationship in the Bible, the account of David and Jonathan is an example of true biblical friendship. True friendship, according to the Bible, involves loyalty, sacrifice, compromise, and yes, emotional

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[21] Loren L. Johns, "Homosexuality and the Bible: A Case Study in the Use of the Bible for Ethics," n.p., cited 31 August 2012, online: http://ljohns.ambs.edu/Homosexuality.htm.

attachment. That is what we should learn from David and Jonathan.[22]

This interpretation is buttressed by the fact that David had multiple wives throughout his lifetime and was attracted to Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, to the point of committing adultery, fathering a child with her, and having Uriah killed in battle to cover up the sordid affair (2 Samuel 11-12). In light of these considerations, Jonathan for David is surely an example of a friend who "sticks closer than a brother" (Proverbs 18:24b, NIV).

Jesus and the argument from silence

Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter articulated an often-cited argument in favour of the acceptability of homosexual practice: "Homosexuality was well known in the ancient world, well before Christ was born and Jesus never said a word about homosexuality. In all of his teachings about multiple things—he never said that gay people should be condemned."[23]

Arguments from silence are difficult to assess. Jesus also had nothing direct to say not just on homosexuality but many topics of modern interest including child abuse, drug addiction, and deforestation. Should one therefore conclude that Christ would have been unopposed to these as well? We are on more solid ground assessing what Jesus *did* talk about regarding human sexuality, and there the record is clear. In Matthew 19:1-6, he re-affirmed the divine model of human sexuality as it is expressed between one man and one woman, in a lifelong commitment (Genesis 2:24-25). Ben Witherington III observed: "Jesus gives us exactly two options: fidelity in marriage, or celibacy in singleness. Read Matthew 19. It's pretty clear. The only alternative to heterosexual monogamy – a man and a woman being married in God – is singleness, for the sake of the Kingdom."[24]

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[22] S. Michael Houdmann, "What was the relationship between David and Jonathan?," cited 1 March 2014, online: http://www.gotquestions.org/David-and-Jonathan.html.

[23] Gary Freel, "Jimmy Carter: Jesus Silent on Homosexuality," cited 1 March 2014, online: https://www.feasite.org/jimmy_carter_homosexuality_teachings_of_jesus.

[24] Ben Witherington III, in a video entitled "Homosexuality and Scripture," cited 1 March 2014, online: http://seedbed.com/feed/homosexuality-and-scripture/.

Homosexual activity according to the Pauline and Pastoral Epistles

Three further New Testament passages relevant to our topic are Romans 2:18-32, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, and 1 Timothy 1:10. Same-sex advocates hold that the Apostle Paul knew nothing about loving committed relationships between same-gender people. In fact, his main concern was that of speaking against pederasty and exploitative sex (1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10) and against individuals (whether homosexual or heterosexual) who perversely act against their natural instincts (Romans 1:26-27). According to this view, persons with inherent same-sex orientation are not included in these passages since they act in accordance with their nature.[25]

In response to this kind of reasoning, Gregory Koukle outlined the message of Romans 1:1-32.[26] Koukle detailed four characteristics of sexual acts performed between two men or two women:

1. An impurity and dishonoring to the body (v. 24)
2. A degrading passion that's unnatural (v. 29)
3. An indecent act and an error (v. 27)
4. Not proper and the product of a depraved mind (v. 28)

Regarding the argument of homosexual individuals only acting according to their "nature," Romans 1:26-27 uses the Greek word *chresin*, which may be translated as "function." In this reading – retained in the NASB – women abandon the "natural function" (*chresin*) for what is "unnatural." Likewise, men abandoned the "natural function" (*chresin*) of the woman and "burned in their desire for one another." This rendering of *chresin* as "function" moves the reader away from the internal realm of same-sex desire with the parallel (and convoluted) question of its origin and instead locates moral responsibility in the external arena of *action*. Whatever one's temptations, it is sinful actions that incur the approval or disapproval of God. Having weighed the evidence of Romans 1, Koukle concluded: "According to Paul, homosexual behaviour is evidence of active, persistent rebellion against God." [27] Likewise, Samuel Kunhiyop observed regarding

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[25] Jeremy Punt, "Romans 1:18-32 amidst the gay debate: Interpretive options," in *HTS Theological Studies*, 63 (3) 2007, 969; cited 1 March 2014, online: http://www.ajol.info/index.php/hts/article/download/41234/8622.

[26] Gregory Koukle, "Romans 1 on Homosexuality," cited 1 March 2014, online: http://www.str.org/articles/romans-1-on-homosexuality#.UxLMzl5sj3o.

[27] Koukle, n.p.

this passage: "He (Paul) has no doubt that homosexuality is unnatural and a perversion of the heterosexuality that God established at creation."[28]

Regarding 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and 1 Timothy 1:10, Robert Gagnon observed that those who engage in homosexual behaviour are included in lists of the kind of persons who will not inherit the kingdom of God.[29] Both passages use the term *arsenokoitai*, a term not found prior to its usage in 1 Corinthians 6. It seems to refer generically to "men who lie with [*koite*] other men [*arsen*] as with a woman," thus echoing the proscription of Leviticus. In addition to *arsenokoitai*, 1 Corinthians 6:9 refers to *malakoi*, (literally "soft men" but taken in the sense of men who feminise themselves in order to attract male sex partners), which was a common slang term in Hellenistic Greek for the passive partner in same-sex acts. The use of both terms here is a rebuttal to the pro-homosexual argument that the chief concern in these passages concerned pederasty and coercive male-male sex.

Conclusion

Recent years have seen a re-study of the question of same-gender sexual activity in the light of Scripture. While a number of revisionist arguments favouring the acceptance of homosexual practice have been advanced – especially in reference to the dignity of two men or women in a committed relationship – this abbreviated study has re-affirmed the validity of traditional interpretations of relevant Bible passages. Having seen the uncompromising view of Scripture regarding human sexuality and its God-given parameters, we are now in a position to turn our attention from biblical theology to pastoral theology. How are the Nazarene pastor and congregation to minister in a way that is at once faithful to Scripture's teaching on human sexuality yet compassionate and redemptive toward gay and lesbian persons for whom Christ died? To reach this objective, this investigation will now turn briefly to a consideration of the sub-Saharan African context in which this debate takes place as well as insights into homosexuality provided by the social sciences.

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[28] Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics* (Nairobi, Kenya: Hippo Books/Word Alive, 2008), 308.

[29] For information used in this section, see Robert Gagnon, "How Bad Is Homosexual Practice According to Scripture and Does Scripture's Indictment Apply to Committed Homosexual Unions?" December 2007, cited 1 March 2014, online: http://www.robertgagnon.net/articles/ HomosexHowBadIsIt.pdf.

3. Homosexuality in Africa

What kind of nerve does the topic of homosexuality strike in the heart of the African Nazarene pastor? Is it one of aggressive or apathetic disagreement, one of denial, or one of sympathetic agreement? Whatever the reply, it would be beneficial to briefly explore the experiences of the African gay and lesbian in an attempt to understand the depth of the above statement. If we are going to gain any value from this attempt, and any meaningful reflection on the issue of homosexuality is to be engaged, we need to embrace our differences (remembering to remain true to our own cultural contexts) as well as celebrate our unity as Africans for the sake of the Gospel we are called to proclaim and exemplify. If we refuse to confront the issue it will be tantamount to an "ostrich" mentality: "stick your head in the sand and ignore the problem for long enough, it will go away." Well, it will not and the longer we shy away from honest, open discussion as a denomination of Africa, the more we will be confronted by it.

Kevin Ward claims that rural traditional Africa has been "silent" on the origins and make-up of homosexual relations.[30] He maintains that this "silence" can be interpreted in one of two ways. On the one hand, denialists are of the contention that it indicates that there is no same-sex practice in Africa. Homosexuality is "un-African," foreign, and a betrayal of African identity. It was first the Arabs many centuries ago, and later the European colonialists, who introduced it to the continent. On the other hand, those who advocate tolerant attitudes towards gay and lesbian people may use the "silence" to indicate an apparently relaxed attitude in traditional African society. There is little doubt that although Ward may be referring to traditional rural African societies, the above may also be the case in industrialized modern Africa.

Space does not allow us to delve into detailed explanation of the conditions under which gays and lesbians live in Africa. There is, however, an insightful article by Jacob Rukweza that would be of value to summarize.[31] He noted that many African leaders are on record for their condemnation of homosexuality and argued that politicians must make space for homosexuals within the law. Among many myths about Africa, he continued, is the oldest and most enduring belief that homosexuality is absent or incidental and that it was introduced by Europeans and therefore an

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[30] Kevin Ward, "Same-sex relations in Africa and the debate on homosexuality in East African Anglicanism," in *Anglican Theological Review* (2002):82-84.

[31] Jacob Rukweza, "Is Homosexuality Really "Un-African,"? n.p., cited 23 March 2006, online: http://pambazuka.org/en/category/comment/32974.

alien culture. It is this supposed alien nature of homosexuality that has been used by Southern African leaders in particular as blame for the problems in their countries. He then cites Zimbabwe president Robert Mugabe as being world famous for his gay bashing and denunciation of gays and lesbians as "sexual perverts" who are "lower than dogs and pigs." Mugabe's attitude and mentality towards homosexuality, in Rukweza's estimation, represents a dominant perception among many African leaders. He cited the actions of Uganda's Yoweni Museveni and former Namibia president Sam Nujoma's utterances in this regard. Rukweza contended that laws across Africa do not recognize homosexuality as a way of life because it is generally perceived as unnatural and therefore criminal. Those who practice homosexuality are automatically turned into lawbreakers, social rejects, and threats to society. Yet citing Stephen Murray and Will Roscoe's book *Boy Wives and Female Husbands* (1998), Rukweza concluded that homosexuality cannot be referred to as a new phenomenon in African society because it is not. Positively, on the part of African leaders, he perceived a "reluctant transition from denial to acknowledgment."[32]

South Arica is unlike any of the countries on the continent. Same-sex marriages are legal and same-gender persons have protection under the country's constitution. The ruling government, with the co-operation of liberation theologians like Archbishop Emeritus of the Anglican Church Desmond Tutu, have championed for the equality of same-sex oriented persons with arguments along the lines of: "to discriminate against homosexuals for an inherent, immutable genetic fact is tantamount to discriminating against black people for the same reason."[33] However the reality of homophobia rises far above the standard set by South African law and its constitution. There are periodic reports of vicious attacks on gays and equally vicious incidences of "corrective rape" against lesbian black women in particular. Have we chosen to ignore them?

4. Homosexuality: divergent views of causation

What causes homosexuality? There are many theories around the "causes" of homosexuality and protagonists would be first to admit that none have been proven beyond reasonable doubt.[34] However, one must listen to

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[32] Rukweza, n.p.

[33] Mark Gevisser, "Homosexuality and the Battle for Africa's Soul," n.p., cited 04 June 2010, online: http://mg.co.za/article/2010-06-04-homosexuality-and-the-battle-for-africas-soul.

[34] Ray A Seutter, "Emotionally Absent Fathers: Furthering the Understanding of Homosexuality," *Journal of Psychology and Theology*.,32, No.1. (2004), 45.

the testimonies of gay and lesbian individuals if there is going to be any meaningful discussion around the issue of Nazarene response to homosexuality.

