



Daniel W Kasomo

# Customary Marriage in African Culture and Religion

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## **DEDICATION**

**This book is dedicated to my Dear wife MaryAnn**

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

First and foremost, I register my sincere and heartfelt gratitude to the respondents for giving me the opportunity to research on Marriage in African custom and African Culture and Religion Versus Christianity.

It is my hope that the book will meet the needs of undergraduates, postgraduates, researchers of African customary marriage and African culture and religion versus Christianity in both theological and secular institutions dealing with custom. It is a book that can be used by all people interested in, culture, anthropology, Marriage, sociology, tradition and religion

Many thanks to all who have articulated that The Married Priests Personal Prelature is the Work of God among married priests and bishops. It represents a loud and ever-growing ground swell to return married priests to full ministry in the Roman Catholic Church. Join us in making the Church a better place for Married Priests and their Families. The Married Priesthood was established by Jesus, his Apostles and the Church during the time the Deposit of the Faith was set. It is part of the tradition of the church and has always been part of the church. Let the Latin Church return to its true tradition of both celibate and married deacons, priests, bishops and popes. The choice for priests to be married must be restored to the church as it was in the beginning.

We want to acknowledge that we believe that celibacy is a wonderful charisma for those who freely choose it, but it cannot be an enforced law as a requirement for the priesthood in the Latin Church because it violates a man's human right to marriage if he chooses it.

Our Prelature in every aspect is proving to the Roman Catholic Church that the future church is rooted in the church of Yesterday. With 39 married Popes, and with the Apostolicity of St. Peter the first, and married Pope, we are reviving what we were, and were supposed to remain. Our Prelature does not offend any constitution of the Catholic Church. We are the Church of Today and of the future, but rooted in the true tradition of the Catholic Church from the past.

Many thanks to Christians who have understood that the Mission and the supreme mission of Married Roman Catholic Priests is catechesis and evangelisation and Salvation of Souls. We support Pope Benedict XVI in all that he is doing to curb sex scandal in the Catholic Church.

We request Pope Benedict XVI to create an Ordinariate for Married Roman Catholic Priests (MRCP)

We MRCP in Kenya accept all the Doctrines of the Catholic Church in filial spirit.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

Ads:	Acts of the Apostles
Afer:	African Ecclesial Research
AMECEA:	Association of Members Episcopal Conference of Eastern Africa
Can.:	Canon Law
CHIEA:	Catholic Higher Institute of Eastern Africa
Cor.:	St. Paul's Letter to the Corinthians
Cromia:	The Church's Research on Marriage in Africa
CUEA:	Catholic University of Eastern Africa
Ed.:	Editor
Et. Al.:	And Others
Fig.:	Figure
Ge.:	Genesis, the first book of Pentateuch
HIV and Aids:	Human Immune Virus and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
i.e.:	That is
Ibid.	In the same work
KEC:	Kenya Episcopal Conference
Mark:	Gospel of St. Mark
S.D:	Standard Deviation
Dr.	Doctor
Rev.	Reverend
Fr.	Father
Hos.	Hosea
MHM.	Mill Hill Missionaries
Ez.	Ezekiel
Jer.	Jeremiah

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Ad Gentes:	Decree on church's Missionary Activities
Ajuaga:	A traditional Luo medicine man
Aromogo to oyiena:	Loose union between male and female
Catechesi Tradendae:	Apostolic Exhortation
Chi Liel:	Wife of the grave (Widow)
Chiri:	A season (period) of long rains
Dher pien:	Bridewealth paid for conjugal rights and obligations
Duol:	Luo traditional homestead gathering
Ecclesia in Africa:	Post Synodal Exhortation of John Paul II on the Church in Africa
Evangelii Nuntiandi:	Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern World
Gaudium et Spes:	Pastoral constitution on the Church in the Modern World
Juogi:	Spiritual powers associated with gods and ancestral spirits
Jok:	The highest Spiritual power
Lamogi:	Supplication to the gods
Lupo:	Luo act of following or fishing
Nyakalaga:	The omnipotence of the Luo deity (Nyasaye)
Nyasaye:	The name of the Luo deity
Od Dayo:	Grandmother's hut
Ogunda:	A closely knit group of Luo clans with both common ancestry and history
Opou:	A season (period) of short rains Place of making supplication to the gods
Podho:	A medium of refracted spiritual powers
Riso:	A Luo marriage ritual - wedding ceremony
Ruoth:	Luo elder equivalent to King
Siwidha:	Synonym to Od dayo - grandmother's hut

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

In every culture and tradition marriage is recognized as a social institution. It is culturally regarded as the fundamental rite of passage of joining the family, the clan and the society. As a union between two opposite sex partners marriage is necessary for the transmission of human life. Mbiti (1969:133) describes marriage as the focus of human existence, the nucleus of life.

