



**A theological evaluation of the ethics of
customary marriage in the Ghanaian
Christian charismatic churches in London**

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**A THEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF THE
ETHICS OF CUSTOMARY MARRIAGE IN THE
GHANAIAN CHRISTIAN CHARISMATIC
CHURCHES IN LONDON.**

RESEARCH PROPOSAL

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to address the prevalent issue of singleness, financial challenge and moral challenge due to the church's attitude to customary marriage. The idea is to introduce and reinforce the Ghanaian customary marriage (GCM) as a legitimate Christian marriage in the Ghanaian church. This marriage is not financially overburdening, it is culturally acceptable and spiritually conducive for moral engagement. GCM is biblically sound from the perspective of doctrine, as the bible has nothing against customary marriage since all the examples of marriage we see in the bible are done within the context of culture of the people involve.

The Ghanaian church has to come to terms and find ways to address its own cultural and ethical position on these matters as the church cannot function and be relevant to the wider community if the debate is not seriously discussed. The place of marriage, common law partnership, cohabiting and customary marriage within the church must be revisited.

KEY WORDS

Pentecostalism, Morality, Culture, Customary Marriage, Cohabiting, Polygamy

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	II
ABSTRACT	III
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION A BIBLICAL EVALUATION OF THE ETHICS OF CUSTOMARY MARRIAGE IN THE GHANAIAAN CHRISTIAN CHARISMATIC CHURCHES IN LONDON	1
1.1 BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM STATEMENT	1
1.1.1 Background of the study	1
1.1.2 Problem statement.....	8
1.2 RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES	10
1.2.1 Aim.....	10
1.2.2 Objectives	12
1.3 CENTRAL THEORETICAL ARGUMENT	12
1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS, DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	12
1.4.1 Research questions	12
1.4.2 Design and methodology	13
1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY	14
1.6 SCOPE OF THE STUDY	15
1.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	15
1.8 CLASSIFICATION OF CHAPTERS	15
1.9 SCHEMATIC PRESENTATION	16
CHAPTER 2: MARRIAGE AND CULTURE IN PENTECOSTALISM	17
2.1 INTRODUCTION	17
2.2 UNDERSTANDING THE ETHICS OF CUSTOMARY MARRIAGE WITHIN PENTECOSTALISM	17
2.2.1 Morality, customary marriage and the Christian context.....	20

2.2.2	A case for monogamy	23
2.2.3	The religious landscape in Ghana	30
2.2.4	The missionary enterprise in Ghana	31
2.2.5	Pentecostalism in Ghana	35
2.2.6	The Role of Peter Anim and Pentecostalism in Ghana.....	37
2.2.7	The moral dilemma within indigenous Christianity	40
2.2.8	Morality and Pentecostalism in Ghana	41
CHAPTER 3:	EVALUATION OF ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST	
	POLYGAMOUS MARRIAGE	48
3.1	INTRODUCTION	48
3.2	ARGUMENT AGAINST CUSTOMARY MARRIAGE AS A	
	LEGITIMATE FORM OF CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE	48
3.2.1	The polygamy factor	48
3.2.2	The status of women and the bride-price.....	54
3.2.3	The levirate union and other distinguishing features of customary marriage.....	55
3.2.4	Infertility, menopause, outcast and sexual relations during pregnancy	56
3.2.5	Conclusion	57
3.3	THE ARGUMENT FOR CUSTOMARY MARRIAGE AS A	
	LEGITIMATE FORM OF CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE	58
3.3.1	Old Testament perspective	58
3.3.2	The development of traditional Church marriage.....	64
3.4	SUMMARY	67
CHAPTER 4:	THEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT	68
4.1	INTRODUCTION	68

4.2	CALL FOR THE RE-EVALUATION OF THE CHURCH’S POLICY ON CUSTOMARY MARRIAGE	68
4.2.1	The call	68
4.2.2	The missionary and the general African marriage	70
4.2.3	The easy dissolubility of the African customary marriage	76
4.2.4	Biblical principles of marriage that apply to all cultures.	77
4.3	THE NEED TO ESTABLISH AN ECCLESIASTICAL ORDER TO ACCOMMODATE CUSTOMARY NORMS	79
4.3.1	The Need	79
4.3.2	The European Wedding	83
4.3.3	The polygamous nature of customary marriage	84
4.3.4	The new order	84
4.4	SUMMARY	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
CHAPTER 5:	RE-EVALUATION OF THE CHURCH’S STAND ON CUSTOMARY MARRIAGE AND CHURCH ORDER.....	86
5.1	INTRODUCTION	86
5.2	CUSTOMARY MARRIAGE AND CHURCH ORDER.....	86
5.3	BRIDE PRICE	92
5.4	THE CHRISTIAN CHARISMATIC CHURCH IN LONDON	94
5.5	SUMMARY	95
CHAPTER 6:	PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	96
6.1	INTRODUCTION	96
6.2	FINDINGS	96
	REFERENCE LIST.....	100

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

A BIBLICAL EVALUATION OF THE ETHICS OF CUSTOMARY MARRIAGE IN THE GHANAIAN CHRISTIAN CHARISMATIC CHURCHES IN LONDON

1.1 BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

1.1.1 Background of the study

This academic work is motivated by the current conversation on Pentecostalism/Charismatism and culture. Pentecostalism is faced with the reality of different traditional practices within the numerous socio-cultural settings of the world. Migration is an indispensable result of globalisation, with the migration of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians from Africa to Europe came the rise of African churches in Europe. With the church planting comes encounter between the European and African cultures (Olorunnisola, 2020). One of such encounter is the area of marriage. Among such practices is the undermining of what the church deems traditional family values where a man meets a woman, they become engaged, then marry and start a home together. As God blesses the relationship, they have children and hopefully live a happy life ever after.

In today's modern secular culture people find it difficult to uphold old church values, and people live together for different reasons. Some do not see the need for marriage because of the financial implications, and complications that come from church values. As a pastor of a predominantly Ghanaian church, I am faced with this huge burden of juggling the impact of British societal influences on the church, which is also influenced by Ghanaian culture, and a theological position that seems to be diametrically opposed to the wider dominant society. Because dealing with the impact of the wider British society on church life as a whole will be too much for this study, I will just look into the impact on customary marriage and culture. I will touch on cohabiting, sexual orientation, polygamy, and gay marriage as a means to establish the impact of the wider British culture on the Ghanaian church. This study will focus on the concept of Ghanaian customary marriage and the ethical implications to the church. I am aware that some of my arguments may not represent the views of Christianity as a whole, and may even differ from the mainstream Evangelical position. I write this from the perspective of the Ghanaian

Pentecostal/Charismatic standpoint which can also reflect, with nuance, similar sub-Saharan African Pentecostal/Charismatic traditions.

The paying of a bride-price plays a key role in the Ghanaian customary marriage. When a man meets a woman he is attracted to her, wants to get married to her, and informs his parents; the parents of the lady then do a background check on the man's family just to ascertain whether there are any serious issues with the family, e.g., a history of mental illness, strange diseases and the like. When they are satisfied with their findings the head of the family is informed about the intentions of the man. At this point, a delegation of family members officially goes to see the family of the woman and informs them of their son's intention to officially date the daughter. If the woman's family agrees to that they will then take an alcoholic drink – usually Schnapps – from the man's family, signifying that their daughter is solely reserved for the man. In some cases, the meeting will be postponed for some days so that they can research whether to accept or not. But usually, it is not as difficult on the woman's side as it is for the men. This stage is referred to as 'knocking' (*kokooko*). This is not the marriage; it's just an introduction, and in real terms, the woman's family puts it to the man's family that if they can't locate the woman it is assumed she is with the man, or at the man's family home. It is much later when the man is satisfied with the woman that a marriage proposal is made. At that stage, the man's family goes to see the woman's family to declare their intention. A date is then set for the customary marriage. At this meeting, the man receives the bride-price list of items, which should be provided on the day of the ceremony. Details of this process will be given in the subsequent chapters.

The challenge with colonisation was that the Portuguese who first came to the shores of west Africa and the subsequent European missionaries did not only come and trade in slaves and merchant goods but also brought Christianity (Labode, 1999). With it came the cultural values and norms of the missionaries. They built schools and hospitals and introduced their way of culture as a Christian culture that needed emulating. Almost everything that is within the Ghanaian culture was demonised as pagan. The indigenes, wanting to be so much like the missionary, took in everything and side-lined their own culture in many cases. Locally made drums were abandoned for the organs and other European musical instruments. Traditional clothes were in most part replaced in preference to suits and ties even in the scorching sun, in temperatures usually in excess

of 30°C. Customary marriages were discouraged for what became known as the 'white' wedding (Christian wedding). Therefore, it seems like everything European was Christian and anything Ghanaian, essentially African, was pagan. As Okyere-Manu (2014) discusses that the great commission was intended to spread the gospel to all nations, for the expansion of the church, as a result hasten the coming of Jesus Christ. Although the command of Jesus is clear, she argued that the command was misinterpreted and as a result opened the way to imperialism in most foreign lands including Ghana.

For instance, the church I was a member of in Ghana will not recognise any customary marriage as a godly Christian marriage, unless the couple walk down the aisle to the altar of the church for exchange of vows and God's blessings. This then creates a problem between the couple and their respective families, especially those family members who are traditionalists.

In John Mbiti's book *Introduction to African Religion*. Mbiti (1991:109) spells out the diversity and richness of the African culture across several countries, demonstrating that the African approach to marriage is not homogenous. He intimates that various forms of engagement as traditional marriage are steeped not just in the culture of the people but also in the African traditional religion. In his work, he explains that the Africans, especially the sub-Saharan Africans, had their own religion before the European missionaries arrived. All our rites of passage were well defined and steeped in the African tradition. The dramatic change in the Christian approach to customary rituals and its accommodation in the modern churches is not straightforward. Bediako (1995:3ff) puts forth a convincing argument that the impact of the Western culture on the customary and traditional approach of the church processes cannot be overlooked. The impact of the European culture on the African culture, particularly the Ghanaian culture, cannot be overstated. Perhaps the colonial masters should have left the indigenous Ghanaians to approach Christianity within their cultural norms yet keeping the integrity of the religion. As things stand now, it's important to understand the huge contention brewing between what has been presented as Christianity and what should actually be done to embrace the African's understanding of God. This thesis looks seriously at a few areas to establish the effect of Western colonisation on the traditional institution, particularly marriage.

Mbiti (1975:45-59) writes about the rich culture of the African. Their ways, norms, and traditions are expressed clearly and exhibit the fact that Africans were comfortable in their

worship and had a way in which they reached out to God. In the expression of worship, the Akan people from Ghana will use powerful expressive language in adoration to God, accolades like 'God the one who satisfies' (Wiafe 2010:3), 'Onyame' the all-knowing one, and 'Otwediampong' the one whom you lean on and will never forsake you. All those accolades were in Ghanaian traditional worship before the colonial masters came with their missionary gospel. As Mbiti (1975) put it, the African indigenous people not only had their expression of worship to the most high God but also had their own musical instrumentation that went along with their expressive worship. The Akans had what they called 'fontomfrum' (or talking drums), specially carved drums with legs designed to encode vital messages. Every note played on the drum had a meaning, and when people wanted to communicate across communities these drums were used, and the people had a perfect understanding as to what was being said. These drums were not encouraged to be used in the church because of their association with paganism, as the kings of old used these instruments in rituals, and the implication of their secret notes. As noted by Bediako (1995:97ff), a lot of the African concepts of worship were labelled by the missionaries as pagan and therefore they were not encouraged to be integrated into the services of God. Additionally, other practices of the community were called into question. One of these is how the Ghanaian customary marriage is conducted. As Wiafe (2010:9ff) discusses that the Ghanaian customary marriage comes with many rituals, including pouring of libations to the ancestral gods and invoking spirits to protect the marriage and give the blessings of children. The tradition itself is polygamously inclined as the man can marry more women if he so wishes, which I will discuss further. Anywhere the word polygamy is used in this text, polygyny is assumed, as this is the custom of the Ghanaian tradition. This is also the norm within the Old Testament, with more recordings of the biblical patriarchs taking on more than one wife like Jacob (Genesis 31:17). Polygamous marriages are illegal under civil law, however the customary law in Ghana does not forbid a man to marry more than one wife; by default, it encourages men to marry many more, as the cultural predisposition (Elizabeth Archampong, 2010). To this effect, there is no threat or need for divorce, as divorce is seriously frowned upon in the community, because divorce is likely to bring hardship on the wife and her children. Men can always look elsewhere to compensate for any marital challenges. It is then the common cultural saying that "too many meats do not spoil the soup, rather enhance it" (Rebecca Kwei, 2016). It is the case of what one cannot get from one woman can be obtained from the

other, whether good food, pleasure, or even attending social gatherings. This marital situation is the way it is because the typical Ghanaian cultural tradition is very chauvinistic, to say the least, and this will be further examined in Chapter 3.

The practices of the Ghanaian marriage traditions and especially the polygamy that comes with it, made the Christian missionary find no ground to even consider a way to assimilate the culture into the gospel they came to present. Therefore, they dismissed the Ghanaian traditional marriage as pagan and introduced English white weddings as the alternative and authentic Christian marriage. This marriage is supposed to be monogamous; as such you live in sin if you have two or more wives. The insistence of the missionary to introduce a monogamous Christian marriage created a lot of problems. Most Ghanaian Christians find the need to have a church wedding as they feel as though the marriage is not recognised by God unless the pastor blesses it or it is brought before the chapel altar for a church blessing (Atto Kum, 2010). I will develop this further in Chapter 3. Those who became committed to the missionary agenda had confrontations with their family members who were not Christians. The culture changed so that the authority of marriage shifted from the family of the couple to the church. The pastor then became the main figure of authority. In the Ghanaian tradition, it is the parents who give their consent to marry, and on the basis of the families' agreement the marriage could go ahead. However, with the involvement of the church, conflict automatically comes as the family members who are traditionalists insist on the traditional way of marriage. Aye-Addo (2013:28) discusses the positions of the African mindset on spirit beings. As the belief goes, the ancestral spirits play a key role in the understanding of the African worldview in that they must be consulted in every major decision by a family. One does not want to anger the spirits because that can have dire consequences for the family. In certain cases, when people become Christians that fear still exists, and therefore, they dabble in ancestral rituals in order to please the spirits and give themselves to God to please God. The African scholars, John Mbiti (1975), Bolaji Idowu (1973), Kwame Bediako (1995), and John Pobee (1962) all attest to the fact that the African heritage is so ingrained in the mindset, norms, and customs of the African that it cannot be overlooked in the pursuit of African Christianity or Christology (Mbiti, 1975). Certainly, every people group, whether African or European, cherishes their heritage and in many cases will not want to give it up but reintroduce it if possible to their newfound faith. That is the whole argument presented by Richard Niebuhr in his book *Christ and Culture* (Niebuhr 2001).

The problem is that missionaries have knowingly or unknowingly presented their culture as an alternative one to that of the indigenes in the place of mission. In Ghana, the missionaries exhibited their culture in such a way that it looked superior to that of the indigenous people, and the indigenes, especially the converted Christians, perceived it as superior. This is seen in their reactions to the missionary culture. In a way, the missionary's viewpoint becomes the 'Christian way of doing things' and eventually informs the respondents' culture. Tugume Lubowa Hassan (2015) in his research paper 'Attitudes of Christian Missionaries towards African Traditional Religious Belief' explains that in general, the missionaries to Africa made Africans believe that their traditions (including marriage) were pagan. As part of the conversion into Christianity Africans adapted to the way the missionaries did things, including the way they marry (Sackitey, 2011). In the Anglo-Saxon days, this form of marriage was pagan just as the marriage the missionaries came to see was branded pagan. The early Christians did not challenge that position. The converts to Christianity wholeheartedly accepted these practices and even looked down on their own cultural heritage. This reflects in different aspects of the society – specifically, everything the colonial masters did was perceived as right and must be followed. Even in the area of commerce, European products were preferred to locally made products; European ways of life that were not so compatible with the Ghanaian setting began to assimilate into the culture. Ghanaian innovation and technology could not advance because of western influence. Necessity is the mother of invention and therefore why should anyone dream of inventing anything when all that is needed is supplied for. Any attempt to do anything will not be as good as what is produced from Europe and even if the effort is made the patronage is not that great.

The ethical considerations, that is, considerations of the way the Ghanaian Christian conducts his or her life in London (or anywhere for that matter) cannot be ignored, especially seeing the extent to which society is fast changing. The church has two options: either we ignore and go with the status quo, or we confront our own theologies, norms, and the way we perceive the traditions of the church. If we go for the first option, there is the possibility we may lose church members, but if we pragmatically look at scripture, we can find solutions to this ethical dilemma. We don't have to confront issues for the sake of it, but it becomes necessary when it undermines the fabric on which social cohesion exists.

This is what I want to explore and come up with some answers in the subsequent chapters. From the scriptural point of view (Galatians 5:1), the church is a place to experience freedom in Christ; in my view, this means Christians can be themselves in the context of their culture, so long as the life they lead is pleasing to God and honouring to fellow humans. Richard Niebuhr (1951:83) expresses the freedom we have in Christ by asserting that Christ is a person for culture and so long as the culture is not opposed to the fundamental doctrines of our faith then it must be embraced.

GCM has been the cultural practice of Ghanaians throughout history. The introduction of the civil and church wedding brought another tier of marriage in the Ghanaian community instead of replacing it. As a result, the young man who wants to marry has to perform three ceremonies if he or she is a believer. He must satisfy the traditionalists in the family by the customary marriage. He must satisfy the legal side by the signing of the marriage register at the civil courts. Finally, he must satisfy the church authorities by blessing the marriage in the church with a ceremony. Some set the bar so high with pomp and grandeur. There can be great financial hardship for young men to meet all these three functions as, culturally speaking, it is the man who should be the breadwinner. In certain cases, the women also share in the burden. As someone who went through this, I want to research how the church can reconstruct the current form and create a form that will be acceptable to all three stakeholders: the church, the law and the tradition. The rejection of customary marriage by some pastors as a pagan practice is not helping the church people. Some of those who reject customary marriage do so by and large on the grounds that it encourages polygamy if not brought to church for a blessing, so the undertone is essentially the practice of polygamy, which is widely practised in Ghanaian and African cultures. This also makes evangelisation difficult, since one cannot convert the polygamist to monogamy. The English colonial masters adhere to the English statute (the Bigamy Act of 1604), and the Edmunds Act of 1882 in the USA made polygamy a civil offence and deprives practitioners from performing their national duty such as becoming jurors (Edmunds Anti-Polygamy Act of 1882). This institutional discriminatory act against polygamists seems not to take into consideration the traditional values of societies that uphold such practices. According to Zeitzen (2008:23), marriage is a social arrangement by which a child is given a legitimate status in society, determined by parenthood in the social sense, and makes socio-cultural life, which preceded national law and order, a relevant force.

The situation is compounded by the fact, as Harold Turner (1966:313-314) argues, that nineteenth-century missionaries to Africa sought to replace polygamy practised by various African cultures with monogamy as a basic necessity within the church. Therefore, any cultural institution that remotely looks like it encourages polygamy should be discouraged outright. Furthermore, the Christian advocates followed suit in their argument that polygamy is a clear violation of the sacredness of marriage and the purity of sexual morality and therefore subversive of social and political integrity (Mason, 2010).

On the other hand, proponents of polygamy such as John Mbiti and E.A. Asamoah argue that African heritage is deeply religious, so the church should have a distinctive way to present the gospel that is contemporary and culturally relevant (Asamoah, 1955). Apostle Paul in 1Corinthians 9:19-23 exhorts his readers that he made himself a servant to everyone and became all things to all people so he may win them to Christ. He approached mission in a way to embrace people the way they were regardless of their society, beliefs and practices, which included polygamy. The disregard for customary marriage and parental role in marriages by some pastors of the Ghanaian Pentecostal and charismatic churches not only causes problems for church relationships but also has a huge financial implication for the members of the church. Currently as it stands, customary marriage itself is expensive, then after that, some pastors compel their members to have a 'white' wedding without which the customary marriage is not valid according to the belief of the pastor. I will probe further into the effects and dynamics of this issue in a later chapter.

1.1.2 Problem statement

The problem of culture and marriage is a current discussion, with Dowuona weighing in. Samuel Nii Narku Dowuona (2006) a columnist for ghanaweb.com in his article 'Church weddings: Is it Christian or Western?' questions our current church weddings, whether they are based on biblical or Western culture. Even though he raised this issue 14 years ago, it still remains an ongoing discussion among the Ghanaian Charismatic Christians especially those in the diaspora. In his argument, he raises the concerns of many church members who with time have become wearier about the lack of insight and discussion of the role of the traditional marriage in the context of the wider church. This calls for further research into the issue. Dowuona's contribution to the discussion is very relevant today as it has become the current conversation among a lot of young African Christians and

particularly Ghanaian Christians who live in the diaspora. The problem of Christianity and African culture has always existed, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Numerous African scholars, including Bolaji Idowu, Kwame Bediako and John Mbiti have weighed in the discussion. This study looks at similar problems amongst Ghanaians in the diaspora.

This study is important because not much scholarly work has been done in this area in the context of the Ghanaians Christians in the diaspora. Hopefully it will inform the pastors and create an avenue for constructive discourse.

Augustine Ankomah, (1996) in his article, Premarital relationships and livelihoods in Ghana, Gender & Development discusses that in this day and age young women, regardless of how their economic status is perceived in society, still look to men for financial support. There are several reasons why people stay single or even refuse to make a commitment to marry; one of these could be financial. This is a serious problem facing most African majority churches, especially the Ghanaian charismatic churches in London. If the church is going to stand to be a beacon of hope in righteousness and holy living in the community, then its members must be seen as living that example.

The rejection of the GCM, which by comparison is far cheaper to organise, and the acceptance of the church wedding, which is far more expensive to organise, has given rise to several members not keen to marry for financial reasons. From my personal cultural experience as a Ghanaian, and a ministry spanning over 30 years in a majority Ghanaian church, a typical customary marriage involves a bride-price that includes 6 Holland wax cloths, engagement ring, Holy Bible, and a gift for the bride's parents and siblings which all can amount to approximately £1000. However, a full church wedding, the wedding bands and the bride's gown alone topples the £1000 figure.

Several approaches have been proposed to enforce holy living. Perhaps the most effective approach is to allow and recognise the GCM as a legitimate marriage for the church.

Action is needed to help the young people to settle in marriage without the financial burden and it will also help minimise fornication, what the church sees as unholy living, even though marriage does not necessarily cure unholy living.

1.2 RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

My main research question is. What is the ethics of customary marriage within Pentecostalism? Out of this main approach I seek to draw conclusions based on my five research questions outlined in Research Aims and Objectives.

The main objective is to determine the ethics of customary marriage within Pentecostalism and Charismaticism a more vibrant expression of Pentecostalism. I will use the two words interchangeably.

1.2.1 Aim

This research will examine the issue of competing values of multiculturalism with a special interest in the impact of British cultural marriage values on the Ghanaian charismatic churches and the response to this impact. Should there be a compromise? Is the church stuck in a faulty principle? Should the church be flexible, or simply dogmatic, not changing to adapt to the new culture in which it operates? In recent times the awareness of this problem has become more pronounced, with a number of church leaders opening up to this discussion. Onesimus Ngundu's book, *Missions Churches and African Customary Marriage*, is a perfect example of the ongoing debate. Ngundu (2010:43) intimates that the Catholic and the Protestant views of marriage-making have become the distinctive attitude and doctrine of Western Christianity, which missionaries impose on Africans who converted to Christianity. Still in the African societies, Ngundu (2010:45) further points out that there are challenges posed by the Western European dogma of marriage in the Ghanaian community. Atto Kum (2010) raises the issue of the influence of the Western concept of marriage on the Ghanaian cultural marriage in his article entitled "African Traditional Marriage, the Church, and Western European Marriage Concept" an article which reflects the current discussion among young adult Ghanaian Christians in the community.