Critiques about research into the theories mention incomplete biological evidence[35] and strong reliance on self-confessed gay and lesbian respondents.[36] However, the criticism does not detract from the deep emotions that are evident in gay and lesbian persons who are confronted with rejection of what they are convinced to be stark realities in their lives.

Ray Suetter divides the supporters of homosexual orientation into what he terms "essentialists" and "constructionalists."[37] Essentialists focus on the biological or natural origins of homosexuality and point to issues of genes, hormones, and brain structure. Rather than being a conscious choice, they are of the persuasion that the sexual orientation has been there since birth and that there is nothing that the person can do about it except deny or act upon it since it is at the *core* of his or her being. It is like they are "pre-wired" in relation to their desires. A typical statement in this regard would be: "We can no more choose our reality than we can choose to change our hair colour or switch from the right to the left hand."[38] In an interview the writer conducted with a group of lesbian singles and married couples – featured hereafter in italics – some of the remarks were:

> *"All I knew was that I liked girls and I didn't know where it came from"; "I was thirteen years old and I had this friend and I just felt differently towards her than I felt towards my other friends"; "I'd just started high school, I thought I'm gonna stick out from the crowd if I say how I feel about a certain girl but in your heart you know that this is who I am ...";"I was six years old ... (huh – you knew when you were six years old?? – response from someone else in the group)"[39]*

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[35] Robert M. Baird, *Homosexuality: Debating the Issues* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1995), 233.

[36] Seutter, 46.

[37] Suetter, 48.

[38] Gilbert Herdt, *Same Sex, Different Cultures: Exploring Gay and Lesbian Lives* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1997), 31.

[39] The participants in the writer's interview all live in an urban environment in South Africa where same-sex marriages are legal. Everyone in the group had come to full acceptance of their orientation and although there were remarks around never having been made to feel uncomfortable about their orientation by most people they encountered, there was the

In the case of such persons the term "sexual preference" would be completely incorrect since they simply have no choice. Robert Baird suggests using the terms "constitutional homosexuality" or "homosexual orientation".[40]

Constructionalists focus on social process and hold that same-gender sexual orientation stems from developmental and/or environmental, as opposed to natural influences or triggers. The foundation of this line of argument is that there was some kind or other disturbance at a particular stage of the individual's life that resulted in homosexuality. Ray Seutter lists examples like disturbances in the pre-oedipal stage (between the ages of four and five years), family of origin (weak / absent father; domineering mother; abuse) while others have cited various types of psychopathologies.[41] Interestingly enough, no one in the group interviewed by the writer attested to a traumatic event that caused them to choose to be lesbian. Their response to the direct question was a unanimous *"Noooo."* Those in the group who had disclosed their orientation to family said that they were all asked by their parents in particular whether "something had happened" to them (allowing opportunity to reflect) and still the answer was that they "just knew" they were different.

The constructionalist view primarily addresses issues of rehabilitation and behavioural change. Opponents of homosexuality might reason that if homosexual behaviour is occasioned by social or developmental influences, surely the possibility of change or rehabilitation must exist? This is a minefield because the immediate reaction must of necessity be: is same-sex orientation then a problem to be fixed? Fixed implies brokenness and restoration to original state or normalcy. Whose definition or concept of normality is being referred to here? Furthermore, who and what define "homosexual behaviour"?

Whatever the merits of the two views, the on-going debate over causation – while intriguing – should not obscure the conclusions reached in the first part of this paper. The testimony of Scripture remains clear that homosexual practice does not meet with the approval of God. Yet attempting to understand the vantage point of gays and lesbians through respectfully listening to their story powerfully reflects the incarnational attitude adopted by our Lord Jesus himself in his loving interactions with people from all

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awareness that not everyone was in favour of their lifestyle. For that reason they were careful about where and to whom they spoke about who they are.

[40] Baird, 233.
[41] Seutter, 47.

walks of life. Christ called us to "Do unto others what you would have them do to you" (Matt 7:12, NIV), the timeless summons to Christian empathy. Can we do any less when it comes to those who self-identify as gay or lesbian? For this reason, let us turn in the next section of this paper to a consideration of what the world looks like through their eyes.

5. Homosexuality and response of the family

After all the theologizing and theorizing, homosexuality is and will always be ultimately personal in nature, and just like heterosexuals, homosexuals have a need to belong. It is difficult to imagine what a person with same-gender attractions seeking to establish a sexual identity must experience in a world made up of mostly heterosexual people. If anything, there must be genuine ambivalence about where and how to fit into society and this uncertainty may or may not last for a long time. But for the homosexual, it would be a reality that confronts him or her at every turn in their lives. Jaime Stubrin calls it the ego-dystonic phase[42] which is defined as "a psychological or psychiatric disorder in which a person experiences persistent distress associated with same-sex preference and a strong need to change the behaviour or, at least, to alleviate the distress associated with the homosexuality."[43]

Coming out

Stubrin admits that it is not impossible for the condition to last for a short time, but whether long or short, the effects are the same nonetheless. During this phase the person with homosexual tendencies would initially struggle with the fear of being rejected, discriminated against, ridiculed, assaulted, abused or even killed because of being "different." One interviewee observed: *"The biggest fear is what your family would say."* That person might initially seek to mask or conceal the tendencies by denying him or herself, attempting to change by becoming involved in heterosexual relationships, or withdrawing from society. Another participant in the interview remarked: *"I was so insecure that I had boyfriends to make everyone believe I was normal. But whenever they (the boyfriends) would visit I would wish that they'd leave the minute they got to our house. I was never sure whether I would ever get to like boys."* A number may accept

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[42] Stubrin, 85-87.

[43] Consulted 1 March 2014, online: http://www.medilexicon.com/medicaldictionary. php?t=41403.

their orientation but live it out in secret liaisons with unsavoury elements often associated with homosexual perversion.

In essence, the world of the gay or lesbian is an uncertain one in which self-denial and fear play a significant role. This may lead to a life of denial, duality, rebellion, acceptance or a combination of any or all of these but whatever the eventual choice, the homosexual will experience many trials and difficulties leading up to and beyond the decision to live openly as a homosexual. Granted, there is more openness to homosexuality in this century than ever before, but it does not mean that all without prejudice will accept the gay or lesbian person.[44] So even though he or she may have moved toward acceptance of their orientation and have disclosed it to the world, the homosexual will most likely never be free of a sense of uncertainty regarding his or her full acceptance in an overwhelmingly heterosexual society.

Homosexuality, as personal as it is, is by no means encased in a bubble. That gay or lesbian is someone's son or daughter, brother or sister, father or mother, and so on. It would be safe to state that the fear homosexuals live with is caused by their expectations of what society would say or do to them because their sexual preference differs, for example being called by derogatory names, physically attacked, excluded from society and so forth. A motto one interview participant lives by is *"expect nothing and you won't be disappointed."*

Reaction by family

It must be pointed out that what follows in terms of family responses to the gay or lesbian's coming out is not indicative of every situation. Each incident has to be treated on its own merit in terms of family relationships, cultural environment, as well as the society in which that family finds itself. For instance, interview responses were as follows: *"When we told my dad we're getting married I expected this outburst but all he said was 'As long as you guys are happy, and you must be conscious of people that don't accept you, take a step back and accept it, and with the people that do accept you, you need to promote your relationship with your wife'"; "I wrote a letter to my parents telling them this is who I am but in the background I made sure I had a job and a career in case they put me out."; "… that is why I am not*

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[44] Herdt, 155.

out of the closet yet. My mother knows but my brother doesn't. I know he'll never accept it."

Despite the increasing openness by society, one would expect that families would experience a sense of loss to a certain degree. This sense would entail, for instance, feeling for themselves the loss of a son or daughter for whom they may have had dreams of seeing them married with children. However, this scenario is shifting dramatically with the recent changes in countries legislating the legalization of same-gender marriages and the consequent freedom for such couples to have children by alternative means like artificial insemination or adoption. As a matter of fact, two married couples in the group interviewed had legally adopted one child each and are raising them as families. An issue for another discussion is that one couple with a child aged six is now dealing with issues relating to questions asked of their child about why that child has two mothers and no father.

Families of gays and lesbians may struggle with their own "coming out." How do they tell extended family, community and society that they have a gay or lesbian family member? They may struggle whether they too would experience rejection or prejudice because of their association and it is not impossible to imagine that fear of rejection and judgment by society could lead to some families rejecting their own gay or lesbian family members. In addition, there may be a struggle with concern over the safety and future of the gay or lesbian family member. That person, by coming out, has identified him or herself with a life that, no matter how open societies may be, is still subject to harsh prejudice, harassment, and possible physical violence. The proverbial blood running thicker than water is no truer in this sense than in any other, regardless of whether there is complete acceptance or total rejection. Families will worry about whether their loved ones will be safe and able to live on a day-to-day basis and achieve their goals and ambitions just like any heterosexual person would. The above concerns were especially real in the life of the mother of a lesbian relative with whom the writer had an informal conversation.

Coming to terms with a gay or lesbian family member's "coming out" is by no means an easy experience, one would imagine. Both the gay or lesbian and the family involved will of necessity have to deal with many emotions and decisions. Denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and finally acceptance – or rejection in some instances – will all be elements of the family's journey with the gay or lesbian and unfortunately it will never end. There will always be some or other reminder that the loved one has chosen a path different from what is expected to be the "norm" for society.

There are three avenues that families may choose to journey along. One is that of complete rejection and expulsion from the family circle. This, however, does not imply release from the emotions: disappointment, anger and loss would accompany and confront them every time that they see, hear from, or about their loved one. Another avenue is that of complete acceptance. In this case the family may choose to stay involved in all aspects of the gay or lesbian's life and to continue as much as possible to ensure that the person lives a "good" life with the lifestyle that accompanies his or her choice. Given this, it is impossible to imagine that all emotions would now be smoothed over – they still need to explain and re-live the loved one's choices when dealing with society's prejudices. A third avenue, one that Jegg Beeler & Vicky Diprova believe to be the most travelled, is the middle road; no outright rejection neither full acceptance – just acknowledgment and no interference in the life and choices of the family member.[45] This has to be the most difficult avenue one would suppose and it is most likely clearly indicative of the level of the relationship the family may have with the gay or lesbian. There is no room for resolution of emotions along the way – just tacit acceptance, stoic silence and resolute continuing with what is perceived to be "normal" but with a "twist in the tale" – a heterosexual family with a homosexual son or daughter. This is the case with three of the participants in the writer's interview.

Based on what has been stated above, where does that leave the gay or lesbian person and his or her family in a seemingly hostile world? The homosexual is embroiled in a constant struggle to make sense of his or her world that is different from what is considered to be "normal." His or her family faces the same kinds of struggles albeit on different levels. Where do they turn to for support? The homosexual may or may not have peers to turn to and they may or may not be of considerable help, but the family may have no idea where to turn. There are numerous support groups for families of homosexuals but they may not all be accessible or affordable for a host of reasons - except perhaps the Church.

6. A Nazarene Pastoral Response

The doctrinal statement of the Church of the Nazarene as it currently stands in its *Manual* would not be acceptable to homosexual theorists or many of those who sympathize with gay and lesbian persons. This is because

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[45] Jegg Beeler and Vicky Diprova, "Family Adjustment Following Disclosure of Homosexuality by a Member: Themes Discerned in Narrative Accounts," *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 25, No. (1999): 443+.

it falls short of acknowledging the possibility of genetic homosexual orientation and the ethical neutrality that some argue orientation implies. Sympathetic voices insist that homosexual orientation leads the person to seek more than just "homosexual acts" and "practices." Homosexuals lay claim to what heterosexuals have, meaningful relationships based on love albeit with persons of the same gender. They also claim to have had no choice in the matter of their sexual orientation and just want to be allowed to live "normal" lives. Normal life includes the right to live, work, play, and worship in the same way heterosexuals do because their needs and indeed relationships are equally complex. Heterosexualism and homophobia complicates their lives to such an extent that "normal" living remains beyond their reach.

