

Polygamy and Divorce Dilemma among African Christians: The Implications of Genesis 2: 18 - 25 for Socio-Economic Stability

Festus Osom Omosor

Abstract

Polygamy is a widespread African marriage system practiced for various reasons. Yet some churches anathemize polygamy as a sinful practice and therefore recommend divorce for polygamous African Christian converts, undermining the socio-economic implications of divorce on the affected persons and the society at large; whereas there is debate among biblical interpreters and theologians as to whether the Bible absolutely prohibits polygamy or not. This paper, therefore, interpretatively engages Genesis 2: 18-25 which is generally referenced as the foundation text for the monogamy doctrines of the Church. The aim is to determine whether this text in question categorically implies a rejection of polygamy or not and to examine the socio-economic implications of divorce on the society. The paper employs the exegetical and hermeneutical methods to interpret the text. The historical and analytical approaches are also used to explore polygamous practices in the Old Testament and examine the socio-economic implications of divorce respectively. The study finds that there is no obvious and categorical rejection of polygamy in the Bible and that the absolute monogamy taught by the Church is an idea that was theologically projected into the text. More so, divorce plunges families and the society into various forms of crises that impair stability and development. Thus, the paper concludes that although polygamy may not be encouraged or recommended for Christians; polygamous Christian converts must not be forced into divorce because it is not only counterproductive socio-economically but also unbiblical.

Key words: Polygamy, monogamy, divorce, socio-economic, stability.

Introduction

Polygamy as used in this paper strictly refers to polygyny, which is a marriage practice in which a man marries two or more wives. It is undeniable that Africans have a culture that accommodates and encourages polygamy as a system of marriage. Polygamy is practiced in Africa not just for the sake of pleasure or as a result of promiscuity. But it is practiced for reasons such as solving the problem of barrenness, the culture-induced desire for male child for the perpetuity of the family lineage and name, having many children for agrarian or economic

advantage, to prevent sexual misdemeanor particularly during women maternity periods when a typical African man ought to abstain from the wife for about three months, to solve the problem of permanent health disorder leading to the woman's inability to discharge her marital duties and responsibilities, and some other socio-political and cultural reasons. It is true that most Africans were originally non-Christians and would not have any moral or religio-ethical problem with polygamy if they wished to practice it. Yet, the gospel is meant for the non-Christian Africans as well. Christianity proselytizes to 'win souls' into the 'Kingdom of God'. It then poses some challenges when a polygamous African Christian is confronted with the gospel of Christ especially by those Christian groups that anathemize polygamy. This problem relates the question whether the new convert should retain his wives.

The issue of monogamy being the only valid form of marriage by Christians has continued to generate diverse views among scholars and theologians alike, particularly as it concerns African Christian converts. Conventional Christian theology projects the view that monogamy is the biblically approved marriage system on the basis of the interpretation of Genesis 2: 18-25. The early chapters of Genesis provide key foundation for how the Jews and, by extension, Christians view and interpret nature, reality, socio-religious ethics and divine-human relation. The quest to grasp the realities and socio-religious and cultural contexts of these chapters has engendered much exegetical and hermeneutical division among critical readers and scholars. Themes ranging from the origin of man, purpose of creation, the nature and purpose of the universe, the origin and cause of sin and human suffering, salvation scheme and the destiny of man to questions about the governance of the human society, ethics and morality among other theological issues have been fraught with subjective and varied interpretations. The institution of marriage is one of the fundamental socio-religious phenomena in the Bible which have shaped the human society through the instrumentality of the church today.

The narrative in Genesis 2: 18-25 which presumably borders on marriage and companionship forms a pericope (unit of discourse) in the larger creation narrative. It is the last unit of discourse in the Yahwist version of the creation story and a wide range of theological assumptions are woven around it. The thrust of the interpretative difficulty as it relates

to this paper revolves around the statements in verses 24 – 25 about a man leaving his parents to cleave to his wife so that they both would become one flesh. The Christian Church regards this assertion as not just the origin or foundation of marriage institution but an imperative for monogamy as the only acceptable form of marriage. Jesus Christ and Apostle Paul are often quoted to have applied these passages to endorse monogamy to the rejection of polygamy for Christians. For example, Jesus Christ while addressing the issue of divorce in Matthew 19: 5 quoted Genesis 2: 24 to discourage divorce. Similarly, Apostle Paul quoted the same verse in Ephesians 5: 31 where he employed the metaphorical image of husband-wife binding love to illustrate the sort of relationship that ought to exist between Christ and the Church. More so, Apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 3: 2 recommends monogamy as *sine qua non* for the clerical office.