The UK is facing a reverse mission from most African countries that the old British Empire colonized. Where once missionaries from the Global North travelled to evangelise and spread the gospel in Global South countries, as time has moved on, the flow of evangelism has changed direction (Olupona, 2011). As a result, the churches planted from Africa, particularly Ghana in the UK, are facing the cultural clash and symptomatic problem from Ghana.

This research will seek to address some of the aforementioned questions and evaluate the impact of culture and an ethical approach to ministry in the wider British and Ghanaian context. As the subject area is broad, dealing with every aspect of the issue will be too heavy. I will look into the Ghanaian customary marriage (GCM) and the challenges it poses in the charismatic churches in London and its ethical view within the wider community.

This research aims to propose that charismatic churches in the Ghanaian community should demonstrate a willingness and objectivity to view GCM as not at odds with scripture so that true freedom can be available in Christ for all Ghanaian believers.

I will examine customary marriage and its effect on the current doctrinal view of the Ghanaian churches, and its polygamous nature. A man under the traditional law can marry many women, thereby perpetuating the 'evil' of polygamy. It is for this reason that the charismatic church frowns on customary marriage and as a result has imposed the marriage tradition of the missionaries (which is monogamy) on the church as 'Christian' marriage. I will compare and contrast the Ghanaian customary marriage with the Christian marriage, which was an Anglo-Saxon tradition transformed into Christian marriage and enforced into the churches by the early missionaries.

I will research into the Ghanaian customary practices to arrive at my conclusions in the context of the available scholarship. It is of interest that Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, (2008) whose background is Ghana, in his research article 'African-led Christianity in Europe: Migration and Diaspora Evangelism' looking at the African-led mega-churches in the UK and Europe, does not fail to indicate the role of culture. The Ghanaian Charismatic Churches (GCC) in London face these issues: the traditionalist versus the Westernised Ghanaian, the orthodox-minded person versus the progressive person. It is very important in my opinion that these issues are examined in order to afford the church more opportunity to debate them. The GCC look up to the Western church and in some cases, practice the liturgical practices inherited from them without any vigorous critique.

The case of marriage is one of the expositions I will argue on in the subsequent chapters. My argument is that even what has been presented to the Ghanaian as a Christian marriage, i.e. a church wedding as we know it today, is an Anglo-Saxon tradition, which

has evolved into what we now call 'white wedding' because people wear a white gown and also because the "white man" (or missionary) introduced it.

1.2.2 Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

- Understand the ethics of customary marriage within Pentecostalism and Charismaticism.
- Evaluate the biblical arguments against customary marriage as a legitimate form of Christian marriage.
- Evaluate the biblical arguments for customary marriage as a legitimate Christian marriage.
- Call for a re-evaluation of the church's policy on customary marriage vis-à-vis white church wedding and the willingness to take pragmatic steps to enhance her services to all people.
- Establish ecclesiastical order that will accommodate customary norms celebrating the richness of the culture and the fundamental freedom of self-expression.

1.3 CENTRAL THEORETICAL ARGUMENT

The central theoretical argument of this study is that the Ghanaian customary marriage as a cultural practice, with its traditions and norms, should be given full recognition in the church and be seen as the essence of the fundamental freedom to choose how to marry. In this study I will look at deontological and consequentialist themes, and the Holy Bible will form part of my theological assessment.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS, DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

1.4.1 Research questions

- What are the ethics of customary marriage within Pentecostalism?
- What is the argument against customary marriage as a legitimate form of Christian marriage?

- What is the argument for customary marriage as a legitimate Christian marriage?
- How do we evaluate the church's policy on customary marriage vis-à-vis church wedding and the willingness to take pragmatic steps to enhance her services?
- How do we establish ecclesiastical order that will accommodate customary norms celebrating the richness of the culture and the fundamental freedom of expression?
- Is there a need to re-evaluate the church's stance on customary marriage and church order?

1.4.2 Design and methodology

This ethical study is done from the perspective of the Ghanaian evangelical tradition in general and the Ghanaian Pentecostal charismatic tradition in particular. I will consider the methods below in my quest to answer the research questions.

- To undertake an objective assessment of the Pentecostal view on customary marriage, I will conduct a comprehensive comparative literature review to ascertain and evaluate scholarly work on the subject matter.
- To establish ecclesiastical principles from a cross-cultural perspective, extension work from scholars such as John Mbiti, E.A. Asamoah, Kwabena Asamoah-Gyedu, Kwame Bediako, Richard Niebuhr and others will be looked at.
- Believing the Bible as my authority for morality and the basis for all doctrine, I will consult the Bible for doctrinal exposition and evaluation to reach some of the conclusions.

McGregor and Murnane (2010) states the intellectual integrity, trustworthiness, and diversity of consumer scholarship depend on accountability for the methodological underpinning of research. This undergirding philosophical stance informs the structure of inquiry, methodological choices, and outcome of the research that can be described as a paradigm. According to Weaver and Olson (2006:460), paradigms are patterns of beliefs and practices that regulate enquiry within a discipline by providing lenses, frames and processes through which investigation is accomplished. In other words, it is an all-encompassing system of interrelated practice and thinking that define the nature and

conduct of enquiry along with beliefs, values, and assumptions that a community of researchers has in common (Kuhn, 1977).

These two definitions lend support to the thoughts of Bogdan and Biklen (1998:22) and Cohen and Manion (1994:38), which support the fact that a paradigm is a philosophical intent that influences the way knowledge is acquired and interpreted. A researcher must, therefore, have a set of assumptions, values, and tenets that informs his worldview or reality, thereby enhancing his choice of theoretical approach. As there are different types of philosophical assumptions in all forms of research, to establish what could be accepted as valid research that will enhance the development of knowledge in a given study, the preferred choice of paradigm is expected to spell out the intent and expectation for the research. It is therefore essential to know the various philosophical assumptions that will inevitably aid the preferred choice of paradigm for my research. My understanding of the Bible is deeply rooted in my engagement with my community, and it is the authority in the matters of doctrine and liturgy. Where necessary I will approach the interpretation of the Bible by picking examples and theologically indigenise it in the context of the text of the discussion at hand. I am aware of the seeming textual problems we face when doing proper hermeneutics, all these will be taken into consideration.

This study will primarily focus on current and other scholarship to discover and guide the development and evaluation of Ghanaian Pentecostal views on customs, norms, and traditions in the wider community and the church itself. This will enable me to explain the benefits of research that has already been conducted in this area, for example, Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu's recent work on Pentecostalism and the African context.

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Even though the study will be focused on the Pentecostal and Charismatic church in the Ghanaian community in the UK, I anticipate that the study will be of an immense benefit to the Pentecostal fraternity in Africa, and African majority churches based in the UK. I hope to create an understanding of the place of culture in the development of the Pentecostal movement. I seek to contribute towards developing an objective approach to the functions of the church to ensure that Pentecostals employ an open-minded policy in dealing with customary norms and particularly addressing those aspects of culture that do not violate human rights and dignity.

1.6 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study will focus on Ghanaian majority Pentecostal churches in the United Kingdom. A fair representation of different denominations and key sectors of the Pentecostal movement will be considered.

1.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics refers to rules of conduct, typically to conform to a code or set of principles. Therefore, ethical considerations are very important in designing research. All my research will be based on books and scholarship already available to the public concerning this subject matter.

1.8 CLASSIFICATION OF CHAPTERS

CHAPTER 1 Introduction

CHAPTER 2 Pentecostalism, Marriage and Culture: understanding the ethics of customary marriage within Pentecostalism

CHAPTER 3 Evaluation of arguments for and against polygamous marriage as a legitimate form of Christian marriage

CHAPTER 4 Theological Assessment: I will call for a re-evaluation of the church's policy on customary marriage vis-à-vis church wedding and the willingness to take pragmatic steps to enhance her services, and I will suggest an ecclesiastical order that will accommodate customary norms celebrating the richness of the culture and the fundamental freedom of expression.

CHAPTER 5 Re-evaluation of the church's stand on customary marriage and church order.

CHAPTER 6 Conclusions and Recommendations

1.9 SCHEMATIC PRESENTATION

RESEARCH QUESTION	AIM AND OBJECTIVES	RESEARCH METHOD
What is the ethics of customary marriage within Pentecostalism?	Understanding the ethics of customary marriage within Pentecostalism.	To undertake an objective assessment of the Pentecostal view on customary marriage. I will conduct a comprehensive literature comparative review to ascertain and evaluate scholarly work on the subject matter.
<p>What is the argument against customary marriage as a legitimate form of Christian marriage?</p> <p>What is the argument for customary marriage as a legitimate Christian marriage?</p>	Evaluate the biblical arguments for and against customary marriage as a legitimate form of Christian marriage	To establish ecclesiastical principles from a cross-cultural perspective. Extension work from scholars such as John Mbiti, E.A. Asamoah, Kwabena Asamoah-Gyedu, Kwame Bediako, Richard Niebuhr and others will be looked at.
How do we evaluate the church's policy on customary marriage vis-à-vis church weddings and the willingness to take pragmatic steps to enhance the church's services?	Call for a re-evaluation of the church's policy on customary marriage vis-à-vis white church wedding and the willingness to take pragmatic steps to enhance the church's services to all people.	As believers the Bible is our authority for morality and the basis for all doctrine. I will consult the Bible for doctrinal exposition and evaluation to reach some conclusions.
<p>How do we establish ecclesiastical order that will accommodate customary norms celebrating the richness of the culture and the fundamental freedom of self-expression?</p> <p>Is there a need to re-evaluate the church's stand on customary marriage and church order?</p>	Establish ecclesiastical order that will accommodate customary norms celebrating the richness of the culture and the fundamental freedom of self-expression.	To establish ecclesiastical principles from a cross-cultural perspective, extension work from scholars such as John Mbiti, E.A. Asamoah, Kwabena Asamoah-Gyedu, Kwame Bediako, Richard Niebuhr and others will be looked at.

CHAPTER 2:

MARRIAGE AND CULTURE IN PENTECOSTALISM

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, I outlined my approach to dealing with the subject of customary marriage and the methodology that will be used. In this chapter, I will explore more on the dynamics between marriage and culture. The ethics of customary marriage within Pentecostalism has always been an issue of intense discussion, as those on both sides of the argument feel passionate about the views they hold. I am aware that in any given subject where tradition, culture, belief and the people's way of life is of concern, there are always strong arguments on culture and practice. Therefore, in this chapter I am going to attempt to answer the question on these issues. I will attempt to bring an understanding to the ethics of customary marriage as practised within Pentecostalism. In doing so I will undertake an objective assessment of the Pentecostal view on customary marriage. I will conduct a comprehensive comparative literature review to ascertain and evaluate scholarly work on the subject matter to achieve my goal. One area of marriage that is often raised in customary marriage is the argument on polygamy versus monogamy. The focus of this study is neither polygamy nor monogamy. However, Ghanaian customary marriage by practice tends to open the door to polygamous marriages. For this reason, I will discuss aspects of polygamy and monogamy as a way to bring clarity to the customary marriage debate.

2.2 UNDERSTANDING THE ETHICS OF CUSTOMARY MARRIAGE WITHIN PENTECOSTALISM

Culture and tradition is the vehicle upon which religion thrives, and the Pentecostal denomination is no exception, expressing its uniqueness amongst different people groups. Stephen Bevan (1992:2) argues that the cultural and historical contexts of human society play a part in the construction of the reality in which one lives, such that one's context influences his understanding of God and the expression of faith. Emerging facts on the historicity of the Bible suggest that God used human instruments within the context of human society and his environment as a vehicle to communicate His values. According to Niebuhr (2001:256), one cannot escape culture; he argues that Christ's authority over Christians does not necessarily deny them the right to live in their cultural milieu, thus

suggesting that the world of culture exists within the world of grace. Shorter (1996:16) also acknowledges that culture embraces the whole context of life and it is as relevant to modernity and modern problems as it is to traditional beliefs and values. In every sense, the culture of a people group is central to their thought forms, and pre-empt the meanings, values, traditions, and religions that influence one's understanding of life.

Taylor (1963:16) states,

Christ has been presented as the answer to questions a white man would ask, the solution to the needs that Western man would feel, the saviour of the world of the European worldview, the object of adoration and prayer of historic Christendom. But if Christ were to appear as an answer to the questions that Africans are asking, what would He look like?

This profound statement reflects the difficulties the early Western missionaries in the nineteenth century faced. Instead of cultural engagement, many seemed to embark on culture rejection, thus presenting a gospel that somehow reflects Western culture. Oosthuizen (1968:4) therefore says Africans are being compelled to be entrenched in an inferiority complex either undermining or completely rejecting their culture. If the missionaries had understood the cultural milieu that would have enhanced effective communication, thereby presenting a gospel relevant to the people, they would have touched their minds and hearts in their own backyard and brought about true transformation. The culture of a people defines their identity and gives meaning to life. Thus, Amanor (2004) states, the separatist movement representing the emerging indigenous people who have found a new life in God recognises those elements of African traditional religion and culture which gave true identity to African Christians, thereby presenting a gospel that is relevant to the people. This was the reason the separatist movement gained momentum when it arose in the 1900s. This movement in the Ghanaian church focused on including local traditions and cultures rather than only Western ideals. Through the likes of Sampson Oppong, John Swatson, and William Wade Harris, the movement was able to attract followers in the face of missionary activities. Amanor (2004) argues that the Western missionary failed to holistically reach the indigenous people, thereby producing nominal Christians who would turn to their traditional religion at the least opportunity. Walls (1994) added his voice to the debate, arguing that nominal Christianity may be attributed to missionary efforts to transform not

only the individual but also to create a new society, thus resulting in converts rejecting their own culture and traditions (Walls, 1994). The report of the Ghana Evangelical Commission especially highlights the inadequacies of the missionary task, noting that the suspicion raised in the wake of Christian conversions marred their authenticity, thereby suggesting that Ghanaian Christianity is problematic because of the production of nominal Christians (Ghana Evangelical Committee, 1989). Furthermore, the enormous effort of the missionaries and the resultant conversions among the people were sometimes motivated by materialism rather than genuine conviction of the veracity of the Christian faith. Debrunner (1967:17) argued that social services such as the establishment of schools and giving practical help in ministry, even though these have value, resulted in creating superficial Christianity or vulnerable conversions..

More importantly, if the missionaries failed to understand the fundamental needs of the people for effective engagement, then the separatist movement filled that gap. This newfound faith is outwardly expressive and inwardly liberating, and holistically responds to the existential needs of the people. Such Christo-cultural engagement within the separatist movement gave people the needed experiences which perhaps became the pre-Pentecostal tinderbox awaiting the spark sometime in the twentieth century. Consequently, there is a general notion that Ghanaian Pentecostalism has found, in its own context, culturally and biblically acceptable alternatives to and adaptation from the practices of their primal religions, and is effectively taking seriously the existential needs of the people, resulting in a rapid rise of the movement (Amanor, 2004). But do Pentecostals embrace that notion? Or in another sense, how holistic is the Pentecostal approach to existential needs? This assertion poses a problem in the Pentecostal fraternity, as many Pentecostals will not necessarily acknowledge their cultural or traditional heritage. Yet, Larbi (2001:427) affirmed that Ghanaian Pentecostalism possesses a distinctive characteristic which separates it from other forms of Pentecostalism.

It is more prevalent within the teachings and practices of Pentecostalism that, on the one hand, the movement is independent of culture and tradition, sometimes branding such practices as pagan, and on the other hand, the movement is perceived to have distinguished itself in the Ghanaian socio-cultural milieu as a distinct movement of believers in salvation that encompasses all of life's experiences and afflictions, and offers

an empowerment which provides a sense of dignity and a coping mechanism for life (Anderson, 2014:212). Some key elements that form part of the socio-cultural fabric of the Ghanaian traditional and cultural milieu have been ignored, leaving indigenous people with probing questions about their sense of both individuality and corporate identity.

The dilemma encompassing the universality of Christianity and its place in various cultures is posing a challenge to adherents because true objectivity in the presentation of the gospel is neither possible nor desirable. One's approach to a text may be subjected to historically conditioned presuppositions (Stott & Coote, 1981:67). What form of Christianity was packaged for Ghanaians? Peters (1972:151) reiterated that there are no privileged people in our dispensation as there were in the Old Testament. This clearly suggests that every culture has an equal opportunity of being a vehicle for the Christian gospel. Thus, all cultures are subjected to their own kind of transformation that will reflect God's revelation in Christ. Kraft (1978:357-367) noted that culture is within us as well as around us, forming an inalienable whole of human life. Kraft further argued that anti-cultural adherents have consciously or unconsciously embraced the majority of their culture. There is no consistency in the relationship between theory and practice as cultural forms and functions emerge in their endeavours. Rather, to interpret Christ wholly in cultural terms may eliminate all sense of tension between Him and social beliefs or customs (Niebuhr, 2001:85). Carson (1987:262) saw in this tension the birth of indigenous Christianity, if it is truly faithful to the biblical tenets, thereby demonstrating the relevance and meaning of the Christian gospel in a given cultural context without diluting the uniqueness and finality of Jesus Christ as God's final revelation. Primary to my discussion is the discovery and analysis of the moral issues within Pentecostalism with special emphasis on customary marriage, considering a holistic approach in a "Christo-cultural" engagement.

2.2.1 Morality, customary marriage and the Christian context

One's understanding of morality plays a pivotal role in shaping the ethical concepts a people group can adopt. Every culture has what they could classify as moral values that adherents consciously or unconsciously embrace, and these are reflected in their behaviour patterns. The unique moral features of a particular society will not necessarily be acceptable in another society. In a world of multi-racial groupings, and especially in the church, where different nationalities are represented, it will be laudable if there is seen

to be a need for a universal moral concept without necessarily undermining the individual cultural values. Gert (2020) attests to this in his work on “The Definition of Morality”. It is noticeable that both the individual cultures or people groups and the universality of moral concepts are being captured. According to Gert (2020) in Wikipedia and the Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy, “Morality can be a body of principles or standards derived from a code of conduct from a particular philosophy, religion, or culture,” or the word can be used “normatively to refer to a code of conduct that, given specified conditions, would be put forward by all rational people” (Gert & Gert, 2020). This broad definition makes room for the recognition of both specific and universal moral theories, thus it will create the opportunity for objective assessment of individual moral issues.

Moreover, as the objective of my work is to understand the moral dilemma of rejection of Ghanaian customary marriage within Pentecostalism, there is the need to place it within a moral philosophical theory that can be used as an empirical instrument. According to Blackburn (2001:5), moral philosophy addresses positive moral features of human beings and offers a theoretical structure for realistic moral enquiry. The need for a theoretical structure is more imminent, especially when the underpinning theory of Christian ethics is embedded in an integrated dialogue of philosophical ideals of Western society and fundamental Christian ethos. Thus, consideration of moral theories such as those based on deontology, consequentialism and virtue may be explored to understand the philosophical perspectives that undergird the structure and form of Christian ethics and the potential dialogue that it may have with moral concepts of other cultures. For instance, Bevans (2004:3) argued that contextual theology has become imperative for any attempt to understand theology from different cultural perspectives. Likewise, moral theories cannot ignore the existence and relevance of different society’s unique moral concepts. This study will enable one to objectively analyse the subjective features of the moral concepts within Pentecostalism.

As the membership of the church reflects multiculturalism, my emphasis on morality will be more generalised to encompass the various traditional sectors. Interestingly, in a typical Ghanaian church where the majority of the members are Ghanaians, there are a few people from other parts of Africa and also a minimal representation of non-African members. However, generally, there is a reasonably common moral ethos across Africa and some of the non-African countries. For instance, as a traditional moral ethos,

premarital sex is prohibited, though individuals sometimes flout the lines and engage in it. However, the importance society places on marriage is reflected in the rules that govern it (Kioli, Were & Onkware, 2012). The issue at stake, customary marriage, may be alien to the Western world, but it remains common rhetoric among some Africans, and Ghanaians in particular, even though current reports suggest that it is not perceived as high in regards as the church wedding, even though it is often a prerequisite to the church wedding. Marriage as an institution is an essential tradition of all ethnic groups and in some cultures it is viewed as an important rite that everyone can experience within his or her lifetime (Nukunya, 2003). For most families, marriage is a prestigious institution that brings joy and happiness, so sons and daughters are hard-pressed when they reach marital age. Thus, the steady decline of marriage is not great news for families and general societal expectations.

Traditionally speaking, customary marriage has been deeply steeped in polygamy. The emergence of Christianity in Ghana gave a new twist to the moral culture of the people. The Christian movement had its moral concept and, in some cases, special rules for marriage, discouraging informal and pre-marital sex with a definite 'no' for divorce. These restrictions had an impact on adherents' attitude to marriage, as the sacred institution needs careful consideration. In the Population and Housing Census National Analytical Report 2010 in Ghana, there was a strong increase in the number of Christians of both sexes who were never married: the proportion of males rose from 41 percent in 2000 to 45.8 percent in 2010 and for the females 27.1 percent in 2000 to 31.3 percent in 2010. The proportion of ever-married Christians showed a decline: the male proportion from 45.2 percent in 2000 to 43.6 percent in 2010, and the female proportion from 48 percent in 2000 to 44.8 percent in 2010 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013:104). The higher female proportion for the ever-married as against the proportion of males may be attributed to casual relationships within the Christian fraternity.

The church's attitude to customary marriage has a deep root in the practice of polygamy by the wider society in Ghana. Before the missionaries arrival in Ghana, the normal marriage was polygamous. Despite the decline of polygamy in Ghana, my experience in ministry as a pastor of a thriving church and my extensive interaction with Christian leaders of other well-established ministries shows that divorce, extra-marital affairs, cohabitation and the involvement of mistresses in marriages have become very prevalent

in the modern church. Since such relationships involve emotional commitment which is not easily terminated, in essence, a man and his mistress are engaged in a kind of polygamous relationship. However, with the changing views on sexuality, extramarital affairs do not seem to generate much hostility in the Western world although it is still frowned upon (Parekh, 2006:283). Married men having extramarital affairs has become so common in our society. It seems a challenge to openly confront the modern trends of sexual behaviour. Even the church is not immune to this challenges, with occasional scandals of indiscretions.