That gays and lesbians are among us is an undisputed fact regardless of what our own denominational assessment of the issue is. They are likely to be part of our immediate and extended families; they live in our communities; they work and play among us and they may want to attend our services and become members of our congregations.

Do we not have a dilemma as Nazarene pastors then?

The Church of the Nazarene's stance on homosexuality as laid out in the *Manual* and the "Pastoral Perspectives on Homosexuality"[46] statement may be summarized as follows: Homosexual activity is sinful and against the will of God. It is the result of depravity and is at its root a spiritual condition that finds expression in perversion of what God ordains to be the norm; sexual fulfillment is pure only within the confines of a monogamous, heterosexual marital union. God's Church cannot sanction anything other than this for the same-sex attracted Christian, except a life of celibacy.

Granted, the statement as it stands in the *Manual* (paragraph 37) does focus on homosexual sex as a matter of choice with no reference to homosexual orientation as possibly being the result of biological or sociological factors. It does use the Bible as its point of departure. It may be interpreted as considering homosexuality something to be "fixed" since it declares it a "distortion". It does consider heterosexual marriage the "norm" since this is accepted as God's standard for sexual expression. Finally, the statement is very strongly worded: "We deplore any action or statement that would seem to imply compatibility between Christian morality and the

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[46] See footnote 6.

practice of homosexuality." So then, from the perspective of the same-gender oriented person who believes that he or she is entitled to a meaningful life in a committed relationship, the Church of the Nazarene's stance might be considered short-sighted, discriminatory, and homophobic.

How does the Nazarene pastor respond to an accusation like this without feeling pressured to believe it and acquiesce by going with the flow of contemporary thought patterns? Does he or she fold or stand firm?

As pastors we stand firm in our beliefs but we exercise grace in our ministry to the gay and lesbian and his or her family. We consider ourselves God-ordained ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and as such we have chosen to practice ministry under the auspices of the denomination called the Church of the Nazarene. This denomination has doctrines, standards, and guidelines that we have undertaken to abide by and we have all stated, in the presence of witnesses, that if we had any issue with these, we would leave the denomination and minister with whichever other denomination we are comfortable with. The doctrine of the Church of the Nazarene gives it an identity that declares it different from other faiths and denominations, though we acknowledge our constant need for the guidance of the Holy Spirit individually and corporately. We believe also that under the auspices of the Church of the Nazarene, we see and understand ourselves to be ministers of the Word who will love unconditionally and minister the grace of God without fear, prejudice, or favouritism. We understand further that we have to stand up for what we believe in this world. One does not have to say anything about the current wave of relativism that is sweeping across the entire human psyche, but one cannot be swayed by every wind of doctrine, whatever that may be (Ephesians 4:14).

The document, "A Pastoral Perspective on Homosexuality," clarifies the denomination's stance on the matter.[47] Following is what we as Nazarenes believe and practice around the issue of homosexuality, as gathered from the "Perspective" statement:

The Bible says nothing about homosexual orientation in the way that the term is used today; what it does address is homosexual activity and considers it a sin. "Both Old and New Testaments are consistent in their rejection of homosexual activity, and it appears that neither Old Testament Israel nor the New Testament church ever considered homosexual practice as

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[47] See footnote 6.

something that would be allowed in their faith communities." The Bible further confirms (as do we) monogamous heterosexual marriage as the only appropriate avenue for sexual expression. We make the distinction between homosexual acts and orientation and concede that, although not proven beyond any doubt, homosexuality could have biological origins, be the result of psychological disorders or could arise from social maladjustments. So as far as the Church of the Nazarene is concerned, sexual *orientation* is not usually a willful choice but sexual *behaviour* definitely is. For this reason: "The person who is homosexually oriented does not need a church that condemns their orientation, but rather a church that calls for a response that is in keeping with the character of God. The church should not be a place of ridicule and condemnation, but a place of love, of grace, and of redemption."

As pastors, we must walk the fine line between blanket condemnation and accepting/condoning homosexual behaviour. However, our "embrace of grace" should not be misconstrued to mean acceptance of both sin and sinner; Scripture makes it abundantly clear – homosexual intercourse is a sin. This is why we consider the term "practicing homosexual Christian" to be an oxymoron: how can one call oneself a follower of Jesus Christ but reject His call to sexual purity? But inasmuch as homosexual activity is a direct contravention of God's law, the church also believes in the power of the Holy Spirit that helps the believer to live a holy life. So: "While we embrace the optimism of grace to transform lives and encourage homosexuals to remain available to God's transforming grace, the reality is that a transformed sexual orientation is not always the case. For those who are not reoriented, they are called to live a life of abstinence that is graced by the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives." Nazarene pastors are urged to offer as much assistance as possible in the person's journey by granting counseling (and in most cases referral to professional care), a safe place to worship, and extension of genuine love.

An emphasis upon behaviour and practice is not an attempt to shy away from the issue, neither to belittle the realities of the constitutional or homosexually oriented person. On the contrary, we are completely sensitive towards those who believe that they have no choice in the matter of their sexual attraction to members of the same gender. But we are not called to leave men and women to their own devices and accept that there is nothing we can do: we are called to minister the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are as Paul states:

> … Obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the
> wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach

the Gospel even to you who are at Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes… (Romans 1:14-16a, NIV).

The above being our stand, how do we go about ministering to the gay and the lesbian as well as to his or her family? What follows are some guidelines that may assist in helping us as pastors make our churches a place of safety, acceptance, and love for the same-gender oriented person whether male or female who desires a relationship with God and wishes to commit to serving Him.

Accept the realities of homosexuality.

Homosexuality is a reality and same-gender oriented persons live among us. Many, though not all, struggle with their orientation and desperately wish to make sense of what it is that causes them to be different. And there are those who revel in their homosexuality and parade it with pride. There are continual debates around whether homosexuality is biological, psychological, socially engineered, or a matter of choice. Whatever the outcome of the debates – and the research has to date not yielded any indisputable results – the fact remains that homosexuality is associated with the threat of violence, ridicule, rejection, and ostracism. We need to take cognizance of the presence of gay and lesbian individuals in our communities and seek opportunities to minister to them. It will not help to bury our heads in the sand and hope that they will go away because they will not. The sooner we accept that the gay and lesbian's presence in our societies together with the divorcee, the single parent, the widow(er) and so forth, the sooner we can begin to minister in the way God intended for us to do.

Know what the Bible says about human sexual relations.

There is no reference to homosexual orientation in the Bible. All the texts refer to homosexual acts and relate them to spiritual depravity. It is important to start at what the Bible declares to be fundamental, namely, the covenant of heterosexual marriage clearly defined in Scripture:

And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and

> hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?
> So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore
> God has joined together, let not man separate." (Mat 19:3-
> 6, NIV) (See also Genesis 1: 26 – 28; Malachi 2:13 – 16;
> Matthew 19:3 – 6; Ephesians 5:21 – 6:4; 1Thessalonians
> 4:3 – 8; and Hebrews 13:4)

There is no reason to believe anything other than this as being God's will for mankind's relations between genders. Whatever the arguments to the contrary, our stand ought to be: *all forms of sexual intimacy that occur outside of the covenant of heterosexual marriage are sinful distortions of the holiness and beauty God intended for it.* This includes all forms of extramarital relations, whether premarital sex or adultery.

Create an environment in the local congregation that fosters positive celibacy.

If acting upon same-sex attraction is sinful – and if it is ill advised for a gay or lesbian individual to marry someone of the opposite sex, due to the sexual dysfunction and frustration that is likely to arise in such a marriage – then what alternative is left? "A Pastoral Perspective on Homosexuality" responds to this question, naming celibacy as an alternative.[48] To prove that celibacy can be an honoured and acceptable choice, we need look no further than Jesus of Nazareth. His singleness did not disqualify him from becoming our Saviour! In our own Nazarene tradition, many single women and men have served honourably as ministers, whether as pastors, chaplains, or missionaries. It is our job in the church to see that those who are single are included in celebrations and at holiday times, extending genuine friendship and fellowship.[49]

Examine personal attitudes relating to homosexuality and homosexuals.

What informs your attitudes and ultimately your actions – really? Willingness or unwillingness to minister to any person is, honestly speaking, influenced by factors such as past experience (positive or negative), fear (presence or lack of), sympathy or indifference, knowledge or perception, and so forth. It is neither the Bible nor our doctrinal stand that preclude us

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[48] "A Pastoral Perspective on Homosexuality," 4.
[49] For an excellent book promoting celibacy as the cruciform option for the same-sex attracted Christian and underscoring the importance of Christian friendship in the faith community, see Wesley Hill, *Washed and Waiting*: *Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2002).

from ministering to the homosexual – they never have – but our attitudes often do.

Assess your congregation members' attitudes and actions towards homosexuals in your church

Bear in mind that the perceptions and attitudes that prevail in the community will be present in the church and they will most likely be based on the same factors that apply to you as the pastor. Homophobic attitudes and behaviour are rife across our continent regardless of constitutional or legal prescriptions wherever they may apply and the church is not necessarily a sanctuary. In fact, many homosexuals claim that they had experienced the worst forms of discrimination in churches – where to the contrary – they had expected love and acceptance. This is certainly the case in the life of one of the married couples in the group the writer interviewed: *"I had an experience in the church ... I was at that church every week, then my mother came to me and said that _____ (one of the ladies in the church) said that she hopes that you are not going to take communion anymore because you're gay. So I thought – It's between me and God, and I'm there with God, I'm not there with aunt _____ . Then there was this one day when communion was being served that when the aunty serving the communion saw me she passed the chalice to the person behind me. That immediately showed me that I was not accepted in that church. It took me a long time to go back there. That is also why _____ (her wife) doesn't go to that church anymore at all."*

Minister to the homosexual but know and communicate your stand and expectations clearly.

Study and examine your church's doctrinal statements and then be bold in your stand. The Bible is our standard and our doctrinal statement communicates our stand on the issue of homosexuality. It is what we believe as pastors affiliated with the Church of the Nazarene and we should be bold enough to defend this stance with conviction despite the criticism that will be leveled against us.

Educate ourselves and our congregants around the issues of homosexuality. Conviction comes from having knowledge that is based on careful examination of all the issues. Homosexuality in all its forms is a reality and the more we talk and teach and engage (*with* and not only *about* the homosexual and his or her family, might we add) the deeper our understanding of the matter. As far as it is possible, include gay or lesbian

persons and their families in the conversations and learn firsthand by listening with open hearts and minds to their experiences and opinions. This is a surefire way to help us assess overheated statements from traditionalists who make observations about homosexuality that do not reflect the love of Christ.

Love unconditionally and graciously, just like Jesus did. Understanding should lead to empathy, and such empathy does not imply compromise. There are same-gender oriented people who are hurting and desperately seeking help and answers. We dare not turn a blind eye to their need and neither must we allow prejudice to prevent us from genuine engagement with them. It requires total commitment and complete elimination of all prejudice from the pulpit to the pew to minister to the gay or lesbian and his or her family. We will face and have to deal with all kinds of challenges from those whose views differ from ours.