On the basis of these interpretative understanding of the text, polygamous Christians are not only discriminated against in some Churches, they are outrightly condemned by some other Christian groups such as the Deeper Life Bible Church with the consequence that divorce is recommended for the man to put away the perceived illegitimate wife or wives so as to be fully admitted into the body of Christ. The Deeper Life Bible Church would regard the first wife as the legitimate one while the other(s) is (are) illegitimate and must be put away. In the Roman Catholic parlance, a man must not be admitted to the sacrament of Baptism and Holy Communion with more than one wife. In fact, Catholic principle or tradition demands that the man should make choice of the preferred wife and dialogue with the other(s) to consent to divorce.

Not only is the interpretation of the text associated with inconsistencies and contradictions, such application of the text creates some socio-religious and economic problems. First, the various Christian denominations maintain different stances on the issue of polygamy, which raises the question of proper interpretation of the text. Second, it is amply evident that polygamy was an accepted practice in the Old Testament which was not categorically condemned. Thirdly, from a critical reading of the monogamy related texts, especially Genesis 2: 18-25 against their socio-cultural backgrounds, it is suggestive that the exclusive monogamy doctrine of the Church is a theological imposition

on the text. More so, and more importantly, the question remains unanswered adequately how the socio-economic crises that attend divorce could be handled were the Church to enforce it on polygamous African converts. There is need, therefore, for proper exegesis of the text for doctrinal clarification; for God could neither give different doctrines to different Churches nor encourage divorce and orchestrate socio-economic upheaval.

Against the above background, this paper raises the following questions. What is the true biblical position on polygamy? Was monogamy God's original intention for man? If yes, why was it allowed in the Old Testament where the patriarchs and many other Israelite leaders practiced it without being censured or punished for it? What is the place of polygamous African converts in the Church? Should they necessarily divorce their other wife or wives? If yes, does the Church understand the socio-economic implications of divorce and how do they intend to handle the crises that attend the forceful dissolution of marriages? In attempting to answer these questions, the paper exegetically examines the text (Genesis 2: 18-25). It considers the socio-literary form of the text with a view to ascertaining its setting and appropriate hermeneutical contexts and then it relates it to the realities in African socio-religious experience especially as it pertains to marriage.

This lives among the *Ukunuani* people (Kwale) of Delta State which serves as a microcosm of Africa. Thus, although African socio-cultural experience provides the general context for the hermeneutical application of the biblical text, the writer draws his facts and inspiration from his immediate environment where he experiences and has investigative encounter with African polygamous Christians and victims of marital dissolution. More so, it is practically impossible to exhaustively investigate the marriage doctrines of all the Christian denominations; thus, references are only made to the stance of the Deeper Life Bible Church and the Roman Catholic Church on polygamy in relation to Christianity.

The Socio-Literary Background of Genesis 2: 18-25

It is important to briefly consider the milieu of the pivotal text of this study. Generally speaking, the Old Testament presents a complex literature, history and theology. The book of Genesis is the first among

the five volumes that make up the Torah (Pentateuch). The pentateuchal narratives are records of events that spanned over a long period of time. The prehistory of ancient Israel and, by extension, the whole world is presented in the book of Genesis covering from chapter one to eleven. This is generally referred to as the primeval history which ordinarily should contain events of which there exists no early written records. In fact, some portions of the history such as the creation event could not have been witnessed by any human. Genesis 2: 18-25 which is the concern of this study is a pericope or a unit of narrative in the larger scheme of the primeval history. Gottwald (1985) shares the view of many critical scholars that the primeval history contains sagas, legends and myths owing to its genre, forms and contents which share so much with the socio-literary and cultural properties of different ancient worlds such as the Sumerians and the Babylonians with which Israel had literary and historical connections. These narratives do not pass as history in the sense that modern history and historiography are regarded.