Marriage is one of the many subjects arousing universal concern today. It is important and central for the understanding of the family in both Christian and African Traditional religiosity. Many traditions and religions attribute its origins to the gods hence its sacral character. The Jews trace its origins and establishment to the biblical patriarchs, Adam and Eve (Gen. 2:22-24). It is here portrayed as the fabric of creation where two opposite sexes, male and female, are installed to perpetuate humanity. The sacrality of marriage is also noted by McDonald (1986:136) who says, that although marriage is looked upon today by many as a purely secular contract which can be made and unmade by the state, it is in fact something sacred and religious because it was instituted by God" (Gen. 2:22-24).

The Second Vatican Council describes marriage as a covenant between two partners different sexes, that it is a life-long process, the fruit and sign of profound human need. All through the Bible God speaks of his love for his people in terms of age. God is looked upon as the husband of the Israelites (Hos 2; Eze 16; Jer 3:8).

While in the New Testament Christian marriage is a symbol of Christ's covenant with church. Marriage is a social institution for the good of the society to which everyone is called upon to participate in its making and consolidation.

Catholic Church bases its marriage precepts of monogamy, indissolubility and stability on its biblical foundation and the sacred tradition of the church. Intrinsic in marriage is love and companionship which must be open to procreation. Through marriage humanity is reproduced and Christians produced through faith and baptism. Consequently, marriage, fertility, procreation and religion are all part and parcel of

the family, the natural family and the ecclesial family. It must be perceived therefore that the family is the cradle and centre of human activities and religious worship.

There are cultural and religious variations and differences in values attached to marriage. Muzvidziwa (2000:138) observes, "that African marital forms are in a state of flux and are characterized by change". To this end Enda (1962:5-6) contributes that appetite is allowed to govern conduct, restraint is allowed to be impossible and that marriage is thought of as an adventure undertaken at will, and to be abandoned at will. Kayongo, & Onyango (1984:48-50) note that polygamy, for instance, is accepted in most independent churches as are many other customs which were rejected by the mainstream churches. It is in this respect that Shorter (1974:183) also notes, that church marriage in Africa has not made use of the African institution of marriage and that the two forms have existed alongside each other.

It is difficult to appropriate a single description to any form of acceptable form of marriage. This is due to the diverse emphases in different institutions. According to Dorjan (1990:169) satisfaction sought in marriage not only vary from one person to another but also differ in their locus of origin. This is an attitude currently common among the Southern Luo of Kenya. It has enormously contributed to the Low Church marriage rates in the Archdiocese of Kisumu. Marriage being inviolable and indispensable to every society has to be consolidated and safeguarded. The study was therefore an attempt to unveil, by investigation, the customary marriage factors which influence low church marriage rates. Since the introduction of Christianity among the Southern Luo over a century ago, (Baur, 1994:478) the Luo customary marriage has had much influence from the church's model of monogamous and indissoluble marriage (Can 1059). Two basic reasons militating this are the strong cultural background of the Luo and the exclusivist approach by the early missionaries. Other causes of the parallel customary and church marriage practices are attached to the introduction of independent church movements in the 1960's, the formal education programmes, urbanization amongst others. At the background was the process of colonization and Christianization of the African people.

Luo elders have arguments against church marriage as loose and not recognizing the cultural heritage, moral values and virtues that safeguarded the stability of marriage.

Luo customary marriage had strict social laws and taboos which were unquestionably observed. Social workers see the problems of marriage from the perspective of the pressure of social changes that have affected parental instructions, bridewealth, polygamy and the value of children. Economists see marital problems as attached to persistent economic grips. The Luo community valued bridewealth payment as what established marriage. Kanyandago (1991:13) notes that Christian marriage can be validly contracted without giving or receiving of bridewealth, but concedes that traditionally the custom is closely linked to the validation of customary forms of marriage. At the same time the modern youth fear total commitment required for church marriage. The fear is brought about by their lack of proper Christian upbringing and the strict implications about the doctrine on marriage, especially the unity and indissolubility, the institution of bridewealth, polygamy and divorce.