Accept that not all same-gender oriented persons will be amenable to our doctrinal stand. Others who profess faith in Jesus Christ and also profess to be gay will choose to join denominations whose teaching on the matter may be more accommodating than the one we belong to and still others will reject the gospel and Jesus Christ. We cannot do anything other than pray for them and continue to offer our ministry of assistance, love, and grace.

Conclusion

The Church of the Nazarene's doctrinal statement on homosexuality is based on its understanding and interpretation of Scripture as the Word of God. Some, on the other hand, have argued that homosexuality is constitutional and have tremendous difficulty with contentions that all homosexual activity is a matter of choice. There are same-gender oriented persons who long to be allowed to live their lives in the manner they choose but are not able to because of all kinds of pressure from heterosexuals who consider their way of sexual expression to be the only normality. Many gays and lesbians seek help from Christian churches but by and large talk about experiencing the same kind of hostility that they encounter in secular communities, albeit in more subtle manners in many instances.

As agents of love and grace, pastors in the Church of the Nazarene have a God-given responsibility to minister to gays and lesbians. Deeply sincere genuineness is the order of the day. This will only be achieved by understanding our theology, our call, and our denomination, as well as ourselves. May God grant us grace and courage – for we need it.

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POLYGAMY: CAN THE CHURCH LIVE WITH IT?

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Introduction

"The practice of polygamy is real in Africa and the church will do well not to ignore it," declared the Holiness Affirmation Committee of the Africa Nazarene Theology Conference (ANTC) 2003, based on written and verbal discussions which took place during the first regional conversation on polygamy.[1] This was an acknowledgement, not only of the reality of polygamy on the region, but also of the need to find redemptive ways to live with polygamists who convert to Christ and the church. The statement was in response to the question: "What shall the church do with the polygamists?"[2] It was also an acknowledgement that efforts to minister to polygamous converts in the past had failed. While wrestling with the question of whether polygamy is sin, the Church of the Nazarene in Africa clearly defined her stand: *to uphold monogamy as God's biblical standard for marriage and completely reject the practice of polygamy by her members.*[3] This stand further brought the question to the fore: What shall the church then do with the polygamist converts? Put another way: Can the church redemptively live with polygamy? These questions seek to encourage the church to proactively, intentionally, and redemptively engage polygamy.

This paper will explore how to build bridges between polygamous converts and the church. To do so, it will first define polygamy and survey its extent. Next, it will outline practical reasons polygamy is practiced followed by a biblical case for monogamy. The paper will conclude by re-visiting the 2003 guidelines from the Holiness Affirmation Committee in

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[1] Eugenio Duarte, et al. "Affirmations on Holiness," in *Africa Speaks: An Anthology of the Africa Nazarene Theology Conference* (Florida, Republic of South Africa: Africa Nazarene Publications, 2004), 294.

[2] Caleb Mathebula. "Is Polygamy Sin?" in *Africa Speaks*, 70.

[3] Mathebula, *Africa Speaks*, 66.

Africa Speaks and making recommendations for how the local church can respond redemptively.

Definition and Extent of Polygamy

Polygamy is a term used for marriages that involve several spouses to one. The term is commonly used for one man who is married to several wives at the same time, correctly called polygyny as opposed to polyandry, where one woman marries several men at the same time.[4] This investigation will focus on polygamy as it relates to polygyny because it is the kind we commonly face. The legitimacy of this relationship depends on cultural context. It should be distinguished from bigamy in which a man secretly marries another woman while continuing with their lawful marriage and neither wife knows of the other's existence. Likewise, it differs from having affairs with other women without formal marriage even though in some contexts communities may have become so permissive that they may refer to such relationships as "marriages."

Although the practice of polygamy has been in existence at least since Lamech's time (Gen 4:19 NIV) and Christians have wrestles with it even during Paul's time (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6) to date, no consensus has been reached regarding its acceptance or rejection. The practice continues unabated both privately and publicly and within some Christian circles. The extent of the practice of polygamy may only be estimated by its recognition under civil or customary law in different countries. According to a 1981 ethnographic analysis by George Murdock surveying 1231 societies between the years 1960 to 1980, 186 societies were monogamous, 453 had occasional polygyny, 588 had more frequent polygyny, and seven had polyandry.[5]

It is also difficult to ascertain figures because polygamy is practiced even in countries where it is illegal. This is one of the reasons countries like South Africa where some traditional practices are fertile ground for polygamy, are leaning more towards recognizing polygamy under customary law and not banning it for it would be difficult to enforce the ban. The South African Law Commission preferred this stance since it allows for "the

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[4] Miriam Koktvedgaard Zeitzen, *Polygamy: A Cross-cultural Analysis*, (New York: Berg, 2008), 3

[5] *New World Encyclopedia.* "Polygamy," [cited 6 December 2013]. Online: http:// www.newworldencyclopedia.org /entry/Polygamy.

gradual process of disuse to take its course"[6].   It would however be interesting to see how the bill on Muslim marriages currently under discussion[7] will influence the country's final legal stance on polygamy.

Why do People Practice Polygamy?

The reasons for polygamy found in the Bible include barrenness (Genesis 16:4; 30:3-8; 1 Samuel 1:1-2), custom in Haran (Genesis 29:26), an attempt to please parents (Genesis 28:6-9), competition for husbands (Genesis 30:9), alliances (1 Kings 11:3-6) and lust (2 Samuel 11:26-27; 12:7-8). There are no explanations for most of these relationships (Genesis 4:19; 25:6; Judges 8:30; 1 Samuel 1:1-2). The practice of levirate marriages (wife inheritance) may have also contributed towards polygamy. It seems there was no requirement that the brother marrying the widow should be single. There is also no indication whether these reasons were valid and legitimate.

Amongst others, Joseph Kahiga detailed[8] and A.M. Okorie cited[9] various modern-day reasons for polygamy. These included social prestige, care of the widows and their children, high mortality rate of infants, the need to have more children, a community support system, maintaining the African culture, and the social responsibilities and community expectations for women.

Others practice polygamy because they believe it is biblical since it is found in the Old Testament. The website, Biblical Polygamy.com, gives a list of forty names of polygamists found in the Bible as proof that "polygamy really is Biblical!"[10] Some Christian churches like the International

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[6] I. Mahomed, "Project 90: The Harmonisation of the Common Law and the Indigenous Law – Report on Customary Marriages," *South African Law Commission,* 89 [cited August 1998]. Online: http://www.law.wits.ac.za/salc/salc.html

[7] I. Mahomed, "Project 59: Islamic Marriages and Related Matters – Issue Paper 15," *South African Law Commission,* 16, 22 [cited May 2000]. Online: http://www.law.wits.ac.za/salc/salc.html

[8] Joseph K. Kahiga, "Polygamy: A pastoral challenge to the church in Africa," in *African Ecclesial Review* 49, no. 1-2 (2007): 124-5, 138, 141-2. Online: https://www.zotero.org/jonathan_mills/items/itemkey/D26XH391

[9] A M. Okorie, "African Polygamy: Church Action, Community reaction, and personal interaction" in *Indian Journal of Theology* 36, no. 2 (1994): 3. Online: http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ijt/36-2_002.pdf.

[10] *Biblical Polygamy.com* [cited 6 December 2013].

Pentecostal Holiness Church[11] and some Zionist groups[12] practice polygamy because of this belief and claim that it validates their African-ness.

Muslims and some brands of Mormonism practice polygamy for religious reasons. However, Mormon women spoke out about their marital frustrations as early as 1886[13]. And, although the Mormon Church formally banned the practice of polygamy in 1890 because it was against the American law[14], an incident reported in 2002 indicated that polygamy may still be practiced by some Mormon fundamentalists[15]. The *New World Encyclopedia* states that among the Muslims in West Africa more educated men prefer polygamy while participation of educated women in such relationships is decreasing[16].

Saint Augustine, while not willing to judge the patriarchs, did not believe that their practicing polygamy gave license for the believers to do the same. He strongly rejected polygamy if it was simply for pleasure and required those who would indulge in polygamy to practice self-control.[17] This implies that lack of self-control is another reason for polygamy.

Whether these reasons and others not mentioned here are legitimate, they have been and still may be fuel for the practice of polygamy.

Why is Polygamy Problematic?

This question is valid considering the fact that some of the reasons given for polygamy seem to benefit the family and the community as a

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[11] *The Columbia Encyclopedia.* "Pentecostalism." [cited 2013]. Online: http://www.questia.com/read/1E1-Pentcstl/pentecostalism

[12] Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007) 23, 58

[13] Jennie Anderson Froiseth, ed. *The Women of Mormonism: or The Story of Polygamy, As Told by the Victims Themselves* (Detroit, Michigan: C.G.G. Paine, 1886).

[14] J. Spencer Fluhman, *A Peculiar People: Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 125

[15] Zeitzen, *Polygamy*, 3

[16] *New World Encyclopedia*. Online: http:// www.newworldencyclopedia.org /entry/Polygamy.

[17] Philip Schaff, ed., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of The Christian Church*: St Augustine Against the Manichaeans and the Donatist 4 (Buffalo: The Christian Literature Company, 1887), 490. Online:oll.libertyfund.org

whole. However, A.M. Okorie[18] states the following as some of the reasons why polygamy is a problem:

> Polygamy subjugates women in several ways. Firstly, in some cultures, women have no say in their marriage arrangements and thus come to the man as slaves to the master, a situation that some men take advantage of and treat their wives as such. Secondly, it 'encourages a double standard' with regards to the expectations the community has for men and women. Men are allowed to 'scout and court for more women as potential wives' while 'women are branded as unfaithful' if they would dare look at other men. Thirdly, junior wives tend to suffer at the hands of the first wife who benefits from her status (the reverse could be true too).

In this way polygamy promotes oppression of women by women. It is no wonder those outside polygamous communities see it as an oppressive tool against women, [19] thus observed Kahiga as he chose to focus his research on polygamy on the oppression of women.

In spite of the claim that polygamy provides family and community support, polygamous families usually experience conflicts and disunity due to jealousies among the wives and among the children (a fact supported by the Scriptures, too). In some extreme cases these lead to hatred, witchcraft, and murder.

With the rising cost of living, polygamy becomes a heavy economic burden for the whole family and sometimes the community depending on the extent of the kindred network. In times like these the children suffer the most especially those of the least loved wives.

Polygamy, by its nature, increases the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). The spread is not only between the husband and his wives but it also involves the secret sexual partners of the wives who cannot survive the sexual hunger imposed by the relationship. Polygamy undermines the sexual interests of women and assumes that the wives will wait for their turn while the husband is taking his time doing the rounds. If we take the case of Solomon with seven hundred wives and three hundred

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[18] Okorie, *African polygamy,*, 6-7

[19] Kahiga, *Polygamy,* 119

concubines, even if he would have planned to spend at least one night or day with each wife it would have taken almost three years for each wife to have their turn. Not many wives would survive that without being tempted to commit adultery.