2.2.2 A case for monogamy

Some of the arguments against polygamy focus on the effects on the women involved in it. For instance, Ruth Gaffney-Rhys (2011) sees polygamy as unlawful discrimination, as in the Ghanaian situation men are given the right to marry more than one woman, while women are not, which has been claimed as undermining Article 23(4) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966 and Article 6 of the Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women. These articles specifically state that there must be equality in marriage relationships. The polygamous marriage further reinforces male privilege by creating an environment where women are treated as commodities and are not respected in the same way as men. This premise of polygyny implies that the domestic disadvantages for women (i.e. household chores, and other responsibilities) can be resolved by the introduction of more women into the marital home. This further reduces the perceived value of women, as subservient domestic labourers. In the anthology *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition, and the Church in Africa*, edited by Mercy A. Oduyoye and Musimbi R.A. Kanyoro, Oduyoye (1992:22) postulates that women in this dynamic are 'monotheists', loving only one man, while men are 'polytheists', freely serving several women and worshipping many bodies. Polygamy, as the opponents argue, violates the dignity of women as well as discriminating against women. It has been further argued that the idea of partnership and mutual gratification, and the principle of gender equity and justice, are completely lost in polygamy (Sam, 2005:212). Strauss (2012:520) claims that the strict moral demands of marriage encompass emotional and sexual fidelity as rights, and the open-ended moral demands like claims for time, care, love, or sex as expectations. Furthermore, Mitsunaga et al. (2005) argues that in polygamous marriages women are at a greater risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases; a study in

Nigeria regarding men with multiple wives seems to affirm this (Mitsunaga et al 2005). It is also claimed that children in polygamous relationships are more prone to incidences of marital conflict, poor living conditions and lack of emotional attachment (Elbedour et al., 2002; Gyimah, 2003 and Strassman, 1997).

Andreas Köstenberger (2010), in his book *God, Marriage and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*, writes that the argument for the monogamous Christian marriage lies in morality and the belief that marriage was instituted by God the Father for one man and woman, exemplified by Adam and Eve, as a monogamous and heterosexual relationship. We see the first introduction of polygamy in Genesis 4:19 with Lamech, who married two women: Adah and Zillah. The first polygamist was a descendent of Cain, a patriarch exemplifying that non-monogamy was developed by humans and not instituted by God. However, does this mean that anything not created by God directly is not endorsed by God? Further into the text, Jabal, Lamech's son, is the first to live in tents and raise livestock. Do we believe that living in sheltered accommodation and raising livestock is against God's initial plan for human life? Jubal, his brother, also was the patriarch of stringed instruments and pipes, yet we celebrate King David for his skill on the harp and lyre and many modern churches centre worship services around music. Therefore, even though polygamy was introduced through Cain's unrighteous line, according to the Bible, it can be noted that there were many other 'unrighteous' inventions such as weapons of war and musical instrumentation (Genesis 4:19-24) which the modern church is indifferent towards or even celebrates. Polygamy can also be considered in this same regard.

There is also the financial argument that monogamy benefits men overall while polygyny benefits only financially successful men. In polygamous societies, a man would only be able to marry as many women as he can afford to look after, and in some cases with the agreement of his family. Because wealthier men, therefore, had greater sexual access, they also had the flexibility to have more children. Men who do not have the means, resources or power have reduced sexual selection and consequently can be dissatisfied. This dissatisfaction can lead to contempt and a more hostile environment within communities as a great number of less influential men are denied polygamous marriage by the extended family. Polygyny demonstrates symbols of power and status, with men with several wives higher in ranking than those with fewer or none (Bobbi Low, 2009:40-41). Through this, we can infer that monogamy conduits a more peaceful society,

providing equal sexual access among men and limiting overt symbols of wealth even within the family.

Furthermore, women in polygamous relationships do not have control over resources, as this is usually fully controlled by their more societally powerful husbands, as traditional marriage and inheritance mostly benefits the male parties involved (Low, 2009:40-41).

Polygyny and polyandry are the two forms of polygamy, however, it is important to note that though polygamy can be seen as a very common structure across traditions and even species, polygyny is the most readily seen and the majority of traditional societies around the world practising polygyny.

On the church front, Pentecostalism's expectation on morality, especially sexual morality, is demanding. The movement believes in the reality of reformed and empowered lives with the help of the Holy Spirit and in the light of a wide range of biblical texts, which they claim condemn certain behavioural patterns like fornication and serial monogamy (Thatcher, 2015:357). It has been stated that Pentecostalism refrains from an open acceptance of ethnocultural moral ideals, or rather engages in selective morality. That is, the movement remains counter-cultural with regards to preserving conventional moral positions, especially those related to sexuality (Thatcher, 2015:357). In either case, some of the moral positions that point out what is good or bad, right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable behaviour also reflect the moral ideals of society. That is, doing cross-cultural ethics presumes that there may be common threads of moral values across cultures or that applying values across cultures is possible. However, there are differences in moral philosophers' lines of thought. While some refute the universality of moral values, others argue that the notion of social progress impeaches the idea of cultural relativism. The need for a balance is plausible to allow an objective dialogue that takes into consideration the unique moral values within individual cultures as well as discovering the common threads of moral truths (Wines & Napier, 1992:831). The main contention in this study relates to the churches' position on customary marriage; differing opinions rage on because of their strong background in polygamy. How would a country or community that endorses polygamy embrace a religion that stands against it? It seems like the moral consciousness of many Ghanaian societies sees polygamy as an acceptable form of marriage. Turner (1966) writes that the early missionaries failed to

address the distinction between monogamous marriage as Western culture and monogamy as the Christian norm for the marriage relationship.

Despite the fact that polygamy has been relegated out of Pentecostal thought, it cannot fully be eliminated in a place like Ghana. Both Pentecostalism and organized institutions such as the UN that promote human rights seem to be concerned with the consequences of the practice. Most of the arguments against polygamy centre on the rights of women and the effects on women and children, whereas Pentecostalism looks at polygamy from the perspective of sin against God. If the problem of polygamy has to do with rights and equality, then can it be justified if a relationship does entail equal status for women? On the other hand, what is the relationship between spirituality and morality? If spirituality and morality engage in dialogue what will be the potential result? Edward Farley asserts that the interpretation of a situation uncovers the distinctive contents of the situation, probes its repressed past, explores its relation to other situations with which it is intertwined, like customary marriage, and also explores the demand the situation makes of participants in a community (Farley, 2000:119-124). This will allow an individual to make sense of the situations around them through their worldview. With such an investigation regarding the moral constraint of polygamy, there is the need to analyse its effect on women as well as the cultural influence and its moral strand that is independent of spirituality but open for a dialogue.

Consequently, the conduct of customary marriage is a subject under inquiry as both Pentecostalism and some social institutions question the conduct of the practice. Thus, consequentialism and deontological ethics will be the ethical foundations that will be a useful consideration for the needed understanding of polygamy as an acceptable or non-acceptable moral practice.

Ethical theories are the foundation of ethical analysis because they are the viewpoints from which guidance can be obtained along the pathway of decision. Each theory emphasizes different points, such as predicting the outcome and following one's duties to others in order to reach an ethically correct decision (Rainbow, 2002). The two ethical theories can be explained as follows. The ethical theory of deontology states that people should adhere to their obligations and duties when analysing an ethical dilemma (Rainbow, 2002). Professor Charles Kay (1997) argued that the maxim of one's action should be a universal law or treating humanity as an end and not as a means. The integral

concern of a deontologist is to focus primarily on a universal moral principle. Conversely, the ethical theory of consequentialism maintain that the rightness or wrongness of an action depends on the consequences of the act (Dreier, 2006:5).

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was arguably one of the greatest philosophers of all time. Samuel J Kerstein (2002) in his book *Kant's search for the supreme principle of morality* expresses that people have a duty to do the right thing, even if it produces a bad result. Kant thought that it would be wrong to tell a lie in order to save a friend from a murderer. This duty-based or deontology position poses a challenge. For instance, if a deontologist focuses on duty, thus emphasising the need to obey fundamental rules despite the consequences, then a situation where one's action could lead to many deaths will be extremely unpopular. That is, when an action is faced with conflicting moral imperatives, then a deontologist will be compelled to provide a means of resolving conflicts between different imperatives to avoid a dreadful result. What will a deontologist do while driving and finding himself about to kill many people if he stays in his right of way, but will cause the death of lesser numbers if he digresses from his right of way? As much as following rules or principles is always the right thing to do, there are situations in which the outcomes matter. Consequentialists focus on the outcome in a way to suggest that the end justifies the means. If the outcome will satisfy the greater good, then so be it, even if it will disadvantage or violate some other moral constraint. Each approach somehow has its appeal, but neither wholly satisfies holistic morality.

Morality plays a key role in the discussion of the rights and wrongs of Ghanaian traditional marriage, polygamy and the human rights of those involve. As Montgomery (1986:106) noted in his work *Human Rights and Human Dignity*, a survey of the most challenging philosophies of human rights has left us with no adequate foundation for human dignity. The various concerns to have a good moral stance lack the absolute sense of moral good. This lack will be seen by an outsider trying to understand the ideals of lawmakers, who attempt to generate acceptable universal moral norms, yet are saddled with the formulation of various conventions and readjustment of constitutions, so that to ascertain the validity of such established theories leaves a plethora of moral constraint which does not have absolute imperatives. How can one trust such judgements when we realise it is of no good after all? In fact, for an imperfect man to set a perfect universal moral imperative is a cause for concern. It is apparent that humanity in all its desire to create

acceptable moral norms is entangled with the fact that we are fallible and limited in our ability to discover fully absolute ideals. Kurt Baier (1965:157) argues that ethical values cannot rise above the societal level, a fact which attests that any distinction between right and wrong cannot be supported out of its societal context. Even limiting the jurisdiction of the operation of moral ethics does not guarantee an absolute moral imperative. In other words, if a fallible person can only set out fallible moral values, then one needs an absolute or infallible person to establish infallible moral absolutes. Montgomery's (1986:110) reference to the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau argues that 'in order to discover the rules of society best suited to nations, a superior intelligence beholding all the passions of men without experiencing any of them would be needed.' This perfectly summarises the plausible path for authentic moral absolutes. Again, this thought is well expressed in the line attributed to Archimedes, as noted by Montgomery (1986:109): 'Give me a place to stand and I will move the earth'. Clearly Francis Schaeffer's (1976) comment on the work of avowed humanists. It is not only difficult, as Will Durant (2002) suggests, to mould a natural ethic strong enough to maintain moral restraint and social order without the support of supernatural consolations, hopes and fears, but rather virtually impossible to attain an absolute moral imperative unless one looks beyond the relative human situation (Montgomery, 1986:110). Thus in the face of conceptual and philosophical differences, one can only accept that moral good within the human race can only be measured by a perfect standard outside society (Geisler, 2010:19).

Consequently the 'God factor' becomes essential in the moral debate. Despite atheists' views about God, it is widely acknowledged within various religious communities including traditional societies that 'God' is the ultimate authority. As such, any reference to the moral essence of God clearly satisfies the moral obligation of humanity. Whatever action God classifies as morally good can be taken as such, and also whatever action God will consider as evil is immoral (Geisler, 2010:21). Conversely, the moral attributes of God become the moral imperatives prescribed by Him as an ethical duty for humanity and should yield desirable results. However, the difficulty associated with God's moral imperatives is the translation of such moral values into the human situation, bearing in mind that a society's understanding of life is dependent on its worldview. And so, as much as most religious adherents will recognise God as the source of moral duty, in practice, such moral duties will be expressed differently. This is the contention within Christianity and for that matter the Ghanaian Pentecostal movement. How can one define polygamy,

or customary marriage, in the light of divine absolutes? Who owns the right to prescribe absolute moral derivatives for the Christian community? This is a conflict between what people actually do and what they ought to do. In this wise an objective assessment of God's moral values in the light of various sociological strands is necessary to ascertain the practicality of moral absolutes in a socio-cultural context.

In the socio-cultural life of Ghanaian society, there are acceptable and unacceptable behaviours which express their moral values. These sets of values have a great influence on how Ghanaians conduct their lives in the communities, and the underlying factor is their respect for the authority figure whose sanctions are revered. In other words, an embedded belief in the supremacy of God underwrites the values placed on the moral prescriptions given by their ancestors, whom they trust to be channels of divine guidance and blessings. Thus upholding society's moral values is the pride of an individual and it well defines their identity. One such moral value is the practice of polygamy in the context of customary marriages. In some communities the practice of polygamy defines an individual's economic power or status.

It could be said that Ghana as a country with her many traditional sectors recognises polygamous marriage within the status quo of the Constitution. Some aspects of the Bill on the Property Rights of Spouses Act (2009) clearly defines a spouse as follows:

For the purposes of this Act a spouse means a man married to a woman or a woman married to a man under the Marriages Act, 1884 to 1985, which includes (a) the Marriage Ordinance (b) Marriage of Mohammedans and (c) Customary Marriage.

It is understood that marriage under the Marriage Ordinance is a monogamous union. However, marriage under Parts One and Two of the Marriages Act 1884–1985 may be actually or potentially polygamous. Customary marriage and especially marital relationships among traditional rulers endorse a polygamous lifestyle, a situation which undermines the ethos of Pentecostalism. Individuals are torn between three moral values: society, the church and Christianity. There is no doubt about society's acceptance of a polygamous lifestyle even if the numbers of those in such relationships seem to have diminished in recent times. Institutionally polygamy has a legal backing, which gives every Ghanaian free choice to decide on the form of relationship they will engage in. Even the

Assemblies of God, one of the mainline Pentecostal movements with a great following, acknowledges in its Constitutional Manual that polygamous marriages contracted before salvation will be a case between the individual and the Lord (AoG Constitution). According to Simon & Altstein (2003), there is an effort on the African government's part to respect both customary and common law practices regarding marriage. This clearly demonstrates the complex nature of attaining a moral good, when there is a conflict of interest in preferring one moral value against the other, thus discovering what one may call a 'common sense' theory.

In the world, practically a moral good may be found on a middle ground, and one may have to work between alternative moral theories. While in Christian circles most people will prefer to veer towards a deontological stance as a plausible universal maxim, in real life situations some individuals may break a moral law to attain what they perceive as fruitful results. This may put Pentecostalism in a moral dilemma when dealing with the issue of customary marriage and polygamy. Can we ignore the polygamous debate while the church is baffled with the enormous rate of divorce, extramarital affairs and serial monogamy among adherents? To human rights activists, which moral practice is more dehumanising? Or to our Pentecostal brethren, how well can we justify other moral vices that have plagued the Christian fraternity, or are we endorsing selective morality? These fears are echoed in the writings of Turner (1966:314): 'Polygamy, which Christ does not forbid, has been frowned upon as unacceptable, whilst the issue on divorce and remarriage has not received the same scrutiny.'

2.2.3 The religious landscape in Ghana

Ghanaians have strong religious inclinations, a character that compelled John Pobee to label them as 'homo religious' because of their religious ontology and epistemology (Pobee 1962:62). This stresses the fact that religion forms an integral part of the socio-cultural milieu, with social institutions inextricably connected to religion and the spirit world. Pobee concluded that in Ghana, 'to be is to be religious'. This attitude of Ghanaians which moves towards the spiritual and spirituality accounts for the pluralism and heterogeneity of religious themes in Ghanaian society.

Among the numerous religious groups in Ghana there are the generally accepted major religions, namely, Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion (ATR). As recorded

in the Christian Council of Ghana publication known as *Asempa Diary* (1978), the religious representation in Ghana was classified as follows: Christianity [52.61%], African Traditional Religion [21.61%], Islam [13.92%] and No Religion [11.82%]. Also, in the year 2000, the Ghana Statistical Service conducted a survey which showed Ghana's religious scenario. The findings were as follows: Christianity [69.0%], Islam [15.6%], ATR [8.5%], Other Religion [0.7%] and No Religion [6.2%]. By the year 2010, the religious community recorded a sturdy progression. According to data from the Ghana Statistical Service, Christianity has 71.2 percent of the national population out of which Pentecostals and Charismatics are represented as 28.3%. Other figures recorded are Muslims [17.6%], Traditionalists [5.2%], Other [0.8%] and No Religion [5.2%].

The most recent records of Ghana's religious climate show that there is a remarkable growth of Christianity, especially within the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. Paul Gifford (1998:110) rightly noted that Ghana's ethos is recognizably Christian. These later findings strengthen the fact that Ghanaians are inextricably religious and open to forms of religion that appeal to the ideals of their traditional cultural identity. This fact may also indicate that the socio-cultural environment is somehow influenced by religious norms which have to some extent impacted their concept of morality. In this way, traditional moral forms and Pentecostal concepts of morality are brought into dialogue. That is, knowledge acquired from the Christian tradition is tested against the contemporary human situation, creating an understanding relevant to the traditional worldview (Cameron et al., 2005:25).

2.2.4 The missionary enterprise in Ghana

In the late fifteenth century, the Gold Coast witnessed the arrival of Christian missionaries, which included the Augustinian, Capuchin and the Dominican Friars accompanying Portuguese traders. Their mission was to win souls (Omenyo, 2002:42, 43), but they failed to make an impact. Nonetheless, in the nineteenth century, the Catholic missionaries (The Society of Africa Missions, SMA) made a second attempt to reach out to the indigenous people and this paid off.

The SMA arrived in the Gold Coast at the time when Protestant missionaries were already evangelising around Accra, Akropong-Akwapim, Cape Coast and Keta, making converts in the Gold Coast colony. However, the presence of the Protestant missionaries did not

affect the SMA since they had come at the invitation of Sir James Marshall (Governor of the Gold Coast) who had himself converted to Roman Catholicism, thus they had the freedom to evangelise in the colony (Amanor, 2004). Consequently, this missionary effort was later reflected in the population of Ghana being largely Christian by the turn of the century. Nevertheless the supposed conversions were marred with suspicion, especially after the report carried out by Ghana Evangelical Commission suggested that the greatest problem facing Ghanaian Christianity was that many were nominal Christians (Ghana Evangelical Committee, 1989). This may have prompted Bediako (1995) and others to argue that the work done by the missionaries was inadequate.

Furthermore, H.W. Debrunner argued that the supposed missionary conversions among the indigenes were motivated by materialism, as previously stated, rather than the genuine conviction of the veracity of the Christian faith (Debrunner, 1967:17), suggesting that the rendering of social services, though that may have its place in the evangelistic process, can overshadow the gospel when it becomes pre-eminent. More importantly, the missionaries may have failed to understand the fundamental needs of the respondents for effective engagement.

We acknowledge that the missionaries' strategic operations in the establishment of schools and the helping ministry in general worked well for partial fulfilment of missionary activity, eventually creating a superficial Christianity which resulted in vulnerable conversions such that when they were exposed to existential problems many resorted to other divinities. According to Annorbah-Sarpei (1990), some of the missionaries were even aware of some converts' visits to anti-witchcraft shrines.

Who is to be blamed? The hypocrisy of recognising the need to build bridges between one's culture and Christianity and the complete disregard for other cultures are well noted by A. Walls (1994). According to him, the failure of some converts to wholly embrace the gospel message, thereby creating nominal Christianity, could be attributed to the missionaries' effort to transform both the individual's life and society, implying a paradigm shift from one's way of life into the missionaries' accepted norms, thus leading converts to reject their own culture and perhaps unwillingly to embrace the missionaries' culturally conditioned way of life, which was perceived to be the Christian way of life.

Prejudice about Ghanaian culture marked the early missionaries' failure to see in the culture any witness for the gospel of Christ, consequently presenting a God alien to the primal religion. Whatever may be the customs of the society in which the Christian lives and whatever the human achievements it conserves, Christ was seen as opposed to them (Niebuhr, 2001:40). Thus in some cases, the way forward was to withdraw from their family home into Salem, a new Christian community. Salem thus became a symbol of the rejection of the customs and institutions of their so-called heathen societies (Niebuhr, 2001:41). Carson thus describes it as a Christian faith experience that holds Jesus Christ as the true and sufficient revelation of God's love, holiness and power such that it cannot be mingled with other religions (Carson, 1987:265). Yet the truth in this argument does not nullify the fact that socio-cultural factors are a necessary vehicle that cannot be ignored.

It is a known fact that true objectivity in the presentation of the Christian gospel is neither possible nor desirable. One's approach to the text may be subjected to historically conditioned presuppositions that colour one's exegesis (Stott & Coote, 1981:67). This is very much reflected in the missionary activities, as Westernised Christianity was presented as gospel absolutely to be adhered to. As a result, George Peters argued that there are no privileged people in our dispensation as there was in the Old Testament (Peters, 1972:151). Invariably all cultures are equally subjected to transformation to be consistent with God's final revelation in Christ.

The inadequate presuppositions of the missionaries on the socio-cultural milieu in some sort created tensions among them and some of the converts (Walls, 1994). These tensions and suspicions could well be the precursor for the emergence of a Separatist movement, which sees in the socio-cultural milieu a witness of God, a vehicular element within the socio-cultural framework for the propagation of the gospel, thus taking culture seriously (Oosthuizen, 1968:221). Unfortunately, this cultural ethos can be over-emphasised, leading to an anthropocentric mission. Such an outcome will justify the concerns of anti-cultural proponents, as anthropocentric mission undermines the primary essence of the gospel. However, the fact remains that God has chosen human instruments to accomplish his task in human hearts within a human society surrounded by a human environment (Peters, 1972:163).

Thus, the Separatist movement represents a desire for a church less alien, and a sense of continuity with their traditional background, which suggests that their identity to some extent rested on tradition (Oosthuizen, 1968). One cannot discard the fact that the rise of the Separatist movement is not only dependent on the reaction to external factors but is also motivated by a profound sense of call, often experienced in dreams and visions. An occasional testimony from leaders of the Separatist movements suggests a mission primarily ordained and motivated by an encounter with God (Oosthuizen, 1968:55-60). Nevertheless, their claim of divine commission becomes culturally relevant. Perhaps the ideals of the Separatist movement constituted a sort of pre-Pentecostal tinderbox awaiting the spark that would set it off sometime in the twentieth century (Amanor, 2004).

It has become obvious that where the missionaries failed the Pentecostal movement has effectively penetrated, breaking through the traditional barriers and giving a new face of Christianity in Ghana, which is outwardly expressive, inwardly liberating, and which provides an adequate identity of faith that can be truly Christian and truly Ghanaian, and which appropriately responds to the existential needs of the people.

Thus the Pentecostal movement has distinguished itself in the Ghanaian socio-cultural milieu as a distinct movement that believes in a salvation that encompasses all of life's experiences and afflictions, and it offers an empowerment which provides a sense of dignity and a coping mechanism for life. Furthermore, their encounter with the Holy Spirit has a telling effect on individual members of the movement. According to Richard Shaull, the emerging reality within Pentecostalism is that something is happening in the life of the people that is making the gospel a dynamic and transformative force in the lives of many people (Shaull & Cesar, 2000:155). Despite the difficulties the underprivileged have to endure, the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives empowers them to believe in a possible breakthrough. In reality, Pentecostalism is effectively engaging with the socio-cultural life of Ghanaians, illuminating and transforming their worldview with the spirit and message of the gospel. Even in cultures where there do seem to be difficulties and contradictions caused by the clash of belief systems, Pentecostalism has found ways of breaking down the barriers and emphasising the major absolutes of Christian teaching. Thus it has become apparent that in most Ghanaian cultures there is a general dissatisfaction among the indigenous people that classical or traditional approaches to Christianity do not seem to take seriously their existential life (Bevans, 2004:5). However,

in Pentecostalism, the fears of the indigenes regarding the wrath that the spirit entities may bring on them are replaced by confidence in the ability of the Holy Spirit to overcome such forces. Thus Pentecostals' openness and engagement with the primal religions have paved the way for cultural transformation, though much more needs to be done. According to Bernardo Campos, the transforming power of Pentecostalism resides not in the coherence of its doctrines, but in its flexibility and its capacity to give expression to new social practices in a defining moment of society in transition (Campos, 1996:49).