Lasor *et al* (1996) testifies that the literary style of the primeval history is unique and difficult to identify; and the accounts do not bear the marks of an objective eyewitness report that characterize modern history; instead, the theological truths they communicate are portrayed in a symbolic and pictorial form. However, whether these narratives are historically factual, it is generally believed that the sagas, legends and myths are preservations of the cosmogonic and theogonic reflections and orientations of the humans which became the way of understanding realities by the 'People of the Book', the Jews or the community of faith. The traditions that formed the written narratives were preserved and handed down orally from one generation to another, giving room for modifications and distortions. Textual critics are in unison in their view that most of these events recorded in the Bible are anachronistic, being backward projections of ideas into the Israelites history.

Collins (2004) and Rumney (2007) maintain that even the stories or narratives in their literary forms went through various stages of editorial reshaping to accommodate the prevailing religious understanding of the community of faith. Person (2002) names Deuteronomistic historians as agents of the editorial enterprise. Matthews and Moyer (1997) further describe the literary character and the socio-religious milieu of Genesis. They submit that:

The materials found in Genesis were not compiled and edited until later part of the monarchy or the early Persian period (ca. 500BCE). Genesis describes the political and religious foundations of the nation of Israel rather than offering a scientific picture of the origins of the earth and the human race. Like many of the nations and cultures of the ancient Near East, the Israelites formulated their own history of the 'beginning time'. The Israelites had two main goals in their primeval epic: (1) to portray their God as sovereign, without challenge, and transcendent over creation; (2) to present a pattern of relationship with their God that eventually led to their covenant with Abraham and the establishment of the Israelite people in Exodus event. These goals were accomplished through series of etiologies (p. 43).

The writers of the Hebrew Bible, therefore, did what they wished with the materials at their disposal. As Kichen (2003) rightly noted, when one reads through the content of the primeval history, one discovers an arrangement of events along time in the thematic pattern of cause and effect; the purpose of the biblical writers is to achieve a 'metanarrative' that presents a history of Israel and the world that would in turn embody Israel's understanding of God and his relationship with the cosmos particularly the human society. Both the family as a social structure and marriage as a social institution were not only bound up with myths but also theologically and figuratively interpreted to symbolize Israel's relationship with God. Hence, Genesis 2: 18-25 leaves critical readers with the burden of exegesis and hermeneutical analysis in order to properly understand and apply it within the context of polygamy and the Church in African experience.

Exegetical Analysis of Genesis 2: 18-25

18	וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים לֹא טוֹב הָיִית הָאָדָם לְבַדּוֹ אֶעֱשֶׂה־לוֹ עֶזְרָ כְּנֶגְדּוֹ
19	וַיִּצַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מִן־הָאָדָמָה כָּל־חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה וְאֵת כָּל־עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיָּבֵא אֶל־הָאָדָם לְרֹאוֹת
	מֶה־יִקְרָא־לוֹ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָא־לוֹ הָאָדָם נָפֶשׁ חַיָּה הוּא שְׁמוֹ
20	וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם שְׁמוֹת לְכָל־הַבְּהֵמָה וְלַעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלִכְל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה וְלָאָדָם לֹא־מָצָא עֶזְרָ כְּנֶגְדּוֹ
21	וַיִּפַּל יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים תְּרַדְמָה עַל־הָאָדָם וַיִּישָׁן וַיִּקַּח אֶחָת מִצַּלְעוֹתָיו וַיִּסְגֶּר בִּשְׂרַת חֲתֻמָּה
22	וַיִּבֶן יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הַצֶּלֶה אֲשֶׁר־לָקַח מִן־הָאָדָם לְאִשָּׁה וַיְבָאָהּ אֶל־הָאָדָם
23	וַיֹּאמֶר הָאָדָם זֹאת הַפֶּעַם עָצָם מִעֲצָמִי וּבִשְׂרַת מִבְּשָׂרִי לְזוֹאת יִקְרִי אִשָּׁה כִּי מֵאִישׁ לָקַחָהּ זֹאת
24	עַל־כֵּן יִעֲזֹב־אִישׁ אֶת־אָבִיו וְאֶת־אִמּוֹ וְדָבַק בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ וְהָיוּ לְבֶשֶׂר אֶחָד
25	וַיִּהְיוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם עֲרוּמִים הָאָדָם וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וְלֹא יִתְבַּשְׂשׁוּ וְהִנֵּחַשׁ הָיָה עֲרוּם

Translation (Revised Standard Version)

- ¹⁸ Then the Lord God said "it is not good that the man should be alone, I will make him a helper fit for him"
- ¹⁹ So out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.
- ²⁰ The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper fit for him.
- ²¹ So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh;

²² and the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

²³ Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of Man.”