Polygamy compromises the wellbeing of the very children it supposedly desires to protect. This is well expressed by Peter Wadri as he concluded his paper on what he sees as the positive side of polygamy:

> Although this form of marriage has benefits to both the men and women involved, it is often hardest on the children, who often end up the pawns of manipulative parents. Being a child of a polygamous marriage myself was difficult, and I feel the opportunities for the potential of a wonderful supportive experience was wasted through petty jealousy and unequal educations for us. I was fortunate to find a sponsor to continue my education, but many of my siblings have not been so fortunate.[20]

Polygamy requires that the husband divide his love equally among his wives. This is impossible and it renders polygamy inadequate. Joseph Kahiga,[21] in discussing the dynamics of marriage, exposes this limitation and shows that polygamy cannot be a fulfilling companionship for *all* the adults involved in the relationship. He explains that it takes the mind, the soul or spirit, and the body to have true companionship in marriage. And that is not possible in polygamy because the husband has to divide himself among the wives while they are striving to win "the man's authentic attention and love." The result is that the wives strive to fulfil the husband's interests at their own expense and the husband gets to choose to love one and despise others. Unfortunately those who are not loved or loved less together with their children are usually neglected and ill-treated.

Why the Church Struggles with Polygamy: A Biblical Case for Monogamy

As with all creation, marriage was designed and established by God. After having created Adam, God said: "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him" (Gen 2:18).

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[20] Peter Wadri, "Three wives and a Score of children, the African way ...," *The Cheers Online Magazine*, n.p. [cited 20 August 2013). Online: http://www.thecheers.org/columns/0/

[21] Kahiga, *Polygamy*, 125-128.

The language used in Genesis 2:18-24 indicates that God was dealing with one man and one woman. He brought animals and birds to be named by Adam, but a suitable helper for man was not found until God formed a woman (Gen 2:23). According to Jesus in Matthew 19:4-5, God then declared: "For this reason **a man** will leave his father and mother and be united to **his wife**, and they will become **one flesh**" (Gen 2:24). Other New Testament allusions to this Scripture also teach that: "… the **two** will become one flesh (Matt 19:5)." The use of the word "two" by Jesus and Paul (Eph 5:31), though it is not part of the text in Genesis, confirms that God was only concerned with one man and one woman. Concluding the matter on husbands and wives in Ephesians 5:33, Paul said: "… each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself …" The bond is so strong that according to Jesus "… they are no longer two but one …" and no one should separate them (Matt 19:6).

That monogamy is God's standard is further shown by other references, including the following:

- Leviticus 21:13: The high priest was instructed to take a virgin for a wife though polygamy was a common practice among the Jews. "And the same … is said of all other priests" in Ezekiel 44:22.[22] The kings of Israel were also prohibited from taking many wives (Deut 17:17).
- In Proverbs 5:15-20 the writer in pleading for faithfulness in marriage calls for enjoyment of the wife of one's youth and thus upholds monogamy.[23] When the nation was indulging in divorce and remarriage, God took offense at their behaviour because God is the witness between them and the wife of their youth (Mal 2:14). God warned against unfaithfulness to the wife of one's youth even if it is in the heart (2:15b, 16b). These references are in the singular.
- As in 1Timothy 5:9, "wife of one man" refers to a woman married to one man, so "husband of one wife" in 1Timothy 3:2, 12 and Titus 1:6 must mean the same.[24] Polygamy and divorce were common among the Jews and it was not easy to stop even among those who believed. And while these practices were not lawful for any member of the church, they were specifically

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[22] *e-Sword*: *Digital Bible Library System*. "Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible". n.p. [cited 2000-2009]. Online: www.e-Sword.net.
[23] Earl C Wolf. *The Book of Proverbs*. (BBC 3; Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City 1967), 477
[24] *e-Sword*. "Jamieson Fausset & Brown Commentary".

prohibited for church leaders. The prohibition was in line with that of the priests and the restriction of kings in the Old Testament.[25] That other members were not excluded from this requirement can be assumed from the fact that the rest of the qualities listed in these Scriptures are requirements for all believers. And the fact that the membership of the church is also the pool of its leadership implies that monogamy would be the ideal for all believers.

• The wedding of the Lamb portrays Christ as the husband who is to be married to His wife, the church – one husband, one wife (Revelation 19:7-9; 21:2, 9).

Although monogamy is God's ideal for marriage, the Bible also shows how God related to polygamy as experienced by His people. It is crucial that we reflect on this relationship. The long sociological and cultural history of humankind shows that humanity did not strictly adhere to monogamy, yet there is no certainty for some of its developmental stages.[26] It is therefore not surprising that we find polygamy in the Bible where it is merely assumed without explanation and only provides guidance for those in polygamous relationships. For example, a Hebrew slave wife was not to be deprived of food, clothing and marital rights if another wife is married (Ex 21:10). In Leviticus 18:18, a man must not take his wife's sister as a rival wife while the sister is still alive. The firstborn son must be given his rightful inheritance even though born by the less loved wife (Deut 21:15-17).

The Scriptures make it clear that these relationships were characterized by conflict and dissension and Jacob's family is a classic example (Gen 29:31-30:24). Leah was less favoured than Rachel and "must have been painfully conscious of this during all the years of her marriage".[27] Thus she must have envied Rachel whom Jacob loved. However, the Lord blessed Leah with six sons, a daughter plus two other sons by her maid Zilpah. Leah's hope to win her husband's affection was expressed by the names she gave to her sons. The first son was named Reuben, "an exclamation, meaning 'Look, a son!'"[28] "By presenting a son to Jacob, she

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[25] *e-Sword.* "Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible".

[26] O. J. Baab. "Marriage." *IDB* 3 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1962), 278.

[27] Herbert Lockyer, ed. "Leah." *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary.* (Carmel, NY: Guideposts, 1986), 640

[28] George Herbert Livingston. "The Book of Genesis." *BBC.* 1 (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1969), 115

hoped he would respond to her in love."[29] But this hope was not realized though expressed with every son born. With her sixth, Zebulun, she still hoped that her husband will now honour her because "I have borne him six sons" (Gen 30:20). How sad.

On the other hand, Rachel in spite of her security in Jacob's love, envied Leah because of her sons. She was the first to offer Jacob her maid Bilhah so she could have children by her. The names she gave them show her own struggles with her sister – Dan meaning vindication and Naphtali meaning wrestling. With such wrestling it is understandable why she would keep Jacob to herself to the point that Leah had to hire him (Gen 30:14-16).

Livingston's comment on Genesis 30:4-6 alluded to the pain of giving up one's child. A pain that both Bilhah and Zilpah must have been felt.[30] This is a reminder of unexpressed hurt and resentment due to unequal treatment of members that ended, among other things, with Joseph being hated by his brothers (Gen 37:1-4). Did Jacob enjoy all that was happening to his family? I do not think so.

The implication is that by relating the problems inherent in polygamy, God wanted people to learn from these experiences. It is important to note that not once did God rebuke those who practiced polygamy nor forbid it. What is even more surprising is that some of Israel's kings disobeyed God's command not to take many wives. But were they truly disobedient? Deuteronomy 17:17a clearly instructs that, "He must not take many wives …" It does not specifically say that a king must have one wife. The Hebrew word translated as "many" or "multiply" means to increase or grow and can also be translated as be, or become, much, many or great when used in relation to people.[31] The use of this word in the context of verse 16 means that the king must not multiply horses "for the sake of multiplying horses."[32] Therefore, "… God condemns an immoderate number of horses …" If this explanation is true for verse 17 and considering the context of the restrictions given to the king, then the implication is that the king may have wives in moderation. Love for honour, for pleasure and

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[29] Lockyer, "Reuben," 911

[30] Livingston, *BBC*, 116.

[31] *NAS Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible with Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries.* "Deuteronomy." 1998. Lockman Foundations. Online:
http://www.biblehub.com/hebrew/7235a.html

[32] *John Calvin's Commentaries*. "Deuteronomy." Online:
http://www.biblehub.com/commentaries/calvin/Deuteronomy/17.html

for riches have been identified as the three key areas in the king's life to which the restrictions applied. [33] All three are legitimate in themselves if pursued in moderation. It thus seems like in a culture where polygamy was rampant and kings freely accumulated wives, God gave restrictions to the Israelite kings to be moderate without being specific with the number of wives to be taken.

This understanding shed some light on God's dealings particularly with regard to the heroes of faith like Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, and others (Heb 11:4-6) who were polygamists. Yet their relationship with the Lord is an example greatly desired by all believers. God, when rebuking David, "the man after God's own heart" (1 Sam 13:14; 15:28; Acts 13:22), for taking Bathsheba, said that God had given David much – including Saul's wives – and could have given him more if what he had was little (2 Sam 12:7-8). It was common practice for a king to take their predecessor's wives as a declaration of their authority (2 Sam 16:21-22). Was God contradicting Himself?

Monogamy, God's Standard for Marriage

Having considered the problems that polygamy creates for women and children as well as what the Old and New Testaments say about polygamy and monogamy, it is my conviction that monogamy is God's standard for marriage. This is based upon the creation of male and female (Gen 1:26-27) and the institution of the ordinance of marriage between one male and one female (Gen 2:18-24) as confirmed by Christ (Matt 19:4-6) and other Scriptures. The church would do well to acknowledge and uphold monogamy as the standard of marriage.

It is also my conviction that polygamy is one of those human practices that God did not condemn as sinful though it is not ideal. Rather, as with slavery, God allowed a gradual change of societies towards the divine standard to take place. Lastly, Barnes' comment on 1 Tim 3:2, 12 and Titus 1:6, is worth noting:

> …one design of the gospel was to restore the marriage relation to its primitive condition; and though it might not have seemed absolutely necessary to require of every man

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[33] *Matthew Henry's Whole Bible Commentary*. "Deuteronomy." Online: http://www.biblehub.com/commentaries/mhcw/deuteronomy/17/html

who came into the church to divorce his wives, if he had more than one, yet, in order to fix a brand on this irregular practice, it might have been deemed desirable to require of the ministers of the gospel that they should have but one wife. Thus the practice of polygamy would gradually come to be regarded as dishonourable and improper, and the example and influence of the ministry would tend to introduce correct views in regard to the nature of this relation.[34]

Above all, polygamy is "unacceptable as a Christian ideal" for marriage.[35] Monogamy is not only a Christian ideal but it is God's standard for marriage as shown by the Scriptures, rightly divided: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Gen 2:24; Matt 19:5) – not one at a time as some want to claim in support of polygamy as if marriage is only about physical union. The truth is that human relationships will always have challenges, even in the most loving monogamous relationships. But polygamy multiplies and intensifies them. God knew that and therefore instituted monogamy from the beginning, knowing that with the addition of each child things would become more complicated. That is why monogamy is assumed in all biblical references to marriage[36]. "The dynamics in the Christian marriage is equality of persons and loving mutual service."[37] That cannot be achieved through polygamy.

Guidelines from the Holiness Affirmation Team in *Africa Speaks*

After studying the papers from the 2003 Africa Nazarene Theology Conference contained in the *Africa Speaks* anthology, it seemed prudent in this paper to take the conversation a step further.[38] The question raised by this paper is a reflection on the struggle that the church has been having with

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[34] Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament: Thessalonians to Philemon, 26* Volumes, 23 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: baker Book House, 1973), 143.

[35] Okorie, *African polygamy,* 7.

[36] Mashangu H. Maluleka, *Africa* Speaks, 73.

[37] Okorie, *African polygamy,* 7.

[38] The Holiness Affirmation Team in 2003 recommended that the Regional Advisory Council establish a Commission to study the issue of polygamy and to formulate an official stance for the Church of the Nazarene in Africa. See *Africa Speaks*, 294. The African Theological Think Tank was formed to address key issues facing the Church in Africa and has addressed this issue, resulting in the present paper.

polygamy through the years that has resulted in unequal treatment towards polygamous converts and their families.