Thus the dilemma of cultural rejection may be addressed if one remains open to other cultures and objectively assesses them on their own merits without any prejudice. In this way, the cultural milieu may be giving its essence as a vehicle for the propagation of the gospel. One may have to realise that 'flexibility' is not compromise, but rather an attempt to have Christian faith expressed in forms relevant to the recipients' own culture, with the view that divine inspiration does not corrupt theological truth. Consequently, such Pentecostal flexibility and its capacity to give expression in various cultures are evident in the works of E. Kingsley Larbi. According to him, the significant factor that has given rise to Pentecostalism in Ghana is their perceived relevance to the all-pervasive primal religious traditions (Larbi, 2001:3). This thesis will in turn be able to contribute to the general theologising of Pentecostalism and also to create an understanding that may prevent the possible danger of syncretism. In so doing one will be able to participate in the development of models of spiritual formation responsive to the leading of the Spirit in a new historical situation (Cesar, 2000:220).

2.2.5 Pentecostalism in Ghana

Long before the emergence of Pentecostalism in Ghana, there were the African Independent Churches (AIC), a Spirit-filled movement alternative to the traditional churches, which were unable to embrace the charismatic phenomena, particularly healing and prophecy, into Christian worship (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005:235).

The AIC, also known as the prophetic independent churches, comprises a diverse group of churches that are primarily ethnic in their outlook and were initiated by African charismatic men and women who claimed that they were called by God through visions and prophetic utterances to begin a spiritual church.

Their beliefs and practices are highly indigenised, making use of African religious idioms and cultural elements (Burgess & Van der Maas 2002). According to Harvey Cox, despite the AIC's own distinct features, there was a resemblance to the worldwide Pentecostal movement in style, showing the same characteristics: the role of dreams, visions, trances and oral theology as well as the Holy Spirit as an integral force in the life of the church (Cox, 1995:243ff).

However, Asamoah-Gyadu sees a close likeness between AIC's healing rituals and traditional forms, suggesting that their indigenisation may have turned to syncretism. He argues that AIC takes the African cosmological worldview seriously, including the reality of witchcraft, the world of spirits and ancestors, and they often combine elements of Christian traditions with indigenous African cultures, which in some cases leads to 'Christo-paganism' (Burgess & Van der Maas, 2002). Thus their form of Christianity has become culture-conditioned as a result of an oversimplification of the Gospel. Furthermore, the AIC's over-reliance on literal interpretation of biblical material in many ways undermines the revelation of biblical truth. As a result, Asamoah-Gyadu does not subscribe to a wholesale recognition of the movement as Pentecostal. Nevertheless, Asamoah-Gyadu sees in the AIC what he could only describe as possessing a Pentecostal culture (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005). Although some scholars like Allan Anderson and Ogbu Kalu may have described the AIC as an African expression of Christianity (David Ngong 2009) tending to veer towards occultism, their recognition of the world of the supernatural in the Ghanaian primal religion opens up the 'Christo-cultural' engagement which may have shaped the religious worldview of the people.

Unlike the AICs, the Pentecostals are 'more orthodox in belief and base their discipline and practice on Biblical standards' (Anquandah, 1990). Pentecostals are, therefore, evangelicals by many standards, but were opposed by the evangelical community for their supposedly 'unorthodox' anti-intellectual beliefs and practices. However, the Evangelical/Pentecostal differences were minimized when the Evangelicals themselves begin to experience the gifts of the Spirit (Amanor, 2004). This new experience within the mainline churches led to the formation of the charismatic movement, which primarily operated within the traditional churches, though some emerged as independent Christian organisations.

Some of the pioneers of the AIC movement in Ghana were the prophets Sampson Oppong, John Swatson and Wade Harris, whose ministry efforts led many to Christ. Amanor says that among the many prophets and prophetesses who worked during that period these three men stood out as prominent figures (Amanor, 2004). Their ministries were thought to have emerged as a result of lack of supernatural acts in the mainline churches, perhaps a denial of continuous experience of the gift of the Spirit or undermining the authenticity of the manifestation of signs and wonders (Larbi, 2001:68). However, the prophets' unwillingness to open churches of their own resulted in many of their converts joining the mainline churches (Amanor, 2004). But with these churches lacking in supernatural encounters, it became obvious that this sudden growth may last only for a period. The spiritual awakening of the new converts may have prepared the ground for the emergence of Pentecostalism in Ghana.

Pentecostalism gained popularity in Ghana because it considers indigenous worldviews and mystical causalities seriously, democratizes access to the sacred, and provides an interventionist's piety that helps ordinary people to cope with the fears and insecurities of life. The underlying worldview helps to extend the appeal of Pentecostal spirituality in a context where religion is expected to serve practical ends through the conquest of evil and the restoration of health and wholeness (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005). Peter Anim, an indigenous evangelist, contributed significantly to the emergence of Pentecostalism in Ghana (Larbi, 2001:69)

2.2.6 The Role of Peter Anim and Pentecostalism in Ghana

In the case of Peter Anim, founder of Faith Tabernacle Church, he is credited with the origins of classical Pentecostalism in Ghana (Larbi, 2001:69). Born on February 4, 1890, Anim was educated in Presbyterian schools and worked for a while for the Basel Mission Factory as a weighing clerk. As a result of ill health, his continued stay at the factory became untenable, necessitating his eventual return to his hometown, Boso in the Volta Region of Ghana in 1916, where he married and had four daughters. After the death of his wife Madam Sakyibea, Anim married Esther Osimpo and had a son called Moses Appiah Anim (Larbi, 2001:99).

An interest in a Christian periodical, *The Sword of the Spirit*, led Anim to form a relationship through correspondence with its editor, Pastor A. Clark, founder of Faith

Tabernacle Church Philadelphia. Faith Tabernacle is a non-Pentecostal church, but believes in faith healing and holiness—themes alien to Anim’s Presbyterian upbringing. He embraced these teachings and tested their efficacy by miraculously obtaining healing for himself from a chronic stomach disorder and guinea worm infection through prayer (Larbi, 2001:99).

In 1921 Anim withdrew his membership from the Presbyterian Church and began a healing ministry at Asamankese, which was later to be called Faith Tabernacle. In 1923 Anim was sent an ordination certificate by Clark, indicating his qualification to pastor a church (Larbi, 2001:100).

The Faith Tabernacle Church was very conservative, stressing personal holiness and separation from the world and its systems in preparation of the imminent return of Christ, for which reason there should be no striving for property acquisition. Because they were anti-Pentecostal, speaking in tongues and emotional worship were considered satanic by the church. Faith healing was, however, believed and practised to its extreme, holding to non-administration of medicine when one contracted a disease.

The first building of the Faith Tabernacle Church was put up on a plot of land donated by the chief of Asamankese, who was attracted by the healing and evangelistic campaigns of Anim and his group. It was on the top of this building that the reported ‘pillar of fire’ was sighted by both believers and non-believers alike during one revival meeting. This increased Anim’s faith greatly and in no time branches of his group had been established in many towns in the southern part of the Gold Coast, now Ghana, and even across the country to Togoland (Larbi, 2001:101-102).

While this expansion was going on another periodical, this time Pentecostal, *The Apostolic Faith*, published by the Apostolic Faith Evangelistic Organization of Portland, Oregon, USA, was deepening Anim’s desire for greater spiritual experiences. The teaching on the Holy Spirit was that which caught his attention the most. This interest in the Apostolic Faith teaching on the Holy Spirit and tongues did not go down well with some of his pastors. Nevertheless, Anim continued to study from the periodical *The Apostolic Faith* and eventually resigned from the Faith Tabernacle in 1930 and adopted the name Apostolic Faith for his group (Larbi, 2001:103).

The Holy Spirit's outpouring with evidence of speaking in tongues became widespread among his members and gave the group both popularity and notoriety, since many Christians, including his Faith Tabernacle pastors, thought he was in error. Yet some of the rank and file of the Faith Tabernacle Church sought for this experience after Anim's. One Kwadwo Duku of Atonsu Faith Tabernacle Church is reported to have walked to Asamankese, a distance of 160 miles, to be baptised in the Holy Spirit (Larbi, 2001:105). On his return, other members who were inspired by him also walked to Asamankese to get baptised in the Holy Spirit.

In 1931, through a fellow Faith Tabernacle pastor, David O. Odubanjo of Nigeria, Anim got into contact with missionaries of the Apostolic Church of Bradford, UK. An understanding between the two parties allowed Pastor George Perfect (Apostle) to visit Asamankese. His ministry made such an impression on Anim and his church that before his departure to the UK the decision to become affiliated with the Apostolic Church UK had been taken by Anim and his church.

Anim then requested Bradford to send a resident missionary to Ghana to assist in the work. In 1937, James McKeown was dispatched as the first Pentecostal missionary from the UK to Asamankese, followed by his wife Sophia, later in the year (Larbi, 2001:106-107). McKeown's diligence attracted the admiration of all. He fully participated in the construction of the mission house, which was to house him. However, his contraction of malaria began a battle between him and Anim's followers, which eventually resulted in their separation. The trekking District Commissioner, seeing the seriousness of his condition, sent McKeown to the nearest European Hospital, the Kibi District hospital for treatment—an action which was considered theologically wrong by Anim's followers. McKeown responded very well to treatment and on his discharge, after eleven days of hospitalisation, returned immediately to Asamankese to continue his work. However, he was rejected because the Church felt betrayed by their missionary who had gone against their teaching to receive medical treatment. McKeown requested a transfer to a new station. Without the approval of the executive, he moved to Winneba, a town along the coast. He later requested a leave of absence and returned to the UK (Amanor, 2004).

The Apostolic Church UK did their best to ask for cooperation with the missionary but without much success, since their stand on 'no medication' was to them non-negotiable. McKeown returned from the UK and at a meeting with Anim at Winneba, threatened Anim

and his group with expulsion from the Apostolic Church if they did not modify their uncompromising stance on prayer alone for healing. Unwilling to compromise, Anim and his followers seceded from the Apostolic Church and instead adopted the name Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) at a meeting in 1939 (Larbi, 2001:110). However, McKeown continued to use the name Apostolic Church of the Gold Coast for his group, which was headquartered in Winneba.

Anim's CAC began to establish herself as a Pentecostal denomination in Ghana. Formulation of its theology and doctrines took quite some time, as its position on matters of theology and doctrine shifted more than a few times as light shone on their understanding. Though Anim was the principal formulator of these doctrines, Larbi indicates that he did this with the approval of his executive (Amanor, 2004). Anim's ministry experience clearly shows that the emergence of three of the classical Pentecostal movements in Ghana, namely Apostolic Church, Christ Apostolic Church and lately the Church of Pentecost were founded as a result of Anim's initiative.

2.2.7 The moral dilemma within indigenous Christianity

The African Independent Churches (AIC), an alternative Spirit-filled movement that emerged as a result of the failings of the missionary activities to meet the existential needs of the people, serves as the forerunner for the emergence of Pentecostalism in Ghana. The AIC, also known as Prophetic Independent Churches, includes diverse groups of churches initiated by some who felt called by God through visions and prophetic utterances to begin a Spirit-filled church. Their beliefs and practices were highly indigenised, making use of African religious idioms and cultural elements (Burgess & Van der Maas, 2002). While the activities of the missionary movements are tantamount to discontinuity, the AIC embarked on continuity of the traditions and cultures of the people. This raised the hopes of the indigenes as they may have identified with the form of spirituality propagated by the Pentecostal movement. It has been noted that there is a close proximity between their healing rituals and those that are traditional. The AIC took the African cosmological worldview seriously, including the reality of witchcraft, the world of spirits and ancestors, and they often combined elements of Christian traditions with indigenous African cultures. Some of the distinctive features of AIC, such as dreams, visions, trances, oral theology and the central role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church can be seen in the ethos and practices in Pentecostalism (Cox, 1995:243ff).

Some of the prominent figures who pioneered the AIC movement were William Wade Harris, Sampson Oppong and John Swatson, whose ministry led many to Christ. Wade Harris, a Liberian national, was very instrumental in the propagation of the gospel, with signs and wonders following his ministry. Harris preached the absolute sovereignty of God, healing from diseases, and rejection of traditional religions, but believed in polygamy and customary marriage. Another indigenous figure who pioneered the Holy Spirit-filled movement was Joseph Ayodele Babalola, whose ministry extended to the shores of Ghana. Babalola's desire to foster a relationship with the Pentecostal Apostolic Church of Great Britain stalled because of their differences in the place of divine healing, customary marriage and polygamy, which led to the formation of Christ Apostolic Church. Both Babalola and Harris, and many of their followers, adhere to polygamous relationships. This contentious position led to a stalemate between the AIC and the missionary societies and was later extended to the Pentecostal movement. It could be said that the Ghanaian Pentecostal movement's association with the West contributed to its anti-customary marriage and anti-polygamy stance. In certain quarters, Pentecostalism and sexuality have proven to be an intractable issue that has plagued the church. For instance, the African-American led church, "Ministers of Jesus Christ, Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, Assemblies of the Apostolic Faith" held a strong view against polygamy and customary marriage, a position that was disputed by one of their own, Bishop Curtis Smith. The disagreement on the church's doctrine on polygamy led to his resignation (Smith, 2003).

2.2.8 Morality and Pentecostalism in Ghana

The emergence of Pentecostalism from various regions is an indication that having a universal definition of Pentecostalism needs a careful assessment of shared characteristics. This is especially when it has been admitted that Pentecostalism's emergence among different socio-cultural groups shows a variety of characteristics (Kalu, 2008:8). Such definition or description needs to reflect the aspects of the movement that have universal resemblance without interfering with the various particularities associated with Pentecostal emergence in different demographical sectors. Anderson's contribution reminds us of the exemplary imagery that can be seen in almost all of the varied Pentecostal movements. He describes Pentecostalism as a movement concerned primarily with the experience of the working of the Holy Spirit and the practice of spiritual

gifts (Anderson, 2014). Kalu (2008:9) also reiterates that appropriating the pneumatic resources of the gospel and recovering the full gospel are the markers of Pentecostal identity. For Asamoah-Gyadu (2005:235), it is a form of Christian expression that actively promotes and encourages the experience of the Holy Spirit as part of normal Christian life and worship.

Furthermore, Pentecostalism sets to work the message of the mainline churches and exploits the translated Bible to recover those elements that were ignored, lost or muted in the process of institutionalisation (Kalu, 2008). Its engagement with different cultures and especially the quest to recover lost experiences opens them up to culture shock, as different societies have peculiar realities. Generally, the Western cultures promote monogamy, which perhaps explains their easy interpretation of the New Testament as prescribing monogamy as the preferred choice. However, the socio-cultural fabric of other communities is different. Ghanaian society, in particular, recognises polygamy as another form of a marital relationship and it is very much reflected in their kinship systems. Therefore the pertinent question that arises is: How can the Pentecostal message be made relevant to Ghanaians without creating superficial Christianity?

It is evident within Pentecostal rhetoric that the Bible is central to their belief. As such, their experience of the Holy Spirit relates to the experience of the Holy Spirit as recorded in the Book of Acts. How this pneumatic experience of the gospel is appropriated by people within varied socio-cultural settings is a question worth investigating. It has been noted that the impact of the pneumatic experiences, on one hand, fulfils the need for the power and experience of the supernatural, while, on the other hand, it prompts a countercultural effect. For instance, Kay and Hunt (2014) argue that Pentecostalism has largely remained countercultural in respect of preserving conventional moral positions, especially those related to sexuality. They are of the view that the Pentecostal drive for the experience of the Holy Spirit makes it inevitable that its expectations of personal morality, including sexual morality, are demanding (Thatcher, 2015:357). Such countercultural potential differs from one region to another depending on the roots of that particular form of Pentecostalism. In many cases, the countercultural potentials are hardly spoken of within Pentecostal circles and presumed to be a detestable subject for adherents, and only brought to the fore when there is the need for pastoral discipline. Kalu (2008) notes that the success of Pentecostalism is entrenched in the discipline of

the body, of speech, and sexuality. Generally, the outward appearance of Pentecostalism in relation to sexuality reflects the ideals of monogamy as the acceptable norm.

Historically, Pentecostalism has shown progression through different phases of countercultural potentials. For instance, the period of “the imminent return of Christ” prompted Pentecostal urgency for missions and the employment of the Holy Spirit for supernatural manifestations (Fanning, 2009). Their interest was soul winning, fulfilling the urgency of the evangelistic task. This resulted in a negative attitude towards social, cultural and political ventures. Thus, Pentecostals lived in denial of socio-cultural influences even though various cultural elements were observed in their practices. While they claimed that there was an absence of the impact of culture in their worship, there were differences that uniquely defined the identities of various cultural groups. Quite promising is the gradual Pentecostal awareness of socio-cultural influences as the rapid growth of the movement has brought to realisation different forms of Pentecostalism, demonstrating different characteristics among different people groups. This in effect highlights the transformative essence of the gospel as Pentecostals effectively engage the socio-cultural life of a people.

Shaul and Cesar (2000:155) remind us that the emerging reality of Pentecostalism is that people are being transformed, reflecting the gospel as a transformative force. Even in cultures where there are seeming difficulties and contradictions caused by the clash of belief systems, Pentecostalism has found ways of breaking down the barriers and emphasising the major absolutes of the Christian faith. Thus Bernardo Campos (1996:49) argues that the transforming power of Pentecostalism resides not in the coherence of its doctrines, but in its flexibility and capacity to give expression to social practices in a defining moment of society in transition.

Thus the gospel is made relevant to a people group producing characteristics that are unique to the socio-cultural milieu. In effect, a vibrant social dynamic plays an integral part in Pentecostal expressions. A general observation of Pentecostal movements across different cultures clearly shows great strides in their traditional engagement. However, the issue of polygamy as a social element remains problematic to Pentecostalism. Various Pentecostal movements have prescribed their own barriers that deny polygamists the freedom to experience the Christian gospel. Of course, the cultural conflicts inherent in these deliberations remain, and nineteenth-century missionaries

struggled with them (Thatcher, 2015:354). As Anderson (2014:21) rightly points out, many of the secessions that took place during Western Pentecostal missions in Africa were partly the results of social and cultural insensitivities. Turner (1996) argues that Christian churches are prone to adding the essential marks of certain features drawn from their individual traditions and to judging other churches by their own standards rather than by basic criteria. Historically, the issues around polygamy remained largely closed. This exclusive moral selection can no longer be kept silent. How can one decipher a culturally conditioned message and what could be classified as basic Christian criteria? A call for a debate on sexual morality is imminent and is especially more needed now as various groups such as the gay rights movements lobby for recognition. Is monogamy legitimate to remain as the Christian standard or has it outlived the notion of universal acceptance?

My interest in this study features the subject of polygamy, given that the traditional stance of Pentecostalism towards the subject poses a threat to the “traditional-cultural” family structure. This subject has not lent itself to much deliberation in Pentecostal circles and people seem to take it as a foregone conclusion. Till now Pentecostals have adhered to monogamy as the acceptable form of marriage, taking their cues from particular views of certain biblical passages. Polygamy then becomes an immoral act that has issued from a backdrop of cultural engagement. This is reflected in the conditions attached to any form of accommodation of those individuals in polygamous relationships. The constitution of the Assemblies of God Church in Ghana, Article 19:4e “strictly adhering to the pattern of monogamous marriage and abstaining from fornication and adultery” emphasises the need for a marriage to be between a man and one wife. They further state that “polygamists and those with marriage entanglements who were polygamists or so entangled before becoming a Christian may be members of the church with a privilege of baptism and communion but are not eligible to hold any official position in the church.” The Church of Pentecost shies away from the use of the term polygamy, but their position on it can be inferred from what they describe as perverse sexual practices (Aboah 2019). They have enshrined in their writings that homosexuality, same-sex marriage and other perverse sexual practices are not permitted in the church and that only monogamous marriage is upheld.

Most of these Pentecostal positions may have had their roots firmly embedded in the “Western” missions’ worldwide appeal. Many follow the tenets and practices of their

parent bodies or affiliates. Unless careful consideration is made for the re-examination of the culturally conditioned gospel, Pentecostal derision of polygamy can no longer stand the test of time. Can polygamy be an answer to the overwhelming divorce rate within the Christian fraternity? In recent times, divorce and remarriage have been gradually sifting through the Pentecostal net; even gays and lesbians are having their way, as some ministers of the Pentecostal gospel are practitioners. Previously unheard-of unacceptable practices have now become normalised. With the exception of some of the mainline Pentecostal movements such as the Assemblies of God and the Church of Pentecost, the Neo-Pentecostal groups are virtually open to divorce, and re-married persons participate fully in their worship and leadership (Adam 2015). One may argue that such lifestyles have gained worldwide acceptance because some leaders with divorce and re-marriage experiences have large followings. Does Christian teaching certify these practices? Or has there been an evolution of new Christian ideas? Even for Pentecostal churches who barred polygamists and other immoral sexual practitioners from assuming leadership offices are also faced with the quest to justify their stance.

It has become increasingly worrying that sometimes church traditions are held high, and probably higher than what could be a genuine Christian norm. The current trend in the Ghanaian Pentecostal circles, especially the charismatic front, seems to relax the original stance on divorce and re-marriage and in some quarters the debate on homosexuality is ongoing. Divorcees and re-married individuals are being treated as normal within the silent church tradition, thus opportunities are open for them to be represented in every facet of church praxis. This dynamism that involves a change in ethical positions amongst Ghanaian Pentecostals is nothing new. There has always been a wide range of attitudes towards social engagement as well as social consciousness in transition (Vondey, 2013:104). Such transitional changes sometimes result in Pentecostal ethical "rigorism". Traditional Pentecostal churches such as the Church of Pentecost (CoP) and Assemblies of God (AoG) seem to be very resolute in their position on what they classify as sexual malpractices (Hollenweger, 1972). For instance, they both make rigorous demands on their members with regard to issues such as divorce, re-marriage and other 'vices' and in some cases, participation in church ordinances is stalled. However, it has been noted that Pentecostal engagement with social action is dynamic, thus an improvement in individuals or communal social status impacts on what could be prescribed as acceptable. According to Hollenweger (1972:36), Assemblies of God had to relax their ethical rigorism

on certain ethical stances because of an improvement in the socio-economic status of some of their members. Recently the Church of Pentecost revisited the compulsory use of headgear by their women during church services, and they now agree that this is unbiblical. Before then, PIWC (Pentecost International Worship Centre), the English assembly of CoP, were already worshipping without the use of the headgear, a situation which is tantamount to social class discrimination. On what basis were the women allowed to worship without the use of headgear? Interestingly, things they held as unacceptable are now being embraced, though some adherents remain sceptical. Even churches that evolve as a result of disagreement on the relaxation of rigorism, that is, abandoning taboos and enthusiastic practices, only grow to become engrossed with the same tension subjected to social pressure (Hollenweger, 1972:406).

The Pentecostal moral dilemma is not an ethical conflict. The tension between Pentecostalism and social action only opens the reality of the socio-cultural essence of human development. It can be noted that individualist and collectivist cultures create different conceptions of the self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). This, in turn, defines how they perceive the world around them, thus creating a situation where moral concerns within different social contexts will be interpreted differently. If we look at the origins of Pentecostalism in Ghana, we will note that social conflict within Ghanaian Pentecostalism arose coincidentally because of Western missionary influence. For instance, CoP was formed by leaders who by default shared the Apostolic Church tradition from the UK, Assemblies of God had its roots in the holiness movement in the USA, and Christ Apostolic Church was founded on a mixture of ideas drawn from the Presbyterian Church, Faith Tabernacle Church USA, Apostolic Faith USA and Apostolic Church UK. Also the Neo-Pentecostal movements—Christian Action Faith Ministries, Perez Chapel, International Central Gospel Church, Victory Bible Church, Light House Chapel, Fountain Gate Chapel and in recent times Elim and other emerging independent churches—either directly or indirectly share the evangelical tradition. By default all the Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal movements adhere to monogamous relationships, an ethical stance which may have arisen as a result of Western ideological contributions or, so to speak, acceptance of biblical texts understood to be condemning these acts as immoral (McCauley 2021). Unfortunately, Ghanaian Pentecostals have failed to open an objective debate to ascertain the form of marital union relevant to the course of Ghanaian Pentecostals. Instead, the Pentecostal movement in Ghana is silently breeding what

some will call serial monogamy (Anarfi, 1993) and others are indulging in all kinds of sexual malpractices (Gifford, 2004). The perception of morality within the church has changed over time, and many things that were once considered unacceptable are now not seen with such surprise.