²⁴ Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife to his wife, and they become one flesh.

²⁵ And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

This passage presents the second account of creation after the first Elohist account in the first chapter of Genesis. It is traditionally established that this passage (Gen. 2: 18-25) came from the hand of a Yahwist writer. However, a critical interpretation of the passage raises the question whether some of the statements were originally part of the narrative or there were some interpolations that serve theological purposes. To begin with, verse 18 reads **וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים לֹא־טוֹב הָיִית הָאָדָם** **לְבַדּוֹ אֶעֱשֶׂה־לּוֹ עֹזֵר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ** (“It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him”). The use of the Hebrew word **לְבַדּוֹ** (alone) in this verse indicates a state of solitude of **הָאָדָם** (the man). From its Hebrew root it means to be separate, apart, empty or idle. It is exegetically insightful to note that the Hebrew word **אָדָם** (*adam*) which would later become a proper name (Adam) for the first man God created originally bore the sociological sense of man or human being, which might not have had any indication of sex or gender. In the original Hebrew parlance, the word for man and woman were (are) **אִישׁ** and **אִשָּׁה** respectively. The use of the word **אָדָם** (*adam*) should indicate its general application as a neuter gender referring to human being in general.

The word **עֹזֵר** is a masculine singular noun in its absolute state. It is variously translated as *helper*, *companion* or *helpmeet*. It is derived from an Hebrew prepositional particle translated as *opposite to*, *insight of*, *in front of* or *facing*. This translation signifies that the loneliness implies the absence of an opposite sex. This opposite sex could only be a human being and one that is fitting for him, as the Hebrew preposition **כְּ** (as or like) suggests. According to Freedman in Kaiser (1996), **עֹזֵר** should be translated as strength or power. The word, according to him is used 21 times in the

Old Testament and in many of the passages it is used in parallelism to the words that clearly denote strength or power. He thus suggested that it implies the power or strength that is corresponding to man (pp. 92-93). This reading, however, is arbitrary. The phrase is better translated as suitable companion, which would suggest complementarity.

Verses 19-20 give an account of the creation of beasts of the field (land) and fowls of the air and how יְהוָה brought them to Adam for naming. The expression וְלֹא־מָצָא עֹזֵר כְּנַגְדּוֹ (but the man did not find a suitable companion for himself) at the end of v. 20 suggests that God initially created those creatures as companions for Adam. This poses serious theological and interpretative problem. Would an omniscient God not know what is good as companion for Adam? This question is pertinent because it was the man that rejected the creatures as inappropriate companions. Could he (the man, Adam) have known which companion would be suitable? And in what sense could he have been talking about companionship? In any case, Adam's attitude intensifies the tension created by the statement לְבַדּוֹ (it is not good) in v. 18a. Wenham (1994) comments that "unfortunately, animals were not the perfect companions for the man. It was only the creation of woman that fully satisfied him" (p. 62)

Hermann Gunkel, in Westermann (1980), holds that the scene presumes a very naïve notion of God. God makes an experiment that is futile. In the same vein, Simpson (1952) argues that verses 19-20 are *non sequiter* to verse 18, and that the Yahwist would be representing God as making a number of unsuccessful attempts to provide a suitable companion for the man. He further argues that the Yahwist would scarcely have tolerated such an implication, even if it had been in the material he was using, and he would have made the meaning clearer than is here the case. Verses 19-20 appear not to logically follow from verse 18. It is possible that they were inserted by a later editor to account for the creation of those creatures. To accept these verses as part of the original account is to characterize God negatively as creating through trial by error. By not accepting the creatures as companions, Adam seems to have assumed so much authority and activeness in the creation process. The statement is, nevertheless, a sly understatement that prepares for the creation of woman. However, the main idea in the discourse is the

loneliness of man and the need for a companion and the placement of man over other creatures.