The clergy, the category the researcher belongs to also have their view. They cite poor child upbringing through poor parental and ecclesial instructions as precedent to most unstable marriages. "In the Christian family, the parents are the first evangelizers of their children. Childhood is the best physical, psychological and emotional atmosphere for religious growth... this is the time when parents have the exclusive responsibility of giving the religious message to children" (Kisembo, Magesa & Shorter, 1977:129). The Christian religious assumption that the off-springs must depend on the nuclear family leaves no chance for the care of the youth that was also the duty of the extended family members. By implication the communitarian aspect of marriage is lost or highly confused.

The presupposition therefore is that Christianity is not yet properly grounded in the Luo Christian community. Generally there is a dualism in religious practices. This is itable when it comes to the participation in the sacraments of baptism, Eucharist and matrimony. There are many births but just a few infants are taken for baptisms. It is an indicator that their parents, at least one parent, do not receive the Eucharist either lcause they are not wedded in the church or are polygamous or are divorced and are remarried. It is difficulties to believe all this without statistics.

The above cited problems found in the cultural background of the Luo community call for attention because of the general outcry by the very people affected, the Luo

Christians and the agents of pastoral care. In almost all corners of the Archdiocese of Kisumu, it is notable that customary forms of marriage do exist. Marriage rituals are first performed outside the church. Church marriages, even the few ones are only but a process of formality to rubber-stamp what has already taken place elsewhere. Many priests agreed that church marriages are only entered into for the sake of the reception the Eucharist, for the baptism of infants and to satisfy the thirst for church leadership (Minutes: Kisumu Deanery Meeting, Oct 2001).

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

There are numerous factors that have impeded the contraction of church marriages. There

factors are culturally practiced against church marriage principles, consequently reducing church marriage rates in the Archdiocese of Kisumu. A good number of priests agree that over 90% of church marriages are first customarily contracted at home. Even those who go for church marriages would later perform a customary declaring ritual “riso” - ritual declaring the payment of bridewealth over and is the couple as permanently married.

Walligo (1986:22) and Hastings (1967:169) agree that Low Church marriage is as a result of some kind of dualism and self-excommunication from the church upon reaching age of maturity. That the African Christian has active sacramental life between baptism and adulthood; that with adulthood comes excommunication. Hence there is a marked decline in the number of marriages in comparison with the number of Catholics.

“Church marriages customary marriages cannot be said to be either modern or ancient as both are still practiced side by side. While the customary marriage does not have to overwhelm the church marriage form, there is urgent need to inculturate the principles of Christian marriage. This can only be achieved by reassessing the good values attached to customary marriages and the tenets of evangelisation that can be integrated for implementation. Kanyandago (1991:160) stresses this point that good African customs should be integrated into Christian rites in view of effecting appropriate inculturation. Vatican II equally encourages basic theological reflection

on the young churches so as to subject the whole Judeo-Christian revelation to a fresh examination. It shows that the sacramental marriage does not suppress valid customary marriage but rather fulfils it (Ad Gentes No. 22). On the other hand, even though there are some literature on this study, the scholars and authors have not directly handled customary and church marriage rates on the Luo community. None of the known literature has been a research on why there are low church marriage rates compared to Luo customary marriage rates. The research is aimed at filling up the gaps that other literature have left unattended. The study therefore is an investigation into those Luo customary marriage factors which influence church marriage rates. This is further aimed at establishing those values with a view of proposing a new way forward for further study and implementation.

### **1.3 Significance of the Study**

This study is significant as it is an attempt to reach down to the Southern Luo people in their belief systems and practices in relationship to the Christian principles. It will further provoke the people's response to have a discernable practice of faith which is not bi-religious. Church marriage has been regarded as inconsequential in the people's lives. Due to this, the Luo customary marriage does influence church marriage rates negatively. This thesis is aimed at making church marriage consumable and liveable by the faithfuls. It therefore commands the concept of inculturation in the process. Roest (1986:31-42) describes inculturation as the integration of the Christian experience of a local church into the culture of the people, in such a way that this experience not only express itself in elements of this culture, but becomes a force that animates this culture so as to create a new unity and communion. With inculturation in place, this thesis is aimed at making the sacrament of marriage appreciable by having more Christians subscribing to it without unnecessary grips or frictions.

The study is further significant for the promotion of the African (Luo) Christian participation in the sacramental life of the church. It is basically meant to increase the disposition of the Christians to the principles of Church marriage through a reviewed methodology and content of catechism.