Of course, the essence of ethical values within the faith is to keep the adherents pure in the light of Christian values. It is up to Pentecostals to justify whether monogamy is an acceptable Christian norm or a Greco-Roman tradition infused as a Christian ideal. I am of the view that a real test will have to be made to understand the moral issues within Pentecostalism. This test will have to uncover the source of monogamy as a universally acceptable Christian value as well as to investigate different conceptions of self to ascertain which values of cultural heritage will be relevant to the Christian cause, especially knowing that social settings which prevail in a group determine the ethical character.

2.3 Conclusion

In summary, we have seen from the arguments presented that the early Ghanaian Pentecostal leaders made the effort to see their Christian beliefs in light of the traditions and cultures they found themselves in. This opened up the discussion of the church and culture, and the modelling of the Ghanaian church after the missionaries caused a lot of cultural conflict in practice. We now look at the argument against customary marriage. In the next chapter, I will evaluate the arguments for and against polygamous marriage. The impact of polygamy on the Ghanaian traditional marriage and arguments for and against will be looked at.

CHAPTER 3:

EVALUATION OF ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST POLYGAMOUS MARRIAGE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I will explore the impact of polygamy on Ghanaian marriage and culture. I will evaluate the arguments against customary marriage as a legitimate form of the Ghanaian Pentecostal Christian view of marriage. As already indicated, the ethics of customary marriage within Pentecostalism has always been an issue of intense discussion. In this chapter I will look at some of the cultural practices that call into question the customary marriage, such as the status of the woman and the bride-price. I will further look at the bride-price in Chapter 5. I will also evaluate my argument from the scriptural point of view. As the Bible has a lot to say on marriage and culture, I will draw my conclusion from both literature and the holy Scriptures.

3.2 ARGUMENT AGAINST CUSTOMARY MARRIAGE AS A LEGITIMATE FORM OF CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

3.2.1 The polygamy factor

The most prominent feature of the African customary marriage that conflicts with the Christian marriage is its polygamous character, the levirate union, the lower status of women and the associated bride-price. In most Ghanaian communities particularly the rural areas polygamous marriage is simply seen as the marriage of one man to two or more women concurrently, where it is permitted. In this system of marriage especially in the farming communities, cooperation in tilling fields and herding cattle is provided by a group of people bound by the obligation of kinship and marriage.

Polygamy constitutes the central point of conflict between the African customary marriage and the Christian marriage initiated by the missionaries from Europe and America. On the crucial issue of polygamy, Muthengi (1995:57) writes missionaries of the different denominations have consistently refused to surrender their ground and still maintain that the acceptance of polygamy would be fundamentally inconsistent with the teachings of Christianity. The indigenous people on their part maintain that there is no legal

impediment to contracting another marriage and the possession of many wives is a defence of their culture and as a result a mark of importance and success in life (Falen, 2008). For this reason of culture, some African men would like to achieve this if only their Church permits it. Monogamy for some of the indigenous people is a matter of Christian church values rather than a choice.

The validity of all forms of marriage changed and developed over the centuries of human history and the outcome of such historical and theological debates on marriage especially in Europe is what the colonial authorities passed on to African societies.

All systems of marriage—customary, civil or church marriage—have their roots in the cultural and traditional practices of the people, therefore marriages all over the world are cultural and customary in nature and relate to the accepted behaviour of the ethnic groups from whom they evolved. European marriage tradition as it is known and practised today is a reflection of the cultural values and practices of their ancestors. The artefacts, symbols and rituals of Christian marriage were borrowed from pre-European cultures at the time of formulating church marriage liturgy in the medieval times, AD 500 to 1500 (Ngundu, 2010:37).

Davies (1996:4) intimates that Queen Victoria (1810–1901) wore a white gown at her wedding and the colour became associated with virginity at marriages because she kept herself a virgin until she married. During her reign, the expectation of virginity at marriage became rigorous in British society. Those who preferred to get married in a church were understood to be virgins. The state of virginity was signalled by church bells at the time of the wedding and it was therefore accepted that if church bells were not sounded at weddings, the bride was not a virgin. There has been a fading away of the Victorian standard of morality, and the incidence of cohabitation before marriage is now unprecedented. Virginity at marriage is no longer a cultural expectation or criterion for church marriage in Britain. The first missionaries had no other marriage laws than those that applied in Europe and America. Under the influence of their homeland rules and practices, they rejected the African customary marriage, branding it as barbaric, heathen, and evil, and replaced it with the Christian system. In his book *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, Radcliffe-Brown and others stressed the primitive nature of the African marriage customs, comparing them with what was prevalent in medieval England

(Radcliffe-Brown, 1950). This, of course, is a clash of cultures as a legacy of white supremacy and not necessarily a conflict with Christianity as an independent institution.

This negative attitude of the missionaries towards African customary marriage was conditioned by their various traditions and by the long process whereby the Church in Europe asserted its control over marriage among Africans. Since the close of the First World War, there has been a great intensification of modern influence among African people (Mair, 2013). They have experienced the impact of alien political, religious and economic organisations, which have shaken the formation of their community life. In fact, within the general setting of these problems, the Christian churches themselves suffer difficulty owing to the fact that the law regulating the status of persons contracting marriages often pays insufficient regard to the conditions of the African social life.

In his book *Mission Churches and African Customary Marriage*, Ngundu (2010:1) asserts that the historic link between the cultural, legal and religious aspects of marriage posed some fundamental questions as to who has the right to declare an African couple married. Should it be according to the tradition, the legality, or the religion? Such ambiguity has resulted in social and moral problems for nearly all African Christian couples. Generally, Africans look to traditional marriage as a complete marital form and the registration at the court or the subsequent solemnisation of marriage in church are regarded as merely the means of satisfying the civil or ecclesiastical law (Broderick, 1945:49). It is essential that we critically examine the argument against customary marriage as a legitimate form of marriage.

The rejection of customary marriage as a legitimate form of Christian marriage may have stemmed from the fact that African traditional marriage generally tolerates polygamy. Okonkwo (2003:15) makes it clear that the distinguishing feature of the African customary marriage as compared to the European marriage is the toleration or perhaps approval of polygamy. Although it may be true, yet it would be incorrect to generalize and assume all Africans to be polygamists, particularly in the current socio-economic situation and the criticisms expressed by some Christian churches. Polygamy has been a widely discussed topic in African theology and is a burning issue even today. Various religious communities and Christian churches have been debating the permissibility of granting church membership to a male polygamist. Some churches are reluctant to allow women or wives of polygamists to occupy a leadership role in the church. For some people, polygamy is

an embodiment of the Old Testament practice and has no place in modern society, while others regard it as an evil and purely pagan practice (Baloyi, 2013).

The question remains whether polygamy is culturally acceptable by the majority or not, the reason being that polygamy that was practised by rich men who possessed land and wealth to support large families is now practised by the middle-class and even the poor (Wunderink 2009:17). Gaskiyane (2007:97) affirms that polygamy is a culturally determined, socially acceptable and legally recognised form of permanent marriage where a man has more than one wife at a time. He maintains that the acceptability of the marriage is determined by the social customs of the people concerned.

We shall here examine the purpose served by polygamy in customary marriage in the African context. Caincross (1974:69) argues that if a wife is barren, it is indeed her duty to give consent and even exhort her husband to take another companion, as Sarah in the Old Testament did (Genesis 16:1-4). This argument is supported by Maillu (1988:1), who suggests that polygamy is the solution in the case of an infertile wife, this being preferable to being expelled from home and having to look for another husband. This practice also becomes a solution for marriages in which only female children were born, since the importance of male children was emphasised (Kyomo and Selvan, 2004:36). My argument here is that in these cultures they are not aware that the sex of a child is determined by the male. In traditional cultures the greatest desire and requirement is to have children, especially male children, to be heirs of property. Male children are valued especially in many patrilineal African societies. Polygamy was also considered a solution in the event of menopause. Kimathi (1994:12) explains that menopause among many African ethnic groups brought an end to the need for sexual activities and sexual encounters became the duty for younger wives. Some African cultures such as the Shangaans in South Africa forbid sexual relations between the husband and wife during pregnancy, and because the husband may be unable to wait for an extended period of time, he might have more than one wife (Baloyi, 2013).

In many African cultures, it is the norm for an adult to be married and have children. Single status in Africa has some negative associations, like witchcraft and the desire to break up other people's marriages. Kathide (2007:17) articulates that since it is a disgrace to be unmarried, so polygamy offers every woman a chance to be married and thus be fit within the norms of society. The belief that every woman must have a husband and every man

a wife has created the situation where a woman would prefer to be one of several wives rather than be without a husband and become a social outcast. Traditionally polygamy also provides a source of labour. In most African cultures men are generally assumed to be the breadwinner. Farming in stock and crop were common means of survival and both required strength and labour and this encourage the marriage of a number of women. Townshend (2008:37) suggests that polygamy was originally a means by which men acquired status and labour because the more wives a man had the more children he could have and greater would be his labour force. Thus labour became a commodity in a male-dominated society where polygamy was allowed by custom. Fenske (2013) points out that the demand for wives is the highest in those parts of the Ivory Coast where female productivity in agriculture is highest. Therefore children born in a polygamous marriage were an economic asset making polygamy an important economic factor (Okyere-Manu 2016).

Many Ghanaians believe that it is best to train your blood-sons to take over whatever you own, like the Akan people. For many families, a male heir is always the objective of marriage. Society saw marriages into which only girls are born as unfortunate and marriages in which there are no sons are not transgenerational. This was often a cause for polygamy. In addition, polygamy can be viewed as a preventive measure against unfaithfulness. If a man worked far from home he took one wife with him and the other wives continued to take care of the children and household. Another point of interest is that if a wife becomes less interested in sex than her husband, it is a justifiable reason for the man to take an additional wife. Okorie (1995:3) expresses the sentiment that polygamy reduces the temptation for a man to commit adultery.

Besides being an entrenched custom in Africa, polygamy features in the oldest historical records. Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas Aquinas taught that simultaneous polygamy is not in itself evil since it was permitted by God in the Old Testament (Hillman, 1975:179). They viewed it as being contrary neither to the law of nature nor the Bible.

Ghanaian Christian churches are divided into three main categories: the missionary-initiated churches, the African Independent Churches (AICs), and the Pentecostal and charismatic churches. The divisions are mainly due to their doctrinal beliefs and practices of which their views on polygamy and its associated customary marriage is part. For the Christian missionaries who first came to Africa, monogamous marriage was the norm.

Throughout the centuries, the teaching of the Christian church about marriage emphasised monogamy as the only accepted form of marriage. Its emphasis is that marriage is primarily a matter of a man or woman leaving his or her father and mother, and both cleaving together and becoming one flesh based on the biblical teaching from Genesis 2:23,24. Its attitude towards human sexuality and its preference for the nuclear family has created much confusion and anxiety in contemporary African society.

The missionaries with their good intentions did not have a proper solution to the issue of polygamy and rather promoted divorce, leaving children not properly cared for. Bishop John Colenso of Natal, South Africa, recognised this when acknowledging that the practice of separating husbands and wives on their conversion to Christianity is in opposition to the teachings of God (Hillman, 1975:32). This policy initially limited the impact of the mission churches, encouraging believers to move towards the new Independent African Churches.

The early missionary churches felt the need to confront polygamy at the point of conversion. A man who wanted to be accepted as a member of the church was required to bring one wife after abandoning all the other wives to remain in a monogamous marriage. Mugambi (1989:96) points out that this common rule did not bring an easy solution to this problem, and treating the African customary marriage as invalid because of polygamy gave rise to many problems. Kasomo in his book *Customary Marriage in African Culture and Religion* states that over 90 percent of church marriages are first customarily contracted (Kasomo, 2010:13).

A critical examination of customary marriage and church marriage helps one to see that they have much in common. Arthur Phillips (2018:xli) in the introductory essay to his work *Survey of African Marriage and Family Life*, intimates that each form of marriage regularises sexual union and the status of offspring, but in other respects, the two institutions (customary and church marriages) are fundamentally different in nature and in the laws that govern them.

A closer look at polygamy also shows that not only does it encourage the treatment of women as inferior beings but it also foments rivalry between wives and forces many women to share the already scarce resources with the other wives and their children. This has an impact on women's health and has a detrimental effect on the many children a

polygamist might have (Struensee, 2004). There will be further discussion on this issue later in this work.

3.2.2 The status of women and the bride-price

The inferior treatment of women has been made grounds for the condemnation of African customary marriage. This is evident in the institution of polygamy, in child betrothal, the inheritance of widows and in all procedures by which women can be disposed of in marriage even without their consent. It is also evident in the division of labour which assigns a large share of heavy work to women, which is evident in a woman carrying foods and firewood from the farm with the baby strapped to her back and the husband with his walking stick strolling leisurely along, and in the submissive behaviour expected of women towards their husbands. The dominance of the man and the recognition of his place in the family sometimes create a toxic atmosphere for abuse and that results in little companionship between the spouses.

The common assumption is that women are oppressed and exploited, have little freedom of action, and receive no respect. In the economic sphere of certain cultures like the Akan of Ghana, the husband retains his own property rights and that of the woman even in household objects like pots and pans provided by the family of the women when going to the marital home. There is an adage in the Akan language of Ghana which says “obaa to etuo a eda obarima dan mu”, meaning whatever the woman acquires belongs to the husband.

Another outstanding feature of the customary marriage is the practice called the bride-price. There are few African tribes in which this is not found in one form or another. Some believers and even pastors raise objection to the bride-price as the requirement of the bride-price, when it consists of cattle, goods or property, amounts to selling the woman. However, to regard it in this light is to misinterpret its meaning. In most African marriages such as the Ashanti of Ghana, the payment of goods or services or money by the bridegroom to the bride's kin is an essential part of the establishment of the legality of the marriage (Kyei, 1992). It also establishes the legitimacy of the children as belonging to the husband. Kyei (1992: 26-30) discusses the requirement of the payment of the bride-price is more adequately understood to be recognition of the wife's value both to her husband and to her relatives and of the importance of the marriage contract. It is also a

way of making sure that the woman is properly treated and that in a case of mistreatment she can always return home and be accepted by her parents and relations. The bride-price is a means of keeping the relationship between the two families alive and strong (Kyei, 1992).

All who receive any woman's marriage payment of cattle or money should be interested in the maintenance of the marriage, for the bride-price will have to be repaid if the marriage is dissolved. They will be expected to give refuge to the wife if she leaves the husband, therefore they work hard to keep the marriage going. Since the bride-price is a pledge for the maintenance of the marriage, the responsibility to pay back cattle or money that might have already been used demands every effort to keep the marriage flourishing. The initial idea of the bride-price was not to make the wife her husband's property or place her in the relationship of a slave, however, over time the bride-price has taken on a new form in some cultures. There is the substitution of cash payment for the traditional cattle and property or services. The cash payment for bride-price is not fixed and can be bargained. It differs from clan to clan. In the Akan tribe of Ghana, the return of the bride-price on divorce is no longer demanded; rather, the party seeking divorce offers a bottle of an alcoholic drink, preferably schnapps, which when accepted brings the relationship to an end. The relevance of the bride-price in many tribes remains the same but the nature practice is slowly changing (Adjei, 2019).

The institution of the bride-price is being destroyed by the selfishness and individualism by which some parents ask for far too much money. Therefore the original aim of the bride-price is being subverted and has degenerated into a commodity exchange. The overpricing of the bride-price now ends in elopement, as in many cases the couple find it economically difficult to meet the modern demands of life before and after contracting the marriage.

3.2.3 The levirate union and other distinguishing features of customary marriage

Among the features that give rise to polygamy is the levirate union. As mentioned in Deuteronomy 25:5-10, this is the customary marriage by a man with his brother's widow such as required in biblical law if the deceased was childless. Levirate unions constitute

yet another problem linked with polygamy. In the customary marriage, when a husband dies, the widow is still regarded as related to her late husband's family. On occasions like this, a proxy husband must be found among the male relatives of the husband to take the deceased's place. Kirwen (1979:201) observed that polygamy and levirate unions are indeed a problem. However, because the custom is compatible with Christianity, he suggests that it must be accepted. The levirate union has some positive values in that it protects the widow against divorce and the some Ghanaian traditionalists think that it is morally and religiously compatible with the demands of Christianity.

A critical examination of the role of polygamy in customary marriage reveals that factors like infertility, menopause, some health issues, and fear of being considered an outcast, encourage polygamy in the context of the African customary marriage. They reflect the fundamental inequality between the sexes typical of the African social system. Whatever may be said about the material advantages accruing to a wife as a result of having co-wives to share her duties, is a social system in which there is unchallenged male dominance. We will now examine the factors mentioned above.

3.2.4 Infertility, menopause, outcast and sexual relations during pregnancy

The African customary marriage is an association between a man and a woman for mutual support, procreation and bringing up of children. It usually has a wider aspect of an alliance between groups of families. Any marriage, as a matter of interest, is not only to the parents of both parties but also to a wider circle of relatives, particularly the members of the lineage of each unit. Therefore every customary marriage requires the consent of some senior members of the lineage.

In most African cultures it is the norm for a man to be married and to have children because marriage is the backbone of the African society. Mabasa (2002: 27-28) argues that it is traditional for African men to marry several women to guard against childlessness. However in the marriage, if there are no children, the woman is usually suspected of being infertile even when a medical test has not been conducted. He intimates that in cases of childlessness it is the woman who is taken to a herbalist or spiritualist for treatment not the man. Oduyoye (2002:108) weighed in the conversation on how African male intellectuals and even theologians have not given much attention to women in this regard. The African tradition tends to be judgmental of women. When there

is a case of infertility the male partner looks for another wife to help give birth to children. This encourages polygamy. Baloyi (2010:12) recommends that before a man marries a second wife for reasons of infertility, both the man and his first wife must undergo a medical test to ascertain which of the two is infertile. Church and community leaders must institute teaching to educate communities that marriage is not intended for childbearing alone, but also for the achievement of goals such as friendship, intimacy, and partnership.

There is a myth perpetuated by certain African traditions that sexual relations after menopause is a taboo (Baloyi, 2013). This view is cited as a reason for polygamy. However, there is no medical evidence to support this notion.

Although some African cultures are changing their stance with dawning modernisation, other tribes continue to treat unmarried women as outcasts. Marriage is part of life but that life can still be enjoyed by those who choose to remain single. It is disturbing to reach a marriageable age and not get a suitor. However, there is no reason to force a woman into a polygamous marriage. The fear of being single is one that needs to be addressed through counselling. This will help people to accept themselves just as they are (Baloyi, 2010).

3.2.5 Conclusion

In attempting to analyse the link between customary marriage and church marriage, the discussion raises the question as to whether there is sufficient identity between the two. From the discussion above, it is clear that they have so much in common that each deals with the relationship between the husband and wife and the raising of offspring. The common link is further strengthened by the fact that in many African countries customary marriage is performed before church marriage. In other respects, customary marriage and church marriage are fundamentally different. The main wall of separation is the tolerance of polygamy in customary marriage, which is also fuelled and strengthened by the low status accorded women, the fear of some women being labelled outcasts, infertility and other health issues. The idea of polygamy has long been familiar to the European mind through the Old Testament Scriptures. As a result, this should have made the missionaries more tolerant towards customary marriage. Instead, the indignation towards polygamy is allowed to draw a radical line of separation between customary and church marriage.

Issues on customary marriage and polygamy is not just unique to Ghana as many sub Saharan African countries have on going conversation on the issue, for instance in South Africa. In 1998, the Parliament of South Africa passed the Recognition of Customary Marriage Act 120, which for the first time extended legal recognition to customary marriage, embracing even marriages where a man has more than one wife. This is a bold step taken by South Africa and Ghana can learn from this and review the laws customary marriage.

South Africa has demonstrated that polygamy can be controlled not only through education but also through legal means such as governments legislation, international conventions, declarations and charters. Steps such as taken by the South African Parliament should light the path for other African countries having this conversation including Ghana. It has shaped the discussion on polygamy and made the African customary marriage legally acceptable. For the purpose of this work I quote Act 120 No.07 1998 of the South African Parliament on polygamy:

The Act allows a person to have more than one marriage with different persons at the same time (polygamous marriages). Polygamous marriages can only be legal if all the marriages are customary. A person is not allowed to have a customary marriage and a civil marriage at the same time with different parties; however, a couple who is married to each other in terms of customary law may enter into a civil marriage with each other as well.

3.3 THE ARGUMENT FOR CUSTOMARY MARRIAGE AS A LEGITIMATE FORM OF CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

3.3.1 Old Testament perspective

Throughout human history, existence has been defined in the context of cultural traditions and customary norms. The field of anthropology studies the reality of human existence. In this segment, I want to look at marriage and the biblical dynamics of custom and tradition found in the Scriptures. Even though the whole Bible is the counsel of God to mankind, the dynamics of culture exhibited in it from Genesis to Revelation tells so much of the dynamics of human culture.

The Old Testament was collected over a period of approximately 1600 years, with a clear differentiation of the dispensations. The first couple were put together by God without any specific ceremony or cultural system by which that union must be recognised. God declared that the man and woman must be fruitful and increase in number and replenish the earth according to Genesis 1:28. They were naked and yet not ashamed of themselves. Human tradition, culture and custom were just starting to take shape. From Scripture, it looks like God himself presided over the marriage of Adam and Eve, since no other human beings were recorded capable of putting them together in marriage. My interest is firmly rooted in the way people in the Old Testament all had marriage customs so different in comparison yet God's blessing was on each of them. According to Genesis 20:12, Abraham was married to Sarah, who was his half-sister, and God honoured that union since no objection was raised. On the contrary, God blessed the union with specific instructions. The Scripture does not tell us specifically whether they had a celebration to usher in the consummation of the marriage; they just moved in as husband and wife. Jacob married two sisters, Leah and Rachael, and Moses' father Amram also married his own aunt Jochebed (Exodus 6:20). There is no record of any objection in the text.

Marriage customs are highlighted in the biblical texts in several places. Marriage customs of the patriarchs were designed to maintain social continuity and perpetuation of kinship. As a result, marriage contracts were arranged by the father or a senior member of the family or clan to ensure that children brought up will benefit the family as a whole. Betrothals may be made while the couple are young and they may never have met before the actual marriage ceremony. We have Abraham insisting that his servant returns to Haran to find a bride for Isaac his son (Genesis 24:1-4).

In the ancient letters from the Mesopotamian city of Nuzi around the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries BC, we find family customs reflecting those in the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the book of Genesis. The code of Hammurabi, a well preserved Babylonian law code of ancient Mesopotamia, reveals that the marriage custom of the Israelites come from this code dating back to 1754 BC. It is one of the oldest deciphered writings consisting of 282 laws (Wright, 2009).