Von Rad (1961) points out the significance of naming the creatures by Adam: “this naming is both an act of copying and an act of appropriative ordering, by which man intellectually objectifies the creatures for himself” (p. 81). This implies that the man, by naming the creatures, opens up, determines and orders his world and incorporates them into his life. According to Westermann (1980), it is only the giving of the name to the creatures that creates the world of humankind and the world becomes human only through language. These interpretations are rather extraneous. What is basically the underlying fact is that there was an editor of the Yahwist material who may have redacted the narrative so as to introduce the creation of other beings. When verses. 19-20 is expunged, verses. 21-23 would follow verse 18 logically and meaningfully.

The need for a suitable companion necessitated the action in verses 21-23. In verse 21 we read: וַיִּפֹּל יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים תְּרִדְמָה עַל־הָאָדָם וַיִּישָׁן וַיִּקַּח אֶחָת מִצִּלְעֹתָיו וַיִּסְגֶּר בָּשָׂר תִּחְתְּנָה (So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh). The word תְּרִדְמָה is a feminine singular noun in absolute state. It means *deep sleep*. It connotes the idea of unconsciousness. According to Harris et al (1980), it is used seven times in the Old Testament and each of the usages presents the profundity of divine intervention and the insensitivity of the human in divine action. The word מִצִּלְעֹתָיו is from an Hebrew root word that is translated as *side* or *rib*. The prefix מִ is translated as *from* or *out of*. Wenham (1994) explains that God’s choice of a rib in creating the woman is for equality “not made from head to top him, not out of his feet to be trampled, but from his side to be equal with him” (p. 62). But more appropriately, the writer or editor must have employed the rib imagery to illustrate the oneness of the man and the woman, a theological motif that was probably intended to establish the idea of marriage. The action deliberately anticipates the conclusion in verse 24. The question is why would God form the woman from the man’s rib? Could he not have formed her from the ground as well? Deliberate interpolation is to be smelled in this verse.

In verse 23, Adam exclaims: וַיֹּאמֶר זֹאת הַפֶּעַם עָצָם מֵעַצְמִי וּבָשָׂר מִבָּשָׂר (And the man said “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”). This is followed by the conclusion that she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. The singular feminine noun absolute עָצָם is translated as *substance, self* or *bone* while the masculine singular noun absolute בָּשָׂר is translated as *flesh*. The expression has a range of meanings; it could be a theological allusion to the physical, the flesh or family relationship. But when used of human nature, it draws attention to man’s mortal life — the life he presently lives in the material universe (Richards, 2004). The expression *bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh* seems to be a metaphor employed to explain natural unity of humanity that derives from God himself.

Westermann (1980) draws attention to the etiological nature of this narrative. The creation of the woman from the man’s rib, he says, should not be understood as a description of an actual event for it would be a misunderstanding of the narrative. He claims further that one cannot say that the Yahwist who passes on these narratives imagines the creation of man and woman in this way; he presumes that his hearers know that he did not shape the imagery himself, but is passing on very ancient traditions formed long ago. As noted earlier, it is plausible that the verse was edited to account for the creation of woman and prepare the ground for the institution of marriage, for if it was only to solve the problem of loneliness, God could as well have created another man. It may be observed that even the writer or editor could not have had monogamy in mind at this stage, given the setting of the text. This position can be buttressed by the fact that many creatures were initially created as Adam’s companions in verses 19-22. Therefore, it is possible that more than one woman could have been made for Adam’s companionship.

Adam named her אִשָּׁה (*ishah*) which is rendered as *Woman, female* or *wife*. The act of naming her has elicited different interpretations. Wenham (1994) submits that it signifies headship of the man over the woman. But such reading is uncritical. Simpson’s objection sounds reasonable. He maintains that “translating אִשָּׁה as wife may be due to allegorical understanding of the narrative as the divine institution of marriage (p. 63). In the context of its usage in this passage, אִשָּׁה is better rendered as woman or female for Adam could not have conceived the

idea of a wife in the prevailing setting. Once again, the writer or editor further lays the foundation for what follows in verse 24 which is built on the assumption that the woman is from the man's bone and flesh. Verse 24 reads thus: **עַל־כֵּן יַעֲזֹב־אִישׁ אֶת־אָבִיו וְאֶת־אִמּוֹ וְדָבַק בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ וְהָיוּ לְבָשָׂר אֶחָד** (Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh). This verse brings us to the crux of the theological nuances and profundity of the passage under study.