The responses made by the Holiness Affirmation Team regarding culture and polygamy are worth considering.[39] With regards to culture, we are encouraged to "learn to understand the reasons behind certain cultural practices and distinguish between what is good, bad or neutral as it relates to our cultural contexts." And, what is more significant is that we need to "provide wholesome alternatives" where necessary in a "proactive rather than reactive" manner. The idea behind these directives is that those who "live with and know the rituals [and practices] that are diametrically opposed to what the Bible teaches …" should, with all sensitivity, redemptively confront them with the truth of the Word of God. Therefore, given the varied diversity of traditional and religious African contexts which give rise to various reasons for polygamy, it seems that the local church is the critical body to be educated, equipped, and empowered to gracefully engage its cultural context in relevant terms that will help identify the community needs and the wholesome alternatives to be pursued. It is therefore fitting to bear this in mind as we reflect on the question about polygamy and the church.

Lastly, in its recommendations, the Holiness Affirmation Team included a provisional statement about the membership of polygamous converts. They were "to be accepted only as associate members and be served the sacrament of Holy Communion."[40] This was a plausible measure taken as the church desired to avoid being legalistic on the one hand or liberal on the other, while seeking solutions. However, the challenge with this recommendation is that ten years later it still stands as the only solution, a source of frustration for those in areas where polygamy is rife.

My struggle with this recommendation as a solution is that, unlike a full member[41] and an NMI Associate Member,[42] an associate member[43] seems not to have specific qualifications except as provided by the district.[44] What guides the districts is not yet clear to me. All we know is that associate members "shall have all the privileges of church members, with the

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[39] Duarte, *Africa Speaks*, 293.

[40] Duarte, *Africa Speaks*, 294.

[41] *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene 2009-2013.* (Kansas City, Missouri: Nazarene Publishing House, 2010), 69.

[42] *Manual*, 318

[43] *Manual,* 69

[44] *Manual,*117.

exception of voting and holding church office."[45] However, by omitting 'responsibilities' in this statement the implication is that they should not be involved in them. They may be received and dropped at the discretion of the pastor and the Evangelism and Church Membership Committee. They "shall not be counted as full members."[46] Probably under certain circumstances the restrictions for associate members would be reasonable because the status would come with specific requirements. This would also apply if associate membership is by choice. However, it becomes awkward when the status is prolonged indefinitely and without directives. Thus polygamist converts desiring to be full members do not know what to expect from the church. They mostly end up knowing, by choice or design, that they are not counted as full members and have restricted participation in "the life, growth and organization of the local church"[47]particularly without the right to vote.

Another important factor to be considered in this regard is that most polygamists who convert to Christ and the church are respected and faithful community leaders in their own right. And they bring these qualities to the church. That is why in some settings they may become better church members and natural leaders. The inability to vote (formally and/or informally) adds to their frustration because voting is critical in that it allows members to actively participate in their organizations. It is a formal expression of one's preference[48]. From the standpoint of human development, this participation is essential for personal fulfilment because it "allows people to realize their full potential and make their best contribution to society…"[49] Therefore, those who are denied this privilege in one way or another suffer human indignity and, in the church, are also thus denied opportunities to grow as Christians. And, contrary to the good intentions to be redemptive and extend "God's grace to persons caught in polygamous marriages,"[50] we will defeat our purpose unless we reconsider our stand to accept them as associate members.

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[45] *Manual,* 69.

[46] Duarte, *Africa* Speaks, 294.

[47] Neville Bartle. *Member's Handbook for the Church of the Nazarene*. (Florida, RSA: Africa Nazarene Publications), 28

[48] Scott Ferguson, "Study Guide: The Right to Vote," *University of Minnesota. Human Rights Library*, n.p.[cited 2003]. Online: http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/edumat/studyguides/votingrights.html

[49] "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, G.A. res. 217A (111), U.N. Doc, A/810 at 71 (1948)," *University of Minnesota. Human Rights Library*, n.p. Online: http:/www1.umn.edu/humanrts/instree/b1 udhr.html

[50] Filimao Chambo, "Polygamy," in Al Truesdale, ed., *Global Wesleyan Dictionary of Theology* (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press, 2013).

So, if the Church truly believes that polygamists can be saved from sin only by faith in Christ and become citizens of heaven, the question then is: *Can the church redemptively live with converter polygamists?*

How Should the Church Respond to Polygamy?

It is my conviction that the church can positively influence polygamous communities to become monogamous by:

- Promoting redemptive and tolerant positions towards the polygamists in the community,
- Providing meaningful outreach and ministry for polygamous converts and their families, and
- As much as possible, proactively striving to pursue "wholesome alternatives" [51] to meet the needs that are supposedly being met through polygamy.

Helpful insights on how to respond to polygamy or some aspects of it were gained from various writers, but I find Sam Owusu's approach[52] more practical and encompassing. Like the other writers, he calls African believers to intentionally engage their traditional contexts by allowing the Gospel to gracefully confront traditional culture and not be sentimental about it. This is a clear call to preach the Gospel in its entirety and in practical terms to enable the hearers to live according to it. He recommends the following as ways in which the church can achieve this: 1) Distinguish customs and practices in the African culture*(s)* that are amoral and keep them. 2) Discern those that are sinful and should not be tolerated by the Gospel and weed them out. 3) Determine which ones need not be rejected outright but can be modified. 4) Decide which ones "though not ideally Christian, are nevertheless tolerable to the Gospel." The criterion being "that there is no clear teaching against them in Scripture and that they are likely to die as we allow the leaven of the Gospel to gradually bring transformation." [53] He then cites polygamy as one of those practices that meets this criterion. He also refers to the Lutheran Church of Liberia as a church that has tried to intentionally engage polygamy and seems to be succeeding. As the Lutherans in Liberia have found, it is possible to safeguard and promote the ideal of monogamy as normative, while allowing people of good will to

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[51] Duarte, *Africa* Speaks, 293.
[52] Owusu, *Towards* a Theology of Marriage and Polygamy,"*Direction: A Menonite Brethren Forum* 36, no. 2: n.p. [cited Fall 2007]. Online:
http://www.directionjournal.org/36/2.towards-theology-of-marriage-and.html.
[53] Owusu,. *Towards a Theology.*

remain in the polygamous condition in which they were at the time of their calling to the Christian faith (1 Cor 7:20). [54]

"How, then, should the African Christian Church promote monogamy while allowing the polygamous converts to remain?" [55] And, as part of the universal church that is to deal with polygamy, what can we, the Church of the Nazarene on Africa Region do to live with the polygamists?

Recommendations

Having learned from some of the recommendations made in answer to this question, I submit the following:

1. That, as a starting point, polygamy be included in the same section of the *Manual* with marriage and divorce as an infraction that is not "beyond the forgiving grace of God when it is sought with repentance, faith and humility"[56] and, for which "proper spiritual guidance" should be required and provided for polygamists who convert to Christ and the Church.

This is because I believe that the district and local church can only engage polygamy redemptively based on the known stance, guidance and support of the denomination as a whole. The issue of divorce is an example. Our constitution clearly states our stance regarding "Marriage and Divorce and/or Dissolution of Marriage" in the rules for Christian living[57]. This provides a platform from which we can address divorce in particular. It is described as an "infraction of the clear teaching of Christ" (*Manual*, 35.1). The explanation further states that, "such infractions are not beyond the forgiving grace of God when it is sought with repentance, faith and humility". While not promoting divorce, members are however, thus called to be compassionate and understanding towards those experiencing "such infractions". This plea is enhanced by the recognition that "some have divorce thrust upon them against their will or are compelled to it for legal or physical protection". For divorcees who seek to remarry, ministers of the Church of the Nazarene are instructed to "provide proper spiritual guidance before conducting their marriage ceremony" (35.2). This stance shows that the Church acknowledges the reality of life that we cannot ignore and,

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[54] Owusu, *Towards a Theology.*

[55] Owusu, *Towards a Theology.*

[56] *Manual,* 51.

[57] *Manual,* 51-52.

express a willingness to do our part to help. Therefore, down through the years this policy has, for better or for worse, guided the Church in her efforts to redemptively reach out and intentionally minister to divorcees. And I want to believe that many have been restored and others saved from going through divorce.

2. That the *Manual* requirements for membership be followed when taking converted polygamists into full membership.

According to Bartle's simplified and condensed *Manual* requirements the prospective member must:

- testify that they have accepted Jesus Christ as their Saviour;
- be in agreement with the beliefs of the Church of the Nazarene;
- promise to follow the rules of the Church of the Nazarene;
- promise to support the church with their time, talent and treasure; by faithful attendance, participation in its programs and financial support.
- attend classes that explain the doctrines of the church, and
- attend classes that explain the rules of the church on how Christians should live.[58]

Since these requirements are simply focused on personal experience and profession of one's faith in Jesus Christ and a commitment to live by the teachings of the Church of the Nazarene, I found myself wrestling with what additional requirements should be laid for polygamous converts while trying to avoid the known hurts experienced in the past. Then I had to wrestle with the question of why do we need to have additional requirements for these converts to become members of a Church when they are already members of heaven. I then realized that nobody had asked me to get rid of the "**permanent scars**" of my sinful life before I could become a member of the Church of the Nazarene (and I could not think of any other member who had to).

Therefore, once again, I recommend that having clearly stated our position on polygamy so that it can be taught to members and followed, polygamous converts who desire to be members and meet the *Manual* requirements for membership be not denied on the basis of what happened before they came to know Christ.

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[58] Bartle, *Member's Handbook*, 27.

The true implications of these recommendations may only be known when we have a clear stance that provides a healthy platform for outreach, ministry and engagement of the church at all levels around polygamy. However, while this development will help us for the future, our biggest challenge is the polygamous converts who are currently associate members. How much longer should they still wait to become full members? Or, are they still waiting?

On the other hand, there may be situations where those who are already members decide to become polygamists by adding wives. What should the Church do in such a situation? What the church should do, will depend largely on what the church had instructed the members about polygamy before it happened. And, if we are to have consistency in this matter, a clearly defined position on polygamy is an imperative. It is not only a necessity for accepting polygamous converts but will also guide the church in dealing with other issues related to polygamy and the church.

Conclusion

"The practice of polygamy is real in Africa and the Church will do well not to ignore it."[59] Can the church live with it? I believe she can if she would adopt the redemptive and tolerant attitude shown by God towards polygamy while upholding and promoting monogamy as His standard of marriage. Polygamy will be around for a long time. And, considering the number of Muslims and other African communities still to be evangelized, this is a challenge we had better prepare to intentionally engage. I believe that if the Church of the Nazarene will join forces with the like-minded, e.g. Lutheran Church in Liberia, learn from them and intentionally confront polygamy she will be able to "shape and contribute" toward the gradual transformation of the mind-set of the polygamous communities from polygamy to monogamy.

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[59] Duarte, *Africa* Speaks, 294.

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THE CHRISTUS VICTOR IN AFRICA[1]

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Introduction

Sub-Saharan Africa is still considered by many as the "Dark Continent" because of the atmosphere of fear, superstition, and belief in the spirit world pervading every aspect of the society. Most African Christians are aware of their forgiveness from sins, but very few are freed from the fear of death, demons, and Satan, a freedom Christ obtained by defeating these three enemies. The Christus Victor perspective of the atonement viewed as Christ's destruction of sin and defeat of Satan and death is a solution to the needs of African Christians.