Since children were important for the continuation of the family name, a childless wife might allow her husband to have children by her slave. This was legal in civilized Mesopotamia (e.g., the Code of Hammurabi, 144-147) as was practised by Sarah and

Abraham (Genesis 16) and Rachel and Jacob (Genesis 30:1-8). Abraham seems to have been following the custom that a husband can choose to take a second wife if the first proved to be barren, which is indicated in BT Yevamot 65a (Baskin, 2009).

Any search for a legitimate form of marriage should derive its source and authority from the principles of biblical theology on marriage that apply to all cultures. Relevant biblical data and especially the teachings of Jesus Christ on marriage need to be examined. The institution of marriage points us to a relationship between a man and a woman who have given themselves for life to one another to live together, support and enjoy each other as husband and wife. Writing on the biblical view of sexuality and marriage, Walter Trobisch (1975:11) declares that there is a meaningful statement about marriage in the Bible in Genesis 2:24. He says it is the only statement about marriage, which is repeated four times in the Bible. Jesus quotes it in Matthew 19:5 and Mark 10:7 and the Apostle Paul relates it to Jesus Christ and the church in Ephesians 5:31. This passage can be divided into three parts, showing the things most essential to marriage: to leave, to cleave, and become one flesh. All factors relating to a legitimate marriage must be directly or indirectly woven around these pillars established by God for successful Christian marriage (Trobisch 1975:11).

To leave father and mother is a public act, making the marriage legal. Marriage concerns more than just the two persons who are getting married. The father and mother stand for the family, who are in turn part of the community. In most cultures marriage is not a private affair; the community is usually invited to celebrate with the family. A marriage cannot function well if leaving is not properly effected. In the Ghanaian culture, the leaving must be managed properly because of the extended family system. The couple must have the chance to start their own home, in their cultural context. Leaving does not mean the abandonment of one's parents or even family. The legal act of leaving is replaced in many countries by a public announcement before the wedding, as well as by an official marriage certificate. The outward form is not of primary importance rather it is a confirmation that a public and legal action has taken place (Trobisch, 1975:13).

The second part is cleaving, which in the literal sense means to stick to, to be glued to, or to paste. The husband and wife are glued together like two pieces of paper and any attempt to separate them will destroy them both. Cleaving means love, but this love is of a special kind. It is love which has decided to cleave in mutual love and remain faithful. It

is sharing one's whole life. Leaving and cleaving belong together: one describes the public and legal aspect of marriage while the other relates more to the personal aspect. You cannot properly cleave unless you consciously decide to leave (Trobisch, 1975:12-13).

The third part, which is "to become one flesh," describes the physical aspect of marriage. It means that two persons share everything they have, not only their bodies and their material possessions but also their feelings, joys, their fears, hopes, successes and failures. It means the two persons become completely one in body, soul and spirit, yet they remain two.

The three parts remain inseparable: if one of the parts is lacking, the marriage is incomplete. It is only those who have left regardless of the consequences and only those who cleave exclusively to each other who can become one flesh (Trobisch, 1975:19). All legitimate and legally accepted customary marriages should include or take into account all three parts of Genesis 2:24.

In the Old Testament, there is no evidence of descent through the mother's line. The line of descent was traced through the father, as can be seen by the genealogies in Genesis. Genesis 24 is the longest chapter in the book of Genesis; it tells the beautiful story of the customary marriage of Isaac and Rebekah. The story has charmed and enthralled people from generation to generation. It chronicles an important episode of marriage since its inception in the Garden of Eden. No other marriage has been more important than this one. In studying the principles guiding the preparation of a legitimate customary marriage we need to carefully follow the steps taken here.

A legitimate marriage in the sight of God should be characterised by the man leaving the father and mother and being united to his wife. Since it is the man who takes the initiative to propose marriage, the woman's consent to enter freely and willingly into a binding marital relationship is an important aspect of a valid marriage. Genesis 24:57-58 shows Rebekah giving her consent to the servant's proposal on behalf of Isaac. Throughout biblical records, very often the marriage is initiated by parents, whose permission for the union is essential. The consent of both sets of parents of the groom and the bride was assumed as a precondition for a legitimate marriage. The consent of both parents to the marriage is implied in the beautiful story of Genesis 24. In the Old Testament the phrase

“take a wife unto my son” suggests that the man initiated the marriage relationship and the woman on her part would give her consent to the proposal (Ngundu, 2010:190).

A valid marriage is ratified by the payment of the bride-price (Hebrew *mohar*) which could be in the form of a complimentary gift (Genesis 24:53). The biblical phrase “take a wife” could also refer to money or the bridal gift. However, this money does not signify purchase; rather it is a symbol of a legal transaction.

For a marriage to be considered valid there had to be the transaction of the bride-wealth, after which the bride is given to the groom. This signifies the passing of the bride from the authority of her family to that of the bridegroom. Ngundu states that the transfer of an item of monetary value, no matter how small, symbolizes the setting aside of the woman exclusively for the man (Ngundu, 2010:190). A valid marriage is one in which the woman willingly sets herself apart for her man in a permanent relationship.

For a Hebrew, marriage was not a simple possession; it was an important relationship basic to family life and was something to celebrate. According to Jesus’ teaching on marriage, entrance into a permanent marriage covenant implies that it is a public event witnessed by others (John 2:1ff). In Genesis 29:20-27, concerning Jacob’s marriage to the daughters of Laban, Morris (2009:461) says that “it was the custom to have a great festive week after a marriage, beginning with a banquet on the nuptial night”. When the wedding formalities had been observed, Laban presented his daughter to Jacob as his wife. Calvin on his part declares that in order to hold Jacob bound by the marriage, Laban invited many guests, as is customary in splendid nuptials, so that he will not dare to depreciate the marriage into which he had been deceived (Calvin, 2000:132).

In biblical times, the newly married couple will have their first intercourse only after the traditional marriage ceremony. The following morning the bride would bring forth the token of her virginity—the bed sheet with bloodstains, which her family would then display as a badge of honour (Deuteronomy 22:17). Though it seems primitive, the custom of examining the bride’s linen after the first night of marriage for spots of blood as a proof of virginity is still practised in some Oriental and African communities. The consummation of the marriage is an essential part of the formation of a valid marriage. From the time of the consummation of the marriage, sexual intercourse remains an exclusive privilege between the husband and wife.

A valid and legitimate marriage has to reflect certain characteristics of what Jesus said about marriage, as discussed above. Indeed, what is valid and legitimate in the eyes of God will be acceptable for marriages contracted customarily, legally and religiously. People of different nationalities or cultures, including Christians, contract valid marriages according to the accepted norms and traditions of those cultures. What Jesus said about marriage should apply to all cultures whose allegiance is to God. In this regard a valid and legitimate marriage should have the following characteristics:

- 1) Initiation of the marriage proposal by the man and free and voluntary consent by the woman. of marriage proposal by man and free and voluntary consent by the woman.
- 2) Permission for such marriage union from parents or guardians of both suitors (man and woman). This is a precondition for a legitimate marriage
- 3) Payment of the bride-price which ratifies the marriage
- 4) Public ceremony or celebration
- 5) The consummation of marriage

As stated earlier Issues on customary marriage is an ongoing discussion. Writing on African customary marriage with reference to the Shona tribe in Zimbabwe, Holleman in his book *Shona Customary Law* argues that there are at least three recognised and distinguishable phases of the traditional African marriage (Holleman 1952:98). The first is courtship-proposal and exchange of commitment gifts. It involves a marriage proposal, consent to the proposal, and a commitment gift which each of the two could keep as an indication of mutual love. The second stage is the marriage negotiations initiated by a representative of the groom's family. It involves the payment of the bride-price (*lobolo*, the Shona tribe's equivalent of the bride-price), which indicates the acceptance of responsibility for the woman, ensuring her welfare. Its primary purpose was to legitimize the relationship for procreation of legitimate offspring. It is also a token of appreciation by the groom and his family to the bride's side for their responsibility in the upbringing of the beautiful bride. The third stage is the handing over of the bride and the consummation of

the marriage. The African (Shona) people have a structured system of marriage similar in content to the biblical system of marriage.

3.3.2 The development of traditional Church marriage

A survey of the history and development of the European traditional church marriage will help to gain insight into the introduction and practices of church marriages by mission churches and civil marriages by colonial authorities in Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The failure by Europeans to recognise the practices and procedures of African marriage as traditionally accepted marriage which had been passed on from previous generations eventually led to the introduction and imposition of civil and church marriages on the Africans, resulting in social and moral confusion. Ngundu (2010:37) states that until the introduction of the ecclesiastical and court marriage laws in the Middle Ages and later in the sixteenth century of the state marriage law, religious leaders in Judaism and Christianity endorsed customary marriage as the only practice of contracting a valid and legitimate marriage even before God. The European Christian marriage tradition is a reflection of the cultural values and practices of the ancient Jewish, Roman-Hellenistic and Indo-European societies.

Before the introduction of church and civil marriage laws, a valid marriage was determined by what each society deemed valid. The customary forms of marriage among the Jews, Greeks and Romans provided the marriage forms for all Christians, and Christians accepted customary marriage as the only form of legitimate marriage. Church marriages according to ecclesiastical doctrine and practice have their origin in the Roman Catholic Church tradition. The Roman Catholic Church in carrying out its responsibilities issued a steady stream of papal decretals that were to prevail throughout Christendom. Through canon laws, the Roman Catholic Church began to regulate marriages in Western Europe. John Witte (1997:30) concludes that the Catholic Church with its canon laws held an unsurpassable authority over churches in Western Europe. It was the Roman law which introduced the idea of state certification of marriages (Ngundu, 2010:65). The marriage certificate was an essential document to verify a legal union, but did not constitute the marriage itself. It acted in a similar way to the bride-price in the African customary marriage. The Roman Catholic theology of marriage as a sacrament resulted in efforts to

bring all marriages under church authority, and therefore customary marriages were no longer recognised by them. People who rejected the Catholic theology looked to the state to enforce Christian understanding and practice of marriage. Both Catholics and Protestant missionaries to Africa would not recognise African customary marriages but only church marriages as valid and acceptable. They ended up imposing a model of church wedding on African Christians, even though the European ecclesiastical marriage regulations reflected pre-Christian marriage practices and values. It is indeed questionable whether marriage legislation passed in Europe to meet specific European marital and social needs of different cultural dispensations can justifiably be extended to the African Christians living in a completely different cultural environment. The missionaries' negative attitude towards African customary marriage was conditioned by their various doctrinal traditions and the long period in which they asserted their control over Africa. The mission churches had no biblical and theological basis for refusing to recognise customary marriages as a legitimate union for church purposes. The refusal to accept the African customary marriage was due to the lack of sufficient understanding of the history of the church marriage.

In spite of the introduction and legislation of the European Christian marriage tradition in African society, African couples continue to contract marriage traditionally before considering going for a second civil marriage ceremony or church marriage. Ngundu (2010:37) declares that in the sixteenth century religious leaders in Christianity and Judaism endorsed customary marriage as the only practice for contracting a valid and legitimate marriage. Notwithstanding the high regard for both marriage and religion, marriage ceremonies and celebrations were not conducted in religious buildings nor were they officiated by a priest or rabbi (Bowker, 1997:18). Traditionally, marriage-making was more of a social undertaking than either a religious or civil responsibility. However, the Old Testament presents God as being involved in such non-religious social marriage ceremonies and celebrations. The presence of Jesus and his disciples at the home-based marriage ceremony at Cana should not be seen as a sign of Christian marriage. To the Jews, God was involved with their traditional marriage-making although it did not belong to temple worship. In their view every marriage, Jewish or non-Jewish, was contracted before God, who created it as a union between man and woman.

In principle and practice, the early church fully accepted that marriage was validly contracted according to local custom (Schillebeeckx, 1965:272). Customary marriage then constituted the only form of marriage for Christians, and Christians were encouraged to celebrate their customary marriage in God-honouring ways. It is believed that in the ninth century Pope Nicholas I referred to the validity of marriage by customary consent even if ecclesiastical marriage liturgy or blessing was lacking. The early church contributed to the endorsement of customary marriage as legitimate. Bishops of the early church, while encouraging their members to continue getting married according to prevailing custom, challenged Christian couples to celebrate marriage differently from non-Christians.

At the All-Africa Seminar on the Christian Home and Family Life held at Mindolo Ecumenical Centre, Kitwe, Zambia in 1963, the African participants dealing with the issue of the compatibility of the African traditional marriage and Christian marriage argued strongly for the recognition of the validity of customary marriage by the church (All Africa Church Conference, 1963). In their view, a marriage union, properly entered into with the full consent of a man and a woman who are competent to marry one another and publicly recognised in the society in which they live, must be recognised as valid in its own right. If the church is to be sincere and true to its own theology of marriage, then customary marriage fashioned after biblical order must be accepted.

Before the introduction of church and civil laws, a valid marriage was determined by what each society deemed valid. Hence the customary forms of marriage among the Jews, Greeks and Romans provided the marriage forms for Christians as well. Christians from those societies accepted customary marriage as the only form of legitimate marriage. Many Africans are under the impression that wedding artefacts like the gown, veil and ring are all rooted in the Bible. The unveiling of the bride by the groom at the end of a church marriage ceremony also signifies the exclusive permission given to enter into sexual relationship, thus making church marriage sacred. However, it must be noted that there are observable acts in the customary marriage system that inculcate love, commitment and purity. There is not much difference between church marriage and customary marriage except in the outer form. In form and practice, they all take into account the biblical norms of marriage and are acceptable in the sight of God.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter aimed to analyse customary marriage, and to identify and understand the ethics of marriage in Pentecostalism. The argument presented so far points to the fact that both customary marriage and church marriage are based mainly on the golden rule of marriage pronounced by God in Genesis 2:24. In our approach to wholesome biblical marriage, attention must be paid to the elements that subscribe to this biblical norm as argued in this chapter. In the next chapter, I will look at the theological assessment, and efforts will be made to re-evaluate the churches' policy on customary marriage and to suggest some practical steps to enhance the services of the church.

CHAPTER 4:

THEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Having argued in the previous chapter that both customary marriage and church marriage are based mainly on the golden rule of marriage pronounced by God in Genesis 2:24, I want now to look at the church's approach to customary marriage in the light of what the church community usually call the white church wedding, and the need to embrace all members in the ordinance services provided by the church. As believers, the Bible is our authority and the basis for all doctrine. I will consult the Bible for doctrinal exposition and evaluation to reach some conclusions.

4.2 CALL FOR THE RE-EVALUATION OF THE CHURCH'S POLICY ON CUSTOMARY MARRIAGE

The Ghanaian church is heavily influenced by the European methods of liturgy and how service is done. The missionaries who came to Africa influenced the indigenes with the European approach to worship, and as a result a new cultural approach to church service emerged. I want to discuss the impact of the missionaries on the marital culture of the people.

4.2.1 The call

The first European missionaries to arrive in Ghana and other African countries had no other marriage laws and policies than those that applied to their respective churches in Europe and America. It was only after their experience in Africa that certain specific rules were formulated to meet the particular circumstance of African life and customs. The missionaries were convinced that there could be nothing in the African philosophy of life, their religious ideas, or social customs, but what was altogether bad and worthy of condemnation. In the minds of the missionaries, their superiority to the Africans was a marked feature of that era. Missionaries regarded themselves as agents of European civilisation and their rigid conformity to the European Christian system caused confusion and conflict. The African indigenous system was imperfectly understood and no attempts were made to suspend judgement upon the African social custom until a better knowledge of the whole African system had been acquired. There was no tolerance towards the

African social customs and institutions and the African customary marriage was regarded as an uncivilized institution. Even at present, directions relating to marriage, which some missions have in Africa, are those which apply to their home churches in Europe and America. Some missionaries were hesitant in making rules because of the early misunderstanding of the African traditions and customs and the attendant confusion. The impact of Western ideas and conceptions upon the cultural life of the African can best be understood by reference to their religious sphere.

The initial attack by the missions on African customs was made irrespective of the general significance of such customs within the African society. There was no attempt to adapt any of the customs by removing what the missionaries thought was objectionable in order to retain what was thought to be acceptable. The missionaries mistakenly construed the Western way of life as representing Christianity and forced Africans to abandon their cherished cultural practices in favour of Western Christian culture. They condemned and prohibited almost all African cultural practices, especially those that had to do with African marriages. Everything African was seen as contrary to Christian beliefs. The missionaries attempted to create a new social order in the African society by the imposition of alien marriage laws. Africans have been expected to contract a valid marriage in the eyes of the church authorities according to the European tradition of marriage, and admission to the church was based on one's subscription to church marriage (Ngundu, 2010:130).

Africans on their part have remained generally traditional in their approach to contracting marriages. The African society regards traditional marriage as constituting a genuine marriage and the registration and subsequent solemnisation of marriage in the church was merely a means of satisfying the missionaries. Since the missionary invasion of Africa, Christians have encountered social and legal difficulties in trying to determine when an African Christian couple can be considered legitimately married. Till today, marriage rituals for African Christians are first performed outside the church and church marriages are regarded only as formalities to endorse what has already taken place. Kasomo contends that about ninety percent of church marriages are first customarily contracted at home and even those who go for church marriages would later perform the customary marriage with its associated dowry or bride-price (Kasomo, 2010:13).

Mission churches refused to recognize African traditional marriages and required all their converts to get married only by Christian rites. The consequences were that African

marriages contracted customarily were not regarded as valid and legitimate unions in the eyes of the colonial authorities. Africans continued to contract marriages traditionally before the prescribed European form of marriage ceremony. The missionaries felt that they were better qualified spiritually than the native people to solemnise the marriages of African converts. The imposition of the European system of marriage on Africans rendered African traditional marriages irrelevant from the missionary point of view. According to Onesimus Ngundu (2010:92), it was only after the introduction of the Marriage Act in 1964 in South Africa that African church marriages were recognised by default as valid and legitimate unions for both government and church purposes. With the introduction of the Marriage Act in 1964, polygamous marriage under the African Marriages Act of 1951 was outlawed.

The missions viewed the practice of African customary marriage as evil because it was different from the European tradition of church marriage. In effect, African conversion to Christianity meant a cultural change from customs like traditional marriage to European practices like weddings. Converted polygamists were required to send away all of their wives except the first one. The missionaries were asking the African Christians to divorce their wives; but that this negative practice of discarding of wives by the converted polygamist was a greater evil than retaining them (Phillips, 2018).

Although there is evidence of a significant shift in missionary attitudes towards African culture, mission churches still do not accept customary marriage as valid and legitimate unions for church purposes. It is because of this view that I call for a re-evaluation of the policy of missions and churches regarding the legitimacy of the African customary marriage.

4.2.2 The missionary and the general African marriage

In his writings on the missionary attitudes to Shona culture, Peadar (1970:27) states that there are areas in the African culture that missionaries conflicted with, ranging from religious beliefs to ethical systems. The radical conflicts between the missionaries and the Africans occurred because of their different views on marriage and family life. He identified particular aspects of the African marriage such as polygamy, bride-price and the easily dissoluble nature of the African customary marriage as points of disagreement. The missionaries were opposed to those aspects of the African marriage, which they

considered degrading to the status of women, and customs which were considered to curtail women's freedom. Their feelings against certain aspects of the African customary marriage were so strong that attempts were made to influence governments to legislate for their abolition. The unsuccessful attempts made to influence governments caused them to come up with rules meant to destroy the African marriage customs. Many of the rules they made conflicted with African traditions and those who broke them were censored by the church. The missionaries administered discipline in a rigid and legalistic way to the exclusion of pardon. This negative attitude towards traditional marriage was translated into church policy by the mission churches in African society (Ngundu, 2010:6). For instance, the Light House Church, International Central Gospel Church, Assemblies of God and a few others in Ghana insist that you bring your marriage to church to complete the true marriage ordinance even if you have done the customary marriage agreed by the respective families (Van Dijk, 1997:446). Van Dijk (2004:21) in his book *Negotiating Marriage: Questions of Morality and Legitimacy in the Ghanaian Pentecostal Diaspora*, explains how the churches push for conformity with the Western approach of doing things and in the process cause cultural conflict.

Adrian Hastings (1973) report on Christian Marriage in Africa 1973 and that of Kisembo on African Christian Marriage 1977, made significant contributions for the establishment of mission churches in Africa which would recognize African Customary Marriage (Kisembo et al., 1977:63). The Hastings report aimed to help the Anglican church in part and other missionary-established churches in general in Africa to come to a better understanding of the deep-rooted African concept of marriage in light of the European tradition of Christian marriages, if the African church were to handle African marriages differently from the pioneer missionaries. Kisembo on his part made some recommendation to the Roman Catholic Church to contextualise African Christian marriage within the Catholic tradition in Africa. The significant contribution of Hastings and Kisembo was their call, among other things, to establish missionary churches in Africa that recognise African customary marriage (Ngundu, 2004). There is still the need to come up with a practical African Christian marriage liturgy that would reflect a link between the African customary marriage and church marriage. The difference between the concept of the European Christian marriage and that of the African traditional marriage had created conflicts in the lives of the African Christians. This subject has not yet been adequately addressed. The need for an African Christian marriage that is

culturally, civilly and biblically oriented is our main objective. There is no doubt that economic factors such as money, modern systems of transport, communication and employment in urban towns outside our villages are hastening the process of social change, and marriage customs and family traditions are also embracing these changes. The old life in a small closely-knit society is changing. Once the individual African was enabled to place himself outside the effective range of traditional control it could be expected that the customary system of family life would not long survive unchanged. The extent of the changes will vary according to the degree of contact with the outside world and the strength with which external influences have been brought to bear on indigenous people and their traditions and customs.

The mission churches in Africa refused to recognise customary marriage as a valid and legitimate form of marriage for African Christians. They regarded church weddings as the only form of valid and legitimate marriage for church purposes for converted Africans. For the Jews, whose religion was at the centre of social life, God was involved with their traditional marriage-making, which did not belong to temple worship. Despite the high Jewish regard for both marriage and religion, marriage ceremonies were regarded as more social than religious. This view is supported by the fact that Jesus and His disciples attended a home-based marriage reception at Cana (John 2:1-12):

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." "Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now." What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his

disciples believed in him. After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days.

The most prominent feature of the African customary marriage which constitutes the central point of conflict between Christian marriage and African customary marriage is its polygamous character. Customary marriage has no binding obligation on monogamy. Thus customary marriage, which is according to native law and custom, is considered potentially polygamous because it tolerates, approves and accords liberty towards polygamy. The African customary marriage places no legal impediment to contracting another marriage. It is this polygamous element that differentiates the African marriage from the Christian marriage. In the thinking of the missionaries, polygamy constitutes the point of greatest resistance to the teaching of Christianity concerning marriage. According to Phillips (2018), it reflects the fundamental inequality between the sexes typical of the African social system and is normally associated with a social system in which there is unchallenged male dominance (Phillips, 2018). There are numerous problems connected with polygamy. In a polygamous marriage, there are frequent quarrels. Polygamy that obtains several children places too much burden on the parents, especially with regards to feeding and education of the children. When divorce among younger people takes place, it tends to provide opportunities for polygamists to have many wives. This is because a divorced woman who has difficulty in finding a husband would be content with becoming a second wife of an already married man.

The missions have consistently refused to surrender to customary marriage's hold on polygamy and they maintain that the acceptance of polygamy would be fundamentally inconsistent with the teachings of Christianity. This has been the unanimous practice of the Christian mission since the inception of missionary work in Africa.