First, the passage purports the institutionalization of marriage; second, it seems to convey the idea of monogamy; third, it also appears to refer to a matriarchal society where it is the man that leaves his family and goes to settle with the wife. The prepositional adverb **עַל־כֵּן**, translated as *therefore* or *for this reason*, signifies a conclusion from an existing premise. Thus, because the woman was fashioned out of the man, a man would leave his parents and cleave (**דָּבַק**) to his wife. The 3rd person masculine singular verb **יַעֲזֹב** is translated as *to leave, to loose, to abandon* or *to depart*. The interpretation that a man would leave his parents and cleave to his wife may not be acceptable, given the structure of the Israelite society. Ogunkunle (2006) rightly noted that the Hebrew marriage system was patriarchal. He maintains that “we are yet to know of any instance in the Old Testament where a man left his parents to leave with his wife” (p. 53). Corroborating this view, von Rad (1961) notes:

Curiously, the statement about forsaking father and mother does not quite correspond to the patriarchal family custom of ancient Israel, for after the marriage the wife breaks loose from her family much more than the man does from his. Does this tendentious statement perhaps preserve something from a matriarchal culture? (p. 83).

Two other words that carry strong interpretative nuances are **אֶחָד** and **בָּשָׂר**, translated *one* and *flesh* respectively. This has always been taken to mean oneness in marriage which also allegorically insinuates the divinely intended oneness that could only be realized in a monogamous union.

But it is quite unlikely that the idea of monogamy is implied in the verse. The question arises whether the statement in verse 24 is to be understood as Adam's speech or that of the narrator who appears to be God's spokesman. It seems it was the writer or narrator making an inferred conclusion; hence the use of the word *על־כֵּן* (therefore). Westermann (1980) supports the view that "there is a change in speaker between verses. 23 and 24" and reflected the position of von Rad "that verse 24 is an addition to the narrative. The narrative ending with verse 23 would have been complete without the statement in verse 24. He quotes von Rad thus:

The narrative [in] 2:4b-24, 18-24 belong to the cycle of narrative about the creation of humankind (it is not therefore "a myth about the origin of the wife"... This is a narrative that is completely sui generis in that its goal is always the same: the existence of mankind as it is today. The etiological motif of verse 24 is then an addition, an explanation of "the basic drives of the sexes to each other". It can be shown that v. 24 has been added; whereas verse 23 remains within the action of the narrative (p. 223).

Simpson (1952) expressed a similar view as Westermann. He noted that the claim by some commentators that verse 24 is an explanatory comment by the Yahwist writer is illogical. In view of the fact that the man and the woman were still without consciousness of sex, it may be doubted that such a finished writer as J would have inserted it here. Thus, the verse seems to be an addition by a later writer who, reflecting upon the desire of man for his wife, found explanation of it in the supposed fact that woman by her very origin was made out of man's bones and flesh. Therefore, the verse was not originally an affirmation that marriage was from the beginning, by divine intention, monogamous.

The text before us is etiological, a sort of myth that reflects and preserves the primordial understanding of the origin and nature of phenomena which was utilized for a theological projection of ideas such

as marriage, especially monogamy. Hence it preserves the memories of the pre-historic past. What matters to us is how these preservative myths have been manipulated to promote or entrench certain ideologies, beliefs, principles and practices in the society, especially in the religious spheres. The crisis of loneliness in verse 18 lays the foundation for the actions that take place from verses 19-22. And the final resolution of the crises is expressed in verse 23 with Adam's statement **זֶּה הוּא הָעֶצְמוֹתַי וְבָשָׂר מִבָּשָׂר וְיָאֵמֶר הָאֵד הַפֶּעַם** (this is at last the bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh), indicating his satisfaction about having a suitable companion. Thus, the idea of monogamy, as verse 24 is often taken to suggest, is extraneous to the text.