In the content of sermons and songs in churches, one notices an insistence on Jesus' victory over Satan. A constant opposition exists between Jesus and Satan, and African churches celebrate the cross by using terms like victory, destruction, authority, domination, and binding. However, churches heavily influenced by Western missionaries rarely mention the victory of Christ over Satan, even though this is ever-present in the worldview and life of Africans. This has created a void and leaves African Christians needing adequate answers from the Bible, Christian traditions, reason, and experience.

The symbolism of Christus Victor – Christ's victory over the demonic powers – may overcome this deficiency. This paper examines the biblical and historical aspects of the Christus Victor model of the atonement, demonstrating its crucial place in the African worldview and closing with applications of the Christus Victor concept in the life of Africans.

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[1] This paper first appeared in *Didache: Faithful Teaching* 13:2 (January 2014), online: www.didache.nazarene.org.

Christus Victor Motif in Scripture and Christian Heritage

Ronald Muller observed: "When man sinned, three great conditions came upon mankind. When man broke *God's law*, he was in a *position of guilt*. When man broke *God's relationship*, he was in a *position of shame*. When man broke *God's trust*, he was in a *position of fear*."[2] Likewise, William Greathouse observed:

> The New Testament regards Christ's work on the cross (atonement) in at least three ways: as propitiation, as redemption, and as reconciliation. As sinners we are guilty and exposed to the wrath of God; in Christ God propitiates his wrath and expiates our guilt. As sinners we are in bondage to Satan and sin; Christ's redemptive act delivers us from bondage and sets us at liberty. As sinners we are alienated and estranged from God; we are reconciled to God by the death of his Son.

> The marvellous work of Christ on the cross answers the most basic and common needs of every human being. Guilt is answered by innocence (propitiation); shame is answered by honour (reconciliation); and fear is answered by power (redemption).[3]

Gustaf Aulén coined "Christus Victor" to express this truth.[4] He demonstrated that the atonement – Christ's redemptive act that delivers from bondage and brings freedom – is captured by the Christus Victor motif. Aulén maintained that the atonement was Christ's victory over sin, death, and the devil, and is the dominant New Testament view. Further, all the Greek fathers from Irenaeus (late 2nd century) to John of Damascus (early 8th century) held this position. Aulén observed: "The central idea of *Christus Victor* is the view of God and the Kingdom of God as fighting against evil powers ravaging mankind. In this drama Christ has the key role, and the title

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[2] Muller, 21; italics added.

[3] William M. Greathouse, "Sanctification and the *Christus Victor* Motif," in *Africa Speaks: An Anthology of the Africa Nazarene Theology Conference 2003* (Florida, South Africa: Africa Nazarene Publications, 2004), 12.

[4] Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Atonement* (London: SPCK, 1931). Aulen was Bishop of Strängnäs in the Church of Sweden and professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Lund. See "Gustaf Aulén, in *Theopedia*; accessed 10 May 2013, http://theopedia.com/Gustaf_Aulen.

Christus Victor says the decisive word about this role."[5] He added: "The work of Christ is first and foremost a victory over the powers which hold mankind in bondage: sin, death, and the devil. These may be said to be in a measure personified, but in any case they are objective powers, and the victory of Christ creates a new situation, bringing their rule to an end, and setting men free from their dominion".[6]

According to William Greathouse, Christus Victor "…furnishes the most solid basis for a dynamic biblical doctrine of sanctification." However, the approach to the holiness doctrine should be viewed in light of 1 John 3:8: "Christus Victor, moreover, not only defeated Satan; he destroyed sin itself. 'The reason the Son of God was manifested was to destroy the works of the devil.' John means that Christ came to destroy the principle of lawlessness (*anomia*—1 John 3:4), which was the devil's chief work in humankind."[7] This concept is lacking in the African Independent Churches (AICs) as they usually focus on the victory over Satan. Teaching Christus Victor from the perspective of overcoming lawlessness can be the Wesleyan contribution to the African church.

John Wesley and Christus Victor

In his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* and in three published sermons, John Wesley acknowledged the Christus Victor concept:

> John Wesley spoke of the devil as "the first sinner of the universe" (*Notes*, 1 John 3:18) who "transfused" his own self-will and pride into our first parents, thus becoming the "origin of evil" in the world (*Notes*, Matthew 13.28; John 8.44). By sin and death Satan gained possession of the world, so that it was "Satan's house" (*Notes*, Matthew 12:29; John 12:31). "Man's guilt (*and shame and fear*) gave him over to Satan's power, and man's corruption takes Satan's side in temptation. *Satan thus enjoyed a right, a claim and a power over man"* (*Notes*, John 13.39, Romans 6.14). In his notes, Wesley shows that Satan's right over man was overcome by Jesus' destruction of sin. Satan's claim over man was destroyed by God's own reconciliation to man through Jesus, and Satan's power over man causing him to live in fear was

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[5] Aulén, *Christus Victor*, ix.
[6] Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 20.
[7] Greathouse, 14; italics added.

defeated by the Christus Victor.[8]

Finally, though Wesley mentioned Christ's final victory in the last day, Greathouse lamented: "By ignoring the objective victory of Christ, Wesley opens the door to *a subjective, individualistic type of holiness*. The message of sanctification would have been more vigorously positive and biblical if he had sounded with clarity *the note of Christ's historic conquest of sin*."[9]

Christus Victor in African Christologies

Holiness is often understood in theological schools in Africa as *a subjective, individualistic type of holiness*. There is inward victory over sin, but little focus on Christ's victory over Satan. In African cultures with fear of spirits and belief in the supernatural, the Christus Victor motif viewed in the sanctification doctrine is needed.

John Mbiti taught that Jesus as Christus Victor is significant to African Christians. He insisted:

> The Christian message brings Jesus as the one who fought victoriously against the forces of the devil, spirits, sickness, hatred, fear, and death itself…He is the victor, the one hope, the one example, the one conqueror, and it makes sense to African peoples, it draws their attention, and it is pregnant with meaning. It gives their myths an absolutely new dimension. *The greatest need among African peoples is to see, to know, and to experience Jesus Christ as the victor over the powers and forces [from] which Africa knows no means of deliverance*.[10]

Colossians 2:15 states: "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (NIV). In Wolof (a major language of Senegal), Colossians 2:15 affirms: "*Futti na kilifa yi ak boroom sañ-sañ yi, weer leen ci kanamu ñépp, sëkktal leen niy jaam ndax ndam la Kirist jële ca bant ba*." It portrays the three actions of the Christus Victor. "Futti na" uses the image of Jesus with

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[8] Greathouse, 20; italics added.
[9] Greathouse, 21; italics added.
[10] Cited by Diane B.Stinton, *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology* (Orbis Books. Maryknoll, New York. 2004), 105; italics added.

authority and by force undressing the power of Satan and the demons. "Weer leen" is the idea of making Satan's schemes public and known to every believer. Finally, "sëkktal" portrays Jesus harassing Satan and making him retreat until there is no way out!

The experience of Christ by most Christians in Sub-Saharan Africa shapes their view of Jesus. John Pobee rightly viewed Christology as pertaining to how

> …people attempt to articulate and portray the Christ who confronts them or whom they have experienced or met on the Damascus Road. And they do that articulation from their being and as they are. So one…can expect different and varying emphases in that articulation, differences determined by one's experiences, by one's heritage, by one's gender, by one's race. The encounter on the Emmaus road is not identical with the encounter on the Damascus road.[11]

Diane Stinton has outlined several African Christologies. Under the rubric of "Jesus as healer," the Christus Victor motif is implied. Jesus as healer conveys the images of Jesus as: a) life-giver, b) the one who recreates wholeness in all aspects of life, and c) the one who has supremacy over every form of evil operating in the universe, whether manifested in the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, or social sphere of life. Jesus as healer overlaps with images like victor, conqueror, and warrior, or the one who what is life-negating and d) images related to significant roles as saviour, liberator, and redeemer. [12]

Notwithstanding, Christus Victor as such is not among the major images of African Christologies. Further, theology in Africa is not limited to the scholars or educated Christians as there is no separation between the living and the written experience of God in cultures where the view of life is inclusive and holistic. Henry Okullu affirmed:

> When we are looking for African theology we should go first to the fields, to the village church, to Christian homes to listen to those spontaneously uttered prayers before people go to bed…We must listen to the throbbing drumbeats and the clapping of hands accompanying the impromptu singing in the independent churches.

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[11] Stinton, 15.
[12] Stinton, 74.

We must look at the way in which Christianity is being planted in Africa through music, drama, songs, dances, art, paintings. We must listen to the preaching of the sophisticated pastor as well as to that of the simple village vicar. Can it be that all this is an empty show? It is impossible. This then is Africa theology.[13]

The Christus Victor motif is so ingrained in the daily experiences of the African Christian that it was never systematized because it is part of who they are and what they live, it is "contextual theology or accountable to the context people live in."[14]

Contextual theology as related to Christus Victor is seen in a prayer from Madam Afua Kuma, an uneducated farmer in the forest of Kwahu (Ghana):

If Satan troubles us,
Jesus Christ,
You who are the Lion of the grasslands,
You whose claws are sharp,
Will tear out his entrails,
And leave them on the ground
For the flies to eat.
Let us all say, Amen![15]

African Experience of Christus Victor

African theologians have stressed expiation as important for evangelism, focusing less on propitiation and reconciliation than on redemption that includes physical, spiritual, emotional, and cosmic deliverance as found in the victorious Christ. African Christologies are present in worship songs, prayers, and teachings of the African Independent Churches and Charismatic Churches. Those churches understand the fear most Africans experience and use the Christus Victor concept to answer their needs in sometimes-controversial ways. However, it is undisputed that those churches "provide protection from witchcraft, failure in business; they help people who need fruits of the womb and those who want to gain wealth or

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[13] Stinton, 17.
[14] Stinton, 16.
[15] Afua Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest: Prayers and praises of Afua Kuma* (Accra, Ghana: Asempa Publishers, 1981), 46.

promotion in the work place" … and they "challenge the adequacy of the pastoral responses of institutionalized churches by their more relevant responses to the human quest for wholeness and harmony, participation and realization, on all levels of human existence and experience."[16] Those churches are scratching where most Africans itch.

It is ironic that the Christus Victor motif – which gives answers to fear-based cultures where superstition, worship of ancestors, and fear of the evil eye, evil tongue, and the spirit world are common – has not been directly addressed by most African theologians. It is left to practitioners who can misuse Christ's victory as a tool based on a non-transformed African worldview. The result is fear of and veneration for "men and women of God" rather than freedom from the sin, Satan, and death provided by Christus Victor.

Books circulate across West Africa, such as *Your Foundation and Your Destiny*, [17] addressing poverty, destroying the fortress, voice and destiny, the sleeping giants, one's birth and deliverance, and explaining people's dreams. Written simply and using the same structure as African traditional religions, these books enlist Christians in a never-ending fight between themselves and the Devil, with Christ as a juju man rather than the Prince of Peace.

The approach's success lies in its apparent answers to the African worldview with its fear of curses, belief in ancestors, and the overwhelming presence of evil spirits from birth to death. It addresses key issues in Africa that produce servitude, including polygamy, live-in-partnerships, blood alliances (symbolized by body scarification made by some ethnic groups), earth alliances (by pouring libations), inherited curses and burdens from ancestors, water spirits, evil altars, polluted thrones (especially in governments), nightmares, name manipulation, evil spiritual marriage, sacrifices, and the demon of poverty. Each topic concludes with a supporting Bible verse and a deliverance prayer.