In view of the discussions above, the need to find out how polygamy became an ideal institution of customary marriage in Africa is apparent. The rationale given for the practice of polygamy in Africa is provided by two schools of thought: the social and the economic. Proponents of the social school of thought explain that polygamy became established when the ratio of women to men in Africa was about 10 to 1. As a result, those responsible for establishing social institutions decided to come up with a marriage system that would address this problem. Their aim at the time was to provide a balance for equal distribution of social, material, security and economic benefits to both women and men. They felt that

if the problem regarding the needs of unmarried women were not addressed there would be the snatching away of other women's husbands or many would engage in prostitution, since the sexual, social, psychological, and economic needs of human beings had to be taken care of (Nyanseor, 2019:1-2).

On the other hand, proponents of the economic school of thought reasoned that polygamy addressed the prevailing economic issues. They explained that during the pre-colonial era in Africa economic activities were centred on subsistence agriculture. This type of agriculture required a lot of manpower. In order to establish the mode of production that was going to benefit the entire society, the polygamous form of marriage was preferred. This emphasised collective responsibilities, communal ownership of farms, wealth and economic benefits for the extended family (Nyanseor, 2019:1).

The major concept of both the social and economic schools of thought was centred on the male marrying more than one wife, depending on his ability to pay the bride-price or dowry for each of them. A man with wives was obligated to provide farms for each of his wives, and children and relatives of each wife were required to work and attend to the maintenance of the farm. The resources derived from these farms were pooled together to provide material and economic benefits for the entire family. With this kind of arrangement, all members of the extended family were better cared for (Nyanseor, 2019:1).

The institution of polygamy in traditional Africa was certainly not merely a means of satisfying male lust. Polygamy has long existed in Africa and it represents an aspect of the African culture and religion. This happened because the African society saw that children were a form of wealth, therefore a family with more children was considered to be more powerful. Under these circumstances, polygamy was considered to be a way to build an empire. In their book *African Christian Marriage*, Kitembo, Magesa, and Shorter declared that polygamy had some well-defined social functions and advantages and that it certainly helped to stabilize the institution of marriage and to integrate the family with society (Kitembo et al., 1977:63). Polygamy also catered for childless union and offered a kinder solution than that of divorce when a wife was barren. Polygamy was not a hidden institution; it was open and accepted by society that the first wife retained a powerful place in the family and the husband confided community secrets in her. When she was too old to carry out matrimonial duties like sex and hard labour the younger wives took on these responsibilities. All wives of a polygamist are his full legal wives and are so regarded by

society. Furthermore, the man paid a bride-price for each wife and this was a means of keeping the relations between the families alive and strong. It was also a way of ensuring that the woman was properly cared for and that in the case of mistreatment or divorce the woman always returns home and is accepted by her parents and relatives. In his book *Polygamy Reconsidered* Hillman (1975) states that polygamy itself is not evil since it was permitted by God under the Old Testament and also because it conforms to the natural purpose of procreation within the permanent bonds of marriage. He cited the example that Jacob was not charged with any great crime because he had four wives (Hillman, 1975:180). There was no ground for offence, as the plurality of wives was not a crime, being the custom at the time. Polygamous marriages which took place before the thirteenth century when church marriage was introduced had no problems for the people. In societies where the idea of marriage is linked with the extended family in which a strong sense of community is pervading, polygamy makes sense. In societies where there is no place for unmarried women, and where marriage alone offers women the security and dignity required for their normal self-realisation, polygamy is apt to be both a social necessity and of positive social value. In such societies, the right that every woman has to marriage and the society's need for legitimate progeny are well served by the system of polygamy. As a matter of fact, polygamy has never been the problem of customary marriage because it is not mentioned when traditional marriage is taking place. The problem with customary marriage in its relation to polygamy is that steps have not been taken to prohibit polygamy. Though polygamy has long been in existence, social changes taking place is making it less attractive. It is not economically viable any more for it is becoming difficult these days to maintain more wives and children. Although the ratio of women to men is widening, with the population of women far exceeding that of men, social changes are making polygamy unappetizing (Kahiga, 2007:121).

Another aspect of the African customary marriage which offends the Christian conscience is the institution of the bride-price. On this subject, there has been a divergence of opinion between different missions. Some interpret the bride-price as a transaction, which involves the purchase of a woman, while others condemn it on account of its unchristian implications. Reasons given for the unchristian features of the bride-price include the following (Phillips, 2018:369):

- 1) That the bride-price denies a woman freedom of choice and self-determination

- 2) That the wife is inherited after the death of the husband by male relatives.
- 3) That the bride-price is not given to the woman's parents but her mother's relatives
- 4) That under certain circumstances both mother and father may be deprived of the possession of their own children.
- 5) That if the bride-price is not paid the wife can be taken and given to another man and the children can also be seized and taken away from the father.
- 6) That any children born to a woman for whom the bride-price had not been transferred or contracted were regarded as illegitimate or children of a prostitute.

In the African mind, the bride-price is a way of ensuring that the woman is properly cared for. It is to act as a support to the permanence of the marriage. The bride-price is the compensation to the woman's family for the loss of one of its members who is a potential child-bearer. It is a part of a transaction in which the dominant emphasis is on the formation of an alliance between two kinship groups. It is designed to stabilize the marriage and give protection to the wife and it is a symbol marking the formal conclusion of the marriage contract. It acts as a pledge to provide adequately for the bride and to show that she is loved more than anything. It confers rights of conjugality and inheritance on the spouses. It establishes a continued commitment in the marriage. The bride-price is not meant for gain but is a concrete way of binding together the two families involved. Although the dominant emphasis on the bride-price is the formation of an alliance between kinship groups, which is a means to stabilize the marriage, the missionaries who came to Africa maintain that customary marriage has weak links and that it is easily dissoluble (Phillips, 2018:xv).

4.2.3 The easy dissolubility of the African customary marriage

It is a fact that in many African tribes marriages can be dissolved by inter-family arrangements without the necessity for any judicial pronouncement. However, it does not follow that divorce can be obtained at the mere wish of a husband or wife in the absence of substantial grounds. Traditional native law requires that relatives should refund the bride-price in part at least as an essential condition to make the divorce valid. This requirement tends to have an obstructive effect on divorce, for it makes divorce detestable

unless under very serious circumstances. The prospect of losing the right to your children is also a possible deterrent to divorce. On the whole, however, there is no definite conclusion to be drawn for a comparison between African customary marriage and church marriage in matters of dissolubility. Indeed the African marriage can only be understood if it is viewed as an integral part of a kinship system as a whole. The customary marriage transaction gives rise to reciprocal rights and obligations between two groups of kinsmen and it binds those groups together in a relationship which remains effective beyond the lifetime of the original spouses. In the book *Survey of African Marriage and Family Life*, edited by Arthur Phillips (2018), the statement is made that the bride-price custom, if purged of all that was inconsistent with Christian principles and safeguarded against abuse, could be made an acceptable and even valuable basis for Christian marriage (Phillips, 2018). From the indigenous law and custom point of view, marriage is regarded as an alliance between two kinship groups and only in a secondary aspect is it a union between two individual persons. This makes for stronger bonds that cannot easily be broken.

4.2.4 Biblical principles of marriage that apply to all cultures.

For a very strong foundation in marriage, the Bible provides enormous help. Marriage is a divine institution and the Bible is the authority and basis for doctrine. Our search for a contextualised form of African Christian marriage that takes into account the civil, customary and Christian aspects of marriage can be found using biblical principles of Christian marriage that are relevant to all cultures. This is a summary to prove my argument in 4.2.

Jesus' teaching about marriage draws on the original will of God on marriage established in the creation account. What Jesus said about marriage applies to all cultures whose allegiance is to God. Genesis 2:24 lays the foundation for a valid and legitimate marriage. This is quoted by Jesus in Matthew 19:5, Mark 10:7 and Ephesians 5:31, and includes three important concepts that give directions for the ideal marriage. These expressions are "leave, cleave, be one flesh." These words involve the following basic characteristics:

- 1) Initiation of marriage proposal by man and consent by the woman
- 2) Permission for the marriage union from parents which is a precondition for a legitimate marriage

- 3) Payment of bride-price to ratify the marriage
- 4) Public ceremony or celebration
- 5) Consummation of marriage

Marriage rites are dictated by the culture of the people, therefore these basic characteristics are found in different forms in both the customary and Christian forms of marriage. Holleman (1952) makes clear the fact that customary marriage in the Shona tribe of Zimbabwe shows all these characteristics in the cultural life of the people

Since there are parallels between church marriage and customary marriage, the African traditional marriage or customary marriage can reflect our discussions above and seek to amalgamate customary marriage and church marriage to come out with a new system that may be named "African Christian customary marriage". This will take into account biblical principles and relevant cultural practices and will make it unnecessary to take both customary and Church marriages on different occasions and for that singular purpose.

Diversity of marriage practices exists simply because of kinship relations, rituals and moral practices. Ngundu (2010) asserts that a pattern of customary marriage existed in the Church in Europe, where casual forms of polygamy were common. They set out to reduce this to what was thought to be Christian standards. Ngundu (2010:218-219) maintains that it took the European Church hundreds of years of thought and discussions to negotiate Christian principles of marriage with cultural practices of the day. After several centuries, the Church succeeded in outlawing polygamy and gaining control of the marriage processes to the extent that these popular practices were made conformable to Christian norms. Christian marriage in Africa still retains its hold on the mission churches and despite the change in leadership to African Christians much remains to be done. Contemporary African church leaders must engage governments and mission-oriented churches in a dialogue on current anomalies of marriage laws, and come out with one system of marriage which will engage biblical principles that apply to all cultures. In this manner, we will suggest a system of customary marriage akin to church marriage, which will cut down costs and be acceptable to all.

4.3 THE NEED TO ESTABLISH AN ECCLESIASTICAL ORDER TO ACCOMMODATE CUSTOMARY NORMS

While culture is the fabric that runs through the life of every people group, it seems like the affirmation of culture is particularly pronounced among the people of Africa, and particularly Ghana. In this segment, I aim to argue the centrality of culture to the Ghanaian mind.

4.3.1 The Need

The people of Africa, and Ghana in particular, consider customary marriage as absolutely necessary and closely knit to their culture. Customary marriage points to a valid and legitimate life of a union between a man and a woman for the Ghanaians in both the UK and Ghana. However, moral difficulties encountered by Ghanaian couples at marriage stem from lack of understanding and recognition of customary marriages by missionary-founded churches. The missionaries made customary marriage unacceptable for the African church because of their misunderstanding and ignorance of African cultures. Therefore, the burden of engaging in a church wedding in addition to customary marriage before or after the white wedding lay on the African converts. The task of the mission churches was to preach the gospel, but their rejection of the culture and traditions of the indigenous people brought confusion and unrest. The imposition of the European culture along with the gospel message cast a shadow of suspicion on their relationship and leadership. Christianity and the African culture have since been contending with each other and African Christian couples face moral confusion at marriage.

Culture as the backbone of the African family life denotes ideas, customs and social behaviour of a particular people or society. It includes values, beliefs, customs, languages and traditions which reflect their history and heritage and how they express ideas. It is the way of life of a group of people and depicts the way they do things. Different groups may have different cultures. Culture measures our quality of life, vitality and health, and through it we develop a sense of belonging. It was not possible for Africans to easily accept living under a foreign culture without a struggle in conducting marriages.

Richard Niebuhr (2001) in his publication entitled *Christ and Culture* outlines five positions in which Christianity relates to culture. Under the third position, "Christ above culture," he explains that culture is neither perfect nor evil but is something which can be elevated

and transformed through the Christian faith. He regarded cultural expressions as basically good as far as they go; however, they need to be augmented and perfected by Christian revelation and the work of the church (Niebuhr, 2001:116-148). He speaks of various ways in which Christians have sought to live faithfully under the authority of Christ as they relate to the culture in which they live. Culture relates to the social life of humanity in the areas of language, habits, ideas, beliefs, customs and social organisation. If we put this in line with the cultural difficulties Africans experience on customary marriage and the fact that marriage originates from God, then we need an ecclesiastical order that will accommodate customary marriage in the African cultural setting. Every theology of marriage applied to any group of people must take into account the culture, customs and traditions of the people. The reason for this is that it is impossible to isolate any group of people from their culture because it relates to their social life. The application of foreign culture to a people group who do not reside in the same environment will yield negative results. This is why missionaries to Ghana and other African countries have failed in their handling of the African customary marriage (Wiafe, 2010:59-60).

The missionaries who came to Africa played a strangely ambiguous role in the history and affairs of the African continent. They were driven by a strong desire to genuinely serve humanity and bring about material and social changes that would improve the quality of life of the people. However, in my view they possessed moral self-righteousness, which led them to make hasty and uninformed judgements upon the indigenous mores, norms and values that they were scarcely equipped to understand. They sought to impose alien morality and work ethos upon the local people without realising that these undermined their most basic social and cultural tenets and were therefore largely to be resisted. They brought the gospel to Africa but in applying it to the life of the African people they made a big mistake in rejecting the culture of the people. The origin of marriage, which is central to understanding family life in both the Christian and African religion, is attributed to God, hence the sacred character of it. The Jews trace the origin and establishment of marriage to the God of all creation. Therefore, marriage derives its authority from the principles of biblical theology that apply to all cultures.

Missionaries to sub-Saharan Africa followed no other marriage laws than those which applied in their respective home environments in Europe and America. The introduction and legislation of the European Christian marriage tradition in Africa were executed in the name of civilization and Christianity. Ngundu (2010) contends that before the introduction

of ecclesiastical marriage laws in the Middle Ages, religious leaders endorsed customary marriage as the only way of contracting valid and legitimate marriage (Ngundu, 2010:37). The European Christian marriage tradition reflected the cultural values and practices of the Jewish, Roman and Indo-European societies, and with its introduction to Africa by the missions, some bishops began to make assertions about marriage practices appropriate for baptised members of the church. As it gradually established its influence, the church claimed jurisdiction over doctrine, liturgy and education and became one universal sovereign power that governed all Christendom. In carrying out its responsibilities, the church issued a steady stream of decrees that were to prevail throughout Christendom. With this development converts to Christianity had no voice but quietly suffered under this yoke by yielding to this expensive wedding and secretly marrying again by customary marriage (Ngundu, 2010:47).

The aspects of the African culture that were unacceptable to the missionaries ranged from religious beliefs to ethical systems. The radical conflict that occurred between the missionaries and the indigenous people of Africa came about because of their different views on marriage and family life. Particular aspects of the African marriage such as polygamy, bride-price and the easily dissoluble nature of the African marriage were strongly opposed by the missionaries. They made every effort to stop the church from being polluted by these customs and traditions and the regulations they made conflicted with the beliefs of the Africans. The missionary hermeneutics of Christian marriage in colonial Africa still retains its hold on the mission-originated churches despite the change in leadership from foreign missionaries to African Christians. Church leaders in contemporary Africa, in spite of the moral dilemmas which their church members repeatedly face at marriage, have not as yet formulated their own theologies of marriage or written their own liturgies of Christian marriage suitable for the African context. It is alarming that without exception even service programmes used in weddings are of European provenance (Ngundu, 2010:201). Traditional marriage is still not recognised by most leaders of the churches in independent Africa (Van Dijk, 2004: 438-467).

No major church in post-independent Africa has changed its policy on customary marriage. There is the need to put forward an African Christian marriage that lays down a biblical foundation for marriage that will be relevant to all cultures and be suitable in the Ghanaian context. Wiafe (2010:65) supports this view in his book *African Traditional Religion and Christianity's Approach to Issues of Marriage and Childbirth*. He suggests

that it is important to merge the traditional marriage rituals with those of the church to avoid duplicity and unnecessary waste of money and time. An ecclesiastical order that will accommodate customary norms and embrace the culture of the people should derive its authority first from principles of biblical theology that apply to all cultures. A valid and legitimate marriage has to reflect certain characteristics of the golden rule for marriage that God the creator and initiator of marriage outlined in Genesis 2:24. The cardinal points in the golden rule of biblical marriage are “leaving”, “cleaving” and “being one flesh”. These imperatives gleaned from the statement in Genesis 2:24 can be used as a guideline for setting up a legitimate Christian Customary Marriage order for contemporary Africa. Ngundu (2010), in his research conducted on the Shona tribe of Zimbabwe, asserts that there are at least three recognised and distinguishable phases or stages of the African customary marriage that can be linked to the biblical imperatives God gave in the book of Genesis. The first is courtship proposals and exchange of commitment tokens. The second is marriage negotiation, which includes the bride-price transactions. The third is the release or handing over of the bride to the groom (Ngundu, 2010:18). These distinguishable phases are all found in the five-point plan:

- 1) Initiation of marriage proposals by the man and the free and voluntary consent by the woman.
- 2) Parental consent: permission for the marriage union from parents or guardians of both suitors
- 3) Marriage negotiations: payment of bride-price or dowry which ratifies the marriage agreement
- 4) Public Ceremony or Celebrations (witnessed by friends and relations and the public)
- 5) The release and consummation of marriage

Walter Trobisch indicates that the three parts of marital commitment from Genesis 2:24 are inseparable from each other because if one part is lacking, the marriage is not complete. It is only the couple who have left father and mother regardless of the consequences and “cleave” exclusively to each other who can become one “flesh”

(Trobisch, 1975:19). In a further explanation of the golden rule of biblical marriage he employs the vertices of a triangle; the upper angle represents “leaving” and is equated to a public or legal act. The left angle represents “cleaving” and is equated to love or faithfulness. The right angle represents “one flesh” and is equated to physical union or sex (much more is meant by this word than just sexual fellowship).

4.3.2 The European Wedding

Wedding artefacts like the wedding gown and the veil are said to denote purity and virginity and represent righteousness. These contribute to making the white wedding very expensive. However, in a customary marriage, African prints are worn and I believe these are acceptable to God. Purity in marriage is linked to virginity but these days before the age of marriage virginity in many cases is broken. However, through the acceptance of the finished work of Jesus Christ, whose blood washed away our sins, righteousness is imputed to us (Romans 5:17; 2 Corinthians 5:21) and this restores our virginity. So if we enter marriage as converts our virginity is renewed through the righteousness of Christ. We are clean inside by the cleansing of the blood and what we wear, no matter what it is, reflects the glory of God. It is said that the unveiling of the bride by the groom at the end of the church marriage ceremony signals the exclusive permission given to enter into sexual union with the woman who has kept herself ready for her husband. In customary marriage, the release of the bride to the groom is signalled by the payment and acceptance of the bride-price or dowry. The wedding ring is understood to be a symbol of endless love. In customary marriage, the payment of the bride-price or dowry brings the two families of the bride and the groom together in love and involves them in caring for that marriage union. If the marriage breaks down the bride’s family will have to return the bride-price, so because of this the families strive to keep the marriage together. Today the wedding and engagement rings have been adopted and may be used if an African Christian customary marriage is realised. The ring is placed on the left-hand ring finger, which is believed to have its veins running to the heart and speaks of an endless love (Ngundu, 2010:161).

Under both customary and church marriage systems the families have on occasions presented problems to the couples, thus it is important and essential that under the new order parents or their representatives of both sets of families be asked to make a public declaration releasing their son and daughter to their new relationship. The declarations

made by the couples to each other under church marriage may also be maintained. This will be a public assurance to the bride and groom that they are fully recognised by the families as a husband and wife.

4.3.3 The polygamous nature of customary marriage

A very important area of objection to customary marriage is its polygamous nature. Social changes have cut down the incidence of polygamy and reduced it to the barest minimum. Today it is not attractive to take many wives; besides being burdensome, it is also expensive. The cost of education and feeding children are high and act as a deterrent to polygamy. Many do not want to take on additional wives; however, another form of polygamy is rearing its head. Fidelity in marriage is a challenge facing the Ghanaian church. Culturally, married men under the Marriage Act or customary marriage sleep around with other women. Promiscuity is not uncommon even among Christians; therefore some women do not trust their husbands just as some men do not trust their wives. A Christian customary marriage in which the Bible and culture play together would be an ideal opportunity to emphasise Christian teaching on marriage ethics. It would be important to stress covenantal faithfulness in Christian marriage. The church should, therefore, teach Christian couples about the ethical and spiritual consequences of unfaithfulness. In many cases, the approach of the church to righteousness is ideologically puritan, and therefore people tend to pay lip service to the prescribed way of living while in their private life they act differently. As already stated, polygamy is seriously frowned upon in the Christian charismatic churches, and as a result, many hide their extramarital activities where sexual gratification is concerned. It is easy for people to question the legitimacy of monogamy when they are surrounded by a culture in which polygamy is widely practised among the non-Christians and even by family members who do not subscribe to the Christian faith. They are also influenced by the Bible stories in which all the patriarchs had multiple wives without any particular warning from the Lord.

4.3.4 The new order

A Christian customary marriage must seek God's blessing as a practical way of recognising that marriage is a divine institution from God, therefore the new order of doing things must be guided by the bible . Blessing on customary marriage should be preceded by teachings on the importance of covenantal faithfulness in Christian marriage. These

will make the people readily aware of the evils of unfaithfulness, as the current system is pushing unfaithfulness to a new level. The establishment of a church order for customary marriage will remove the double marriage system that confronts the African convert. Christian couples will no longer be humiliated for consummating their marriage before the so-called white wedding (Christian wedding). Social pressure for expensive marriage ceremonies and celebrations will be cut down so as to reduce the financial pressure on young couples. The new order will meet all the requirements for customary, church, and civil marriage in Ghana and the diaspora churches and thereby restore the fundamental freedom of self-expression that is lacking under the old church marriage order. As expressed by the apostle Paul in Galatians 5:1, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free", so we should no longer be entangled with the yoke of slavery. As believers, we should embrace the truth of God's word to liberate us in doing God's will.

4.4 Conclusion

I have demonstrated that the Ghanaian church has a moral duty to accommodate its members' needs in the area of marriage within their cultural settings. It is great for all people to appreciate other people's cultures in the framework of marriage but certainly not at the expense of their own. A Christian customary marriage will hopefully eliminate promiscuity even if the marriage is set out in a polygamous arrangement. The institution of marriage, is very holy and therefore proper measures ought to be in place so people are not made to feel like they are sinning against God in something that is pure and wonderful. In the next chapter I will re-evaluate the church's stance on customary marriage and church order with the scriptures forming the basis of my arguments. I will also look at how the church can establish an ecclesiastical order that will accommodate customary norms, celebrating the richness of the culture and the fundamental freedom of self-expression.

CHAPTER 5:

RE-EVALUATION OF THE CHURCH'S STAND ON CUSTOMARY MARRIAGE AND CHURCH ORDER

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will focus on the re-evaluation of the church's stand on customary marriage, and the biblical texts that form the basis of the doctrine of marriage will be looked at. The European missionaries' approach that attempted to Christianise Africa inevitably informed the liturgy of marriage. I will be evaluating the whole concept with the view to suggesting what could be a fine church order.

5.2 CUSTOMARY MARRIAGE AND CHURCH ORDER

The church's standpoint on marriage was biblically based, primarily on the direct sayings of God and especially on the golden text in Genesis 2:24, "For this cause shall a man leave the father and mother and shall cleave to his wife and they shall be one flesh." However, the nature of marriage changed as it developed over centuries of European history. The outcome of such historical and theological debates on marriage in Europe was what the missionaries imposed on African societies. Christianity first emerged among the Jews in the Mediterranean world before it spread through Europe, and it existed in the Roman-Hellenistic society which had its own system of laws.

During the early years of missionary activities in Africa, it was the ardent preoccupation and desire of the missionaries to Christianise Africans and save their souls. This was because they thought that the souls of the Africans were sinful and damned to Hell. In this endeavour, everything African was seen as contrary to Christian belief. The Western way of life was construed as representing Christianity, and because of this Africans had to abandon their cherished cultural practices in favour of the Western Christian culture. They, therefore, condemned and abandoned all African cultural practices, especially those which had to do with the customary marriage. The missionaries believed in their own form of marriage rituals based on their cultural practices. They did not adjust to the African way of doing things nor did they try to understand or incorporate the African culture into Christianity. As I have pointed out in my previous chapter, they implanted the Western liturgy into the African context.

The areas in the African culture that the missionaries had conflict with ranged from religious beliefs to ethical systems and also their different views of marriage and family life. In Africa, the marriage contract is essentially an agreement between families in which the individual interests of the bride and groom, though formally recognised, are but a subordinate element to the wider dominating interest of their families. Any union entered into by a man and woman without the assistance and cooperation of their respective families has no legal base. This is the fundamental aspect of the African traditional marriage and it is expected that any choice of a wife or husband, if not actually made by some key relatives or sanctioned by them, is not acceptable.

The general view of the missionaries towards the African culture and traditions, especially their customary marriage, appeared to be that Africans were untutored, barbaric and a people who had vestigial religious and moral consciousness. The missionaries had theories about the African people that varied considerably, leading them to believe that in terms of development the Africans had not reached the same stage of growth as the white races. This fuelled the beginnings of racist pseudoscience that still has lasting effects to this day. As a result, they were biased in their judgement on matters concerning the indigenous African traditions. One of the African customs that dominated discussions among the various missions was the customary marriage, particularly its polygamous nature, the bride-price, the easily dissoluble character, the inferior status of women, and the levirate union. The missionaries accused the African people of witchcraft, divination and ancestral worship and viewed them as people who had been under barbarism for centuries and had no concept of sin, repentance and salvation. They thought that preaching on these doctrines was a waste of time and energy and had no effect because of the precarious nature of the African system. Such attitudes towards Africans and their marriage system shaped the missions' approach to African marriage and religions. To uproot the evil in the African customs and traditions, the missionaries built mission-owned farms for the Africans that would grant them more control over the people than was possible in their scattered villages. These Christian farm villages were also to serve as an object lesson to the surrounding African villages (Ngundu, 2010:126). African converts on the farm stations were required to build square houses to distinguish them from the heathen, who built round houses. By isolating certain people from the surrounding heathen villages and communities, the missionaries were hoping to make a "new man" from the natives. The missionaries were influenced by their theory of missionary work,

which led to the belief that it was necessary to separate African converts from their environment in order to establish them in faith. Rules and regulations governing members of the satellite villages were crafted from the home mission. They also began to pass a series of regulations on customs and traditions to govern the African members. To widen their control over other villages the missions approached the governments for help in discouraging such traditional marriages by the issue of strict rules. No African could be admitted as a member of the church who did not accept the Christian form of marriage. All traditionally married African couples who converted to the Christian faith were required to take marriage vows in the European Christian tradition in a church ceremony. If a full member of the church took a second wife, he would lose the right of full membership. Membership, baptism and communion could only be administered to people who met the laid-down criteria. All existing customary marriages of church members and mission church workers were required to be ratified by Christian marriage within a reasonable time and no marriage was to be performed between a Christian and non-Christian, as already said in Chapter 3.

The missionaries believed that these church marriage requirements and regulations would strengthen the weaker Christians and discourage pre-marital sex and polygamy. Church marriage became a requirement for any employment or church office work within the missionary setup. It also became a requirement for church membership. Throughout the first century of the Christian era, there was no special way for a Christian to marry. Customary forms of marriage among the Jews, Greeks, Romans and many others provided the marriage forms for Christians. The blessing of a priest was not thought to be necessary or even a regular part of the marriage procedure. Later, around the fourth century, the priestly blessing of marriage took a more regular form, and marriage liturgy developed. It can also be argued as a fact that Jesus was a guest at a wedding in Cana, not in his capacity as a rabbi to bless the marriage.

The seeming bond attaching the missions in Africa to their European counterparts has not been severed since the inception of its activities, therefore the theologies of Christian marriage from Europe have been adopted as the unquestioned framework for the principles and practices of their respective churches in Africa. The hermeneutics of Christian marriage in Africa still retains its hold on the mission-originated churches today despite changes in leadership from foreign missionaries to African Christians. Despite the moral dilemmas which the African members repeatedly face at their marriage, the African

leaders have not yet formulated their own theologies of marriage nor written their own liturgies of Christian marriage suitable for the African context. Service books used in mission churches for weddings are of European provenance. No major church, including the independent African churches that have emerged to provide answers to problems facing African converts in marriage, has changed its policy on customary marriage. Given this impasse, as previously discussed, there is the need to re-evaluate the churches' stand on customary marriage.

The most prominent features of the Ghanaian customary marriage that offended the conscience of the missionaries were the polygamous nature of customary marriage, the bride-price, the inferior status of women and the levirate union. Polygamy constitutes the central point of the conflict between the Christian marriage of the missionaries and the customary marriage of the indigenous Africans. Failing to learn from the culture, traditions and customs of the Africans and refusing to endorse polygamy, the missions consistently refused to yield their grounds against polygamy. They reasoned that polygamy was inconsistent with the teaching of Christianity, and that this has been their view since their arrival in Africa. It is clear from the Scriptures that Christianity grew up within a predominantly monogamous world. The Jews practised polygamy to a considerable extent as this was allowed by the Mosaic Law and was accepted without condemnation in any biblical writing (Hastings, 1973:6). Hastings maintains that the polygamous marriages of Jacob, David and Solomon were not condemned but their examples were rather followed by others. Though the Jewish ideal of marriage was clearly monogamous, showing a true covenant relationship, with such a view there is a little room for polygamy, and this was supported by the condemnation of the Essenes. Yet polygamy was by no means outlawed among orthodox Jews and it continued to be entered into by a few. Jesus accepted the monogamous ideal of marriage in the post-exilic period in Israel. However, in no other area does Jesus go out of the way to condemn polygamous marriage, as He strongly condemned the practice of divorce, though that too had the authority of Moses behind it. His teachings presuppose that marriage is monogamous and it is based on Genesis 2:24. According to Hastings, the text of Genesis 2:24 in its Hebrew form has certainly no anti-polygamic reference. It is in the Septuagint that the last phrase becomes "and the two become one flesh". It is in this anti-polygamic form that the Gospel quotes it. He maintains that no decisive guidance, positive or negative can be drawn from the Gospels and the same is true for other books of the New Testament. Paul's teachings

presuppose monogamous union, particularly 1 Corinthians 7:4, but there is no explicit treatment of this subject (Hastings, 1973:7). Summarizing it, Hastings says that though Christian marriage from the beginning is known to be monogamous; there is no clear condemnation of polygamy anywhere in the Old or New Testament.

The various Christian denominations are divided on the subject of polygamy and they have been debating the permissibility of granting church membership to polygamists. It is being argued whether polygamy has a cultural mandate in Africa. For some people it is an embodiment of Old Testament practice and therefore has no place in modern society, yet others regard it as a pagan practice. Some churches are reluctant to allow wives of a polygamist to occupy prominent positions and others refuse to allow polygamists to occupy leadership positions. It is believed that the treatment of women under polygamy is oppressive in its nature. It encourages abusive treatment of women and is an aspect of the African culture that keeps women in bondage or reinforces their inferiority.

The African Independent Churches accommodate polygamists and allow them full and active participation in the life of the church. As a result of the stand they took in accommodating polygamists, they have gained members. The question is whether the churches that reject polygamy would change their stance in order to gain from the polygamists or would remain true to their principles even though this would mean dwindling membership. The fact that the missions are divided on the issue of polygamy and customary marriage shows that they ought to examine the theological reasons for their various positions. It appears that they are more concerned with maintaining the positions they have adopted than with finding a clear explanation for their stand.

In an unpublished paper by Harvey Currens (1950) titled "Polygamy in the Church in Native Africa", he narrates that the Lutheran Church in Liberia, a very traditional Christian community, after careful deliberation on the issue of polygamy decided to admit polygamous husbands and their wives to baptism and communion. They upheld the ideal of monogamy and also recognised that the rejection of polygamy does not always demand the rejection of men who were polygamists before their conversion to Christianity. They started this new course in 1951 and fourteen years later they surveyed participants to evaluate their policy pragmatically. They found that the Church's teaching on monogamy as the standard of Christian marriage was not compromised by the practice of baptising those who had previously entered into polygamy. The Church stood firm in its conviction that it has been right in its policy of admitting polygamists into full

membership. The survey revealed that the church was not inundated with polygamists and well over ninety per cent of its married members were monogamist. The findings of the survey show that the real problem was not with polygamy but with monogamous married people who were committing adultery and fornication. Souaiaia (2010: 93) In his discussion on polygamy in Islam, states that Muslim scholars are not alone in arguing for the protection of the institution of polygamy but also Christians. An excerpt from his book reads, "Is it more Christian to have organized prostitution, marital infidelity with impunity, a rapidly growing divorce rate and an increasing number of illegitimate children than to have polygamy? Is it more Christian for young women to become prostitutes, call girls or mistresses than to become the second or third wife of a respected member of the community?" There is today among church leaders in Africa a new openness and a willingness to discuss the recurring suggestion that the churches may have been mistaken in their previous policies regarding plural marriage (Eshun, 2017).

One's conception of marriage is determined by the values that are emphasised in one's own culture. Where procreation is no longer the primary purpose of marriage, because of changed economic conditions and the lower mortality rate among children, greater emphasis may be given to the purpose of mutual love between husband and wife, so that the love aspect may become detached from the family-making aspect of marriage. Under different conditions in some societies, polygamy makes sense, especially where the idea of marriage is almost interchangeable with the idea of the extended family and where a strong sense of community is all-pervading. In a society that has no place for unmarried women, where marriage alone offers women the security and dignity required for self-realization and where economic forces prevent men from marrying at an early age, polygamy is apt to be both a social necessity and a positive social value. In such a society the right that every woman has to marriage and the society's need for legitimate progeny is well served by the system of polygamy. This is the reason some women support polygamy. Various strong tendencies are working against polygamy, especially the changing economic conditions and the education of girls. The practise of polygamy is rapidly vanishing in Africa. The gradual decline of polygamy is not due to Christian influence but to economic and social factors which militate against it. As polygamy diminishes, the problem of adultery increases in both society and church.

Bernard Haring (1969) in his preface to Hillman's book *Polygamy Reconsidered* states that if the church is the sacramental sign of saving grace, inviting all to participate in it,

then the church, far from being a closed system that admits only those who can fulfil selected legal prescriptions, must be truly open to all people of goodwill in whatever socio-cultural condition they may be when they hear the call to Christ (Hillman, 1975: viii). Newbigin (1969) on his part asserts that it is wrong on theological grounds and disastrous in missionary practice to demand the abandonment of polygamy as an essential sign of conversion to Christianity in Africa. He declares that conversion is an event which is more than its ethical implications and to deny this is to leave grace and freedom and enter into the world of legalism and bondage (Newbigin, 1969:74). The task of the mission is not to preach monogamy but the gospel, and instead of resorting to legalism and commands, the church must learn to allow things to grow or wither under the power of the gospel. The message of Christian freedom cannot liberate people if it is presented equivocally under the burden of the law (Acts 15:10-11).

The practice of polygamy as it may be observed today in many African societies could hardly be regarded as more incompatible with Christianity than was the institution of slavery. If slavery could be tolerated by the Christian conscience for centuries, then why is it necessary to repudiate the social institution of polygamy? The liberation of slaves was not required of slave owners when they were converted to Christianity. Curran (1970:60) proposes that the polygamy question should be approached as the very gradual and tolerant approach of the early church to the question of slavery.

5.3 BRIDE PRICE

Another outstanding feature of the African customary marriage which offends the conscience of the missionaries to Africa is the institution commonly called the “bride-price”. On this subject there has been considerable divergence of opinion between different missions and fluctuation of opinion within particular missions. It was generally considered that the system of the bride-price involved the purchase of the woman and that the woman’s status was inferior and in a condition of perpetual minority. Some missionaries regarded the system as basically a purchase, as in the selling of wives. They declared that women thus acquired were no more than slaves. At an annual meeting of missions in Natal in 1867, three resolutions were submitted for consideration:

1. That to demand cattle from the groom’s family is contrary to the spirit of humanity and greatly retards the progress of civilisation and Christianity.

2. That it is the duty of all members of the mission to eradicate the practice from the native churches.
3. That Christians who follow the custom should be subject to ecclesiastical discipline.

A majority voted in favour of the first two resolutions but the third was strongly opposed and dropped (Phillip, 2018). Studies in bride-price by Siwan Anderson (2014) indicated some of the unchristian features of the bride-price.

1. Bride-price is associated with domestic violence against women.
2. Dowry payments force parents to disinvest in female human capital.
3. Bride-price hinder the bargaining power of women.
4. Payments are large enough to impoverish parents.

Missions have naturally tended to overemphasise the abuses on the bride-price and have failed to understand the general purposes of the bride-price. The Christian emphasis on the importance of the individual is at the root of the conflict with the system of the bride-price, which has its meaning primarily in the importance of a clan.

In most African marriages the making of payments of goods, services or money by the bridegroom to the brides' kin, known as the bride-price, is an essential part of the establishment of legality. Within the wide limits of the institution, there is a great diversity of customs. The payment may be in livestock, in other chattels (hoes, lengths of cloth) or money. It may be payable by deferred instalments. There is considerable difference of opinion as to the significance of the institution; therefore, the bride-price is variously interpreted as being primarily in the nature of compensation to the woman's family for the taking away of a potential child-bearer from them. However, the dominant emphasis of the transaction is the formation of an alliance between two kinship groups. It is also, like marriage insurance. designed to stabilize the marriage, to give protection to the wife, and to seal the formal conclusion of the marriage contract. It is only in a secondary aspect that marriage is considered as a union between two individual persons. The African institution of marriage and especially the bride-price can only be understood if it is viewed as an integral part of the kinship system as a whole. Native law demands that the woman's

relatives refund the bride-price at least in part as an essential condition of the validity of a divorce. This requirement and the prospect of losing the right to the children tend to have an obstructive effect on divorce. Customary marriage is not easily dissoluble; in a majority of cases a marriage can be dissolved by inter-family arrangement without the necessity for any judicial pronouncement. It does not follow that divorce can easily be obtained at the mere wish of the partners without any substantial grounds. The bride-price is a way of ensuring that the woman is properly treated; in the case of mistreatment, the woman can always return home and be accepted by her relatives (Kasomo, 2010:81). It is also a means of keeping the relationship between the two families together.

Africa is witnessing a violent and far-reaching process of social change. The structures of the old society are changing in such a way that there is an enlargement of scale in social relationship. Individuals are no longer tied down to self-sufficient village communities. Education, trade, economics and travel have forced them to broaden their horizon. Differing cultures, beliefs and value systems jostle one another and influence one another in this modern changing situation.

5.4 THE CHRISTIAN CHARISMATIC CHURCH IN LONDON

I have demonstrated throughout this project that culture plays a vital role in the life of the church. Anywhere we find human beings, be it in the church or in civil society, culture will inevitably rear its head. Again, the culture of a people group tends to replicate itself wherever they may be found, because of the homogeneity of the culture of a people. The predominately Ghanaian churches in London tend to exhibit this homogeneity. So, what we see in these churches in London is reflective of what goes on in mainland Ghana.

There is no doubt that the culture of the church is heavily influenced by the Western approach of rites of passage and liturgical ordinances. It is my view that the church should not feel ashamed of its cultural heritage; rather it should introduce church members to the cultural norms of marriage and other rites of passage. Where marriage is concerned, there will be no need to force people into having a ceremony with all the hefty expenses, rather a simple exchange of the bride-price and a simple ceremony to celebrate a union. The pressures to have an elaborate affair is societally driven, and with the rise of Instagram and other social media platforms, the church can encourage couples to align their priorities. The money saved from what would otherwise have been a really expensive

affair, could be channelled towards the purchase of a house or something that will benefit the couple financially.

5.5 Conclusion

In spite of the changes taking place and the fact that missionary-originated churches have changed leadership from foreign missionaries to African Christians, the hermeneutics of Christian marriage ought to change. Mission churches must awaken to the changes taking place, formulate their own theologies of marriage, and institute their own liturgies of Christian marriage suitable for the African situation. This will bring about policy change on customary marriage and usher in recognition of traditional marriage.

In the next chapter the conclusions, findings and recommendations will be discussed.

CHAPTER 6:

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

To every research question, there is an approach to attempting to answer the question. Throughout this project, I have looked at the main problem of the seeming conflict between church, culture and tradition. While I do not pretend to have all the answers, some things are very clear through the findings of this project. I hope the findings and conclusions will help us better understand our cultural context and help us provide better services to our congregants, whether they are in the diaspora or Ghana proper.

6.2 FINDINGS

Marriage in whatever form it appears has its basic foundation in the biblical cornerstone laid by the Almighty God at the institution of marriage after the creation of man and woman. As a result of this, all the different kinds of marriages—customary, civil and church—have some things in common. Marriage is contracted among different groups of people and is the centre of human life. It is the relationship between a man and woman who have given themselves for life to one another exclusively to live together, support and enjoy one another as husband and wife. It refers to a formal public transaction marking the union according to commonly accepted cultural procedures and regulations or laws. This makes culture a necessary ingredient for the proper functioning of a successful marriage. Culture defines the identity of people and gives meaning to life. It has the opportunity of being a vehicle for the Christian gospel. Niebuhr (2001:256) declares that one cannot escape culture; he argues that Christ's authority over Christians does not deny them the right to live in their cultural milieu, thus suggesting that the world of culture exists within the world of grace. However, there will be unrest when the culture of a people among whom marriage is being contracted is set aside for the adoption of a foreign culture. In Ghana, colonisation and the inferior status into which the indigenous people were drawn caused them to unwillingly live under the domination of foreign culture, which brought untold hardship in regard to some traditional practices, especially customary marriage. The African type of marriage, since the coming of the Westerners, has become financially overburdening, culturally unacceptable and deeply demoralising.

Before the emergence of the missionaries, Africans had their own way of worship and traditions of marriage. Customary marriage was the norm but principally it was monogamous and the most obvious feature of this kind of marriage was its toleration and the silent approval accorded to polygamy. It was potentially polygamous in the sense that during its subsistence there was no legal impediment to contracting another marriage. It is this polygamous element that differentiates the African marriage from the Western marriage. It constitutes the point of greatest resistance to the teachings of the missions concerning marriage. On this crucial issue, the mission authorities consistently maintained that the acceptance of polygamy would be fundamentally inconsistent with the teaching of Christianity. They refused to yield their ground and considered most African customs pagan and barbaric. Because of the practices of African marriage traditions, especially polygamy, that come with customary marriage, the Christian missionaries found no ground to even consider a way to assimilate the African culture into the gospel they presented. Therefore, they dismissed the African traditional marriage and introduced the white wedding as an alternative authentic Christian marriage. Under the church marriage system, one's marriage is not recognised by God unless it is brought to the altar for a church blessing.

The insistence on the monogamous marriage by the church authorities created a lot of problems. Those who became sold out to the missionary course had disagreements over traditional issues with their family members who were not Christians. By changing the culture, the authority on marriage shifted from the family of the couple to the church, and pastors became the main figure of authority. Conflicts ensued as family members who as parents gave their consent to the marriage under the customary marriage system fought for their rights. The young Christians who wanted to marry under Christian marriage had to satisfy the traditions by engaging in a customary marriage, and then satisfy the legal side by the registering of marriage and signing of the marriage register at the civil courts. Finally, they had to satisfy the church by the blessing of the marriage in church with a ceremony of pomp and grandeur. The three-tier marriage brought untold financial burdens, a time drag and sometimes delay in what was to be the happiest moment in the life of the couple.

The evolution of the African Independent Churches, composed initially of dissident Christians from the missionary churches, provided temporary relief for the African converts. These separatist groups took a more lenient position in repudiating polygamy.

Others merely upheld monogamy more as an ideal than as a normal practice, while still others positively accepted polygamy as a part of their indigenization of Christianity in Africa. The stand taken by the AIC was the dynamic factor behind their growth. Their newfound faith, which was outwardly expressive and inwardly liberating, responded to the existential needs of the people. The socio-cultural engagement within the separatist movement gave people the experiences which became the flashpoint that ushered in the Pentecostal and charismatic movements in the twentieth century. The Pentecostals and their charismatic counterparts and their preceding AIC movements effectively met the existential needs of the people; however, despite the social changes that lessened the prominence of polygamy, they did not formulate their own theologies of marriage nor write their liturgies of Christian marriage suitable for the African context to facilitate real change. In the missionary sector, the mission-originated churches, despite the changes in leadership from foreign missionaries to the indigenous African Christians, made no efforts to tackle the dilemmas which their church members repeatedly faced at marriage. Rather, they persisted in using the church wedding books that were of European provenance. Though their attitude towards customary marriage changed, their operations and observance of the African marriage remained the same. No major church in post-independent Africa fully changed its policy on customary marriage. This resulted in converts having to engage in a three-tier marriage, which involved tradition, the state and the church. African couples were required to have a church wedding after their customary marriage. This indeed is unnecessary duplicity, superfluous waste of money and time. Since the church demands traditional marriage as a prerequisite for a church wedding, this was a sign of recognition of the tradition of the people. Therefore, an attempt must be made to merge the traditional and Christian celebrations of marriage. What is good in the traditions should be enculturated into Christianity to ensure a judicious use of time and to make it cost-effective. Additionally, it will correct the view of many on the traditional ceremony of customary marriage as only an engagement, the reason why the church does not accept customary marriage as a proper marriage.

Using the biblical principles of marriage, Christians in different cultures can determine in their own given cultural context what is acceptable in the sight of God. We must put in place a marriage ceremony which takes into cognizance the civil, customary, and Christian aspects of marriage in a single ceremony and takes into account biblical principles of Christian marriage in the African context. This will alleviate the burden on

Ghanaian Christian couples and enable them to consummate their marriage without any sense of guilt.

Ngundu asserts that the history of marriage in Europe and Africa is somewhat similar, therefore we can reflect on and learn from the way the medieval church handled issues of customary marriage. We must also have in mind the assertion Ngundu makes that diversity of marriage practices exist because of kinship relations, rituals, moral practices and social responsibilities (Ngundu, 2010:218). Once polygamy is no longer attractive because of social changes that have taken place, there is not much obstruction in the way of uniting customary marriage and church wedding ceremonies. Conditions are ripe for uniting the African and missionary-introduced marriage and it is only human effort and determination that is needed to bring them together.

Church leaders are more concerned with maintaining the positions they have adopted than with finding a clear explanation of the issues surrounding customary marriage. The task or mission of the church is not to preach monogamy but the gospel. Therefore, instead of resorting to legalism and commands, the church must leave things to grow under the power of the gospel. The message of Christian freedom cannot liberate people if it is presented equivocally under the burden of the law. An African Christian marriage which combines the customary, civil and church components in a single marriage ceremony is a must.

Do Western Christians go through the burden of the series of rites before they are recognised as married? One can imagine how the traditionalist can find it difficult accepting the Christian faith and making it his or her own. It would be expedient for the churches to come together and devise their own theology that accommodates the culture of the people without foreign influence. In my view if this is not done the inherent culture of the people will always conflict with the Western theology adopted by the church. What will be so wrong is adopting theologies and practices that eventually erode the very essence of the culture of the people.

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