These topics are part of the everyday of African Christians. They represent the "excluded middle" explained by Paul Hiebert:

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[16] Rev. Dr. J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu in an a r t i c l e presented at the Mission Conference, "Awaken to the World," Accra, Ghana, 2005.

[17] D.K. Olukoya, *Your Foundation and Your Destiny* Mountains of Fire and Miracle Ministries. 2005. Nigeria.

The modern Protestant movement began in the eighteenth century when modernity and the Enlightenment had captured the minds of people in the West. Underlying these movements was a major worldview shift…After the tenth century, the Greek worldview was reintroduced through the Crusades and the universities in Spain. It made a sharp distinction between spirit and matter, mind and body. In this worldview, spirits, such as angels and demons, exist in the realm of the supernatural, and humans and other material beings in the natural world, which is governed by natural laws. [18]

This distinction did not exist in the African worldview, creating a split-level Christianity, the gap filled by the theological responses mentioned above. The teachers in those groups view the enemy as every power, spirit, or force opposing God's will with little mention of the sinful nature in humans and the need for forgiveness and repentance. They addressed the main goal of the African, which Paul Mpindi identified as

Utilitarian in that it exists only in order to prevent the bad events which can destabilize the harmony in the life of the individual and the community. The African is known for being extremely religious. However, it is important to mention that his/her profound religiosity doesn't come from an attachment to the Supreme Being or to the spirits or ancestors. The African religion is utilitarian because the African invokes, prays, sacrifices, respects the taboos towards God or the gods and not because he loves them or wants to serve them.[19]

The worldview of most African Christians has not been converted into a Christian worldview, hence the syncretism we find in most of the books, teachings, and theologies circulating in Africa today. This approach is unbiblical and unhealthy, a misuse of the Christus Victor motif. It sees the Christian's relationship with God as a slave/client rather than a child in his/her Father's house.

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[18] Paul G.Hiebert, R.Daniel Shaw and Tite Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion* (Baker Books, 1999), 89.

[19] Paul Mpindi, "African worldview: The foundations of the traditional ethics in Africa," in Jack Robinson, *Ethics for Living and Leadership* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Development Associates International, 2005), 26-27.

Toward a Balanced Application of Christus Victor in the African Church

An African pastor recounted:

One day, I was walking in a street in my city when I saw a crowd running after a man and throwing stones and cursing him. In most cases, either that person is a thief or he is accused of being a witch. There were two groups of people running after that man. One was trying to kill him while the other group was trying to help him escape. As they were shouting, they were saying, 'This is not a man, it is a dog!' They finally caught him and stoned him to death, and when I came to see him, I found a dog rather than a man. I was horrified and with great fear I ran to the missionary who was teaching me at the Bible school and told him the story. I needed an answer to an experience that was not addressed in our teachings. He calmed me and confidently said, 'Don't worry; this did not really happen, it is only your imagination.' I was greatly confused with a lot of unanswered questions in my mind.

This story illustrates the gap between classroom theology and the reality of life. Mbiti told similar stories, observing: "To an outsider they sound more like fiction than reality; however, they cannot be dismissed as trickery, hypnotism or purely the result of psychological conditions of those who experience them. To my knowledge, there is no African society that does not hold belief in mystical power of one type or another."[20]

When those people come to church, they find a great divide between the world of fear that they live in vs. the message, teachings, and songs at church. So how can we create a balanced Christus Victor view in the life of African believers?

Paul Hiebert noted that the Bible depicts the Christus Victor motif (Ephesians 6:10-20, Revelation 19:19-20), describing it as spiritual warfare; however, it is neither a question of power nor of confrontation between God and the evil forces. It first and foremost clarifies in the minds of the African believers that God is above everything. Hiebert observed:

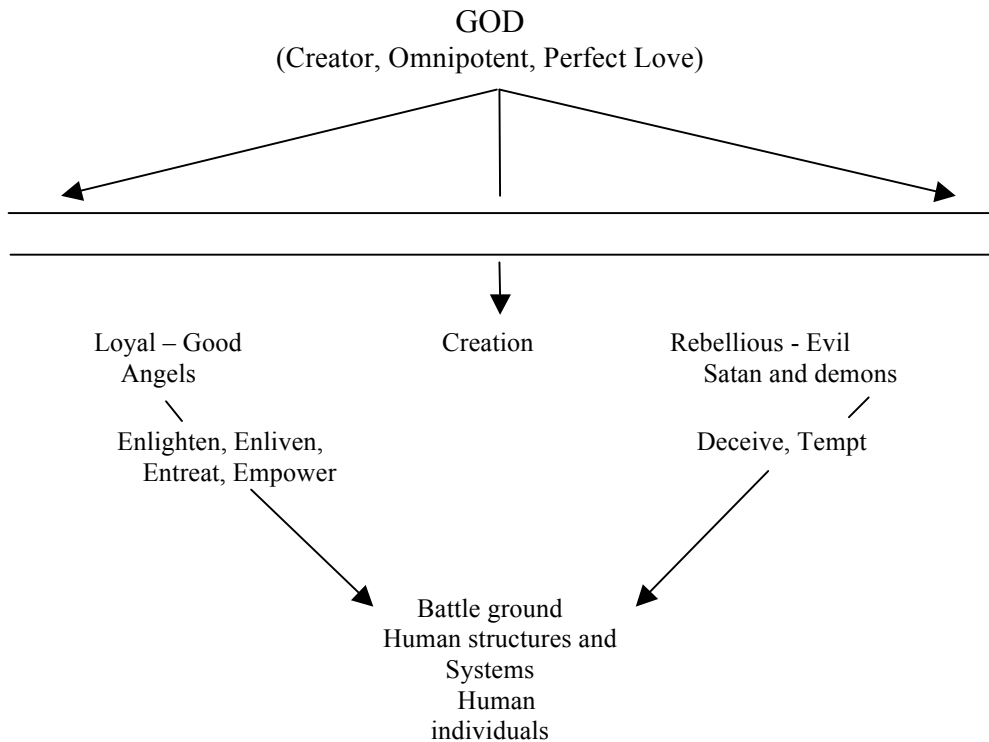God is eternal and evil is contingent. The Bible is clear:

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[20] S.Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (New York: Anchor Books, 1970), 257.

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God and Satan, and good and evil, are not eternal and coexistent…Moreover, God's creation depends upon him for continued existence…Satan and sinners, like all creation, are contingent on God's sustaining power. Their very existence in their rebellion is testimony of God's mercy and love."[21]

Worldview conversion begins with a biblical understanding of God and divine sovereignty as diagrammed by Hiebert and shown below:

GOD
(Creator, Omnipotent, Perfect Love)

Loyal – Good
Angels

Creation

Rebellious - Evil
Satan and demons

Enlighten, Enliven,
Entreat, Empower

Deceive, Tempt

Battle ground
Human structures and
Systems
Human
individuals

Proper Christus Victor teaching underscores the dual existence of believers mentioned in Ephesians 2:6-7 : "…and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (ESV). Charles Talbert explained: "Unbelievers live in one world only, the earth, although their lives are

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[21] Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1994), 209.

impinged upon by the evil powers from the lower heavens. They are one-dimensional beings. Believers, however, live in two dimensions. They are alive upon the earth and alive in the heavenlies at the same time. They are two-dimensional."[22] This implies position and co-seating which make a huge difference in the worship of the African believer. As Greathouse affirmed: "He (Jesus) became what we are that we might become what he is. Such was the dominating theme of the Christology of the orthodox Fathers who fashioned the ecumenical creeds."[23] Thereby, Christus Victor presupposes that it was only by meeting the forces of evil on their own ground – in other terms, by entering the history where they were entrenched – that Christ could break their power: "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil" (Hebrews 2.14, ESV).

It is essential in Christus Victor for believers to know the locus of spiritual warfare. Paul Hiebert stated: "Prayer in Indo-European- and African- thought is a means to control the gods; in biblical thought it is submission to God. In prayer we give God permission to use us and our resources to answer our prayer."[24] Prayer is not getting results but living in God's *shalom*, beginning with a right relationship with God involving worship, holiness, and obedience. Hiebert continued, describing the locus of spiritual warfare not as:

> …a cosmic struggle between God and Satan (that) will determine who will rule…The battle rages within the human heart, which God seeks to win…What then is the nature of spiritual warfare in the Bible? Compared to Indo-European (or African) myths, there are few references to cosmic battles. *The central story is about the battle for the spirits of human beings.* In this, *humans are not passive victims of battles* fought on a cosmic plane. *They are the central actors and the locus of the action.* They are the rebels, and ever since the temptation of Adam, self-worship has been the basis of their idolatry.[25]

Christ crucified is the conqueror of Satan, sin, and death. It is here

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[22] Charles H. Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007), 61.
[23] Greathouse*,* 16.
[24] Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections*, 210.
[25] Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections,* 211; italics added.

that Aulén and Greathouse agree upon the interpretation of sanctification:

> As the rule of sin is broken in the believer's life, Christ's victory for us becomes his victory in us by the indwelling Spirit (Romans 8.1-11). Christ's victory is reproduced in us. In the Holy Spirit, Christ for us becomes Christ in us, recapitulating in our history his triumph over sin. This is the meaning of Christus Victor for sanctification. Every demon we meet is foredoomed in Christ. Sin itself has lost its power for the believer in whom Christ dwells (1 John 4.4; 5.4, 18). This victory is given to us in three stages – in conversion, in entire sanctification, and in glorification.[26]

Christus Victor *completely and sufficiently* protects from fear or demonic attacks. This is important in the believer's encounters with demonic oppression that can tempt him/her to ask: "What could be wrong with wearing a magical amulet or invoking magical names for *additional* protection?"[27] The confusion lies in the use of the name or the blood of Jesus as an amulet or protection over the evil spirits and the invoking of the Holy Spirit as a higher and more powerful spirit whose presence purifies the atmosphere from any evil presence or spirits. In spiritual warfare, believers should be aware that they "have been rescued from the ultimate enemy, the dominion of Satan and his evil powers. They have a present experience of the blessings of the future realm that enables them to deal with the on-going hostility of the supernatural principalities and powers."[28]

As William Greathouse noted:

> Christ's victory is complete but not final. We have been saved in hope – the hope of resurrection and glorification with Christ (Romans 8.15-17; Corinthians 15.22-28; Philippians 3.12-21). Meanwhile our sanctification has the character of spiritual warfare in which our victory over sin is assured as we permit Christ to live moment by moment in us (John 15.1-6; Ephesians 6.10-15; Philippians 1.6). This is the practical meaning of Christology for a theology of holiness.[29]

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[26] Greathouse, 17, 19.
[27] Clinton E.Arnold, *Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1989), 167.
[28] Clinton E. Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism: The Interface between Christianity and Folk Belief at Colossae* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books), 291.
[29] Greathouse, 19.

Conclusion

African Christians should write a balanced theology of sanctification with both a subjective and objective view of the cross. Christus Victor is the answer to fear, anxiety, and the need for protection and power among Africans. However, this work and teaching should not be limited to classroom learning; all African Christians in the dynamic of contextual theology should put it into practice. Christ is the victor, and His victory is complete. The teaching and the putting into practice of Christus Victor until the return of Christ will contribute to His complete victory.

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