It is better to think along with Simpson that an affirmation of monogamy in the text would, indeed, have been impossible at the time of the event. That the Christian Church blew up emphasis seems to be the influence of the Greco-Roman ideal of marriage of which monogamy is officially the norm. As Gottwald (1985) rightly noted, the materials in the narratives of the Bible generally were independent traditions which the writers, historians and theologians of ancient Israel, weaved together to produce a theological history of the nation of Israel. These traditions and the documents produced at different stages of the nation's development went through series of emendation, with much subjective interpretation, interpolation and expurgation.

Thus, while we may read the institution of marriage into the text as an act of obedience to the theological motif of the writer or the editor, it would be absurd to associate the text with monogamy as a divine injunction. Such Interpretation would be a total betrayal. More so, the fact that the patriarchs practiced polygamy with impunity and was not rebuffed by God would be indefensible if God originally intended monogamy in the text.

The Import and Implications of בָּשָׂר אֶחָד (One Flesh) for African Marriage Practices

It is important to note the view of this paper that the idea of marriage in the text under study was theologically generated and redactionally interpolated. Thus, verses 24 and 25 made most probably came from the

hand of a redactor. But although the idea of monogamy is extraneous to the text, it is already a part of the canon meant for a community of faith, Israel in the first instance and Christians today. How then should the idea of *one flesh* in the text be understood and applied? Marriage is first and foremost for companionship. This companionship flows from the inside of the couple. Assohoto and Ngewa (2006) explain that it is consummated when the couple opens up in total submission to each other. Thus marriage involves more than just the recognition that one's partner is a human being like oneself, but also involves a total return of the couple to their original unity, and completely sharing without boundaries between them. However, oneness in conjugal relationship cannot be actualized in monogamy alone. Experience have thought us that most monogamous couples many a times live in disunity, whereas some polygamous unions have relative peace, harmony and unity in their matrimonial set ups. Thus, the statement וְהָיוּ לְבָשָׂר אֶחָד (and they shall be one flesh) does not exclusively suggest monogamy, but rather unity of mind, mutual submission and openness in a marriage commitment.

The words עָרוּמִים (naked) and עָרוֹם (not being ashamed) in verse 25 symbolically refers to the unreserved mutual acceptance of each of the parties in the conjugal relationship. It connotes innocence and sincerity of mind and action which in the end attracts love and dignity. Richards (2004) states that the affirmation in verse 24 that married couple would become one flesh implies more than sexual union. It also entails sharing of companionship in each other's joys and sorrows that life in this world holds. To be one flesh is to be bonded together on a living, supportive union that not only lasts but becomes deeper and more significant as years pass by. Symbolically, taking a rib or flesh from Adam shows that man and woman share a common identity, each fully participating in God's gift of his image and likeness. To leave (יִעָזֵב) one's parents and cling (דָּבַק) unto his wife should not be taken to be literal. It is a metaphor for the attraction towards each other. A man can thus unite with one, two or more women who are equally in the original nature of humanity and still be one with them.

The Socio-Economic Implications of Divorce

When the Church holds various alienating and discriminatory positions against polygamists, the consequences are inestimable. The stances of the

Roman Catholic and the Deeper Life Bible Churches will suffice to argue out the point. The Roman Catholic Church requires a polygamous Christian convert to divorce his extra wife (or wives) and retain the most preferred one who is equally willing to be baptized with him. This is *sine qua non* for baptism and admittance to the Eucharist. The Catholic Church defines Christian marriage as one between two baptized persons and regards it as a sacrament. The Deeper Life Bible Church on the other hand believes that any marriage contracted after the first one is illegitimate and unholy before God. Thus, for any polygamist to be fully admitted into the Church, the very body of Christ through baptism, the man must divorce all else except the first wife as an act of restitution. On this, Isaacson (1990) quotes W. F. Kumuyi, the founder of the Deeper Life Bible Church, thus: “we have always maintained that in the New Testament, it is one man one wife. In the Old Testament, polygamy was practiced but God did not command it, in the original institution of marriage, God made one man one wife” (p. 214).

To say the least, such application of the text engenders various dimensions of crises, social and economic. First and foremost, the text would seem to encourage divorce which orchestrates marital instability which the bible itself abhors. The immediate effect is on the victims, the affected women and the children, while the society at large is equally affected. Experts have shown that marital crises such as divorce and separation have serious implications for the lives and carrier of the victims and also have negative consequences for the society. When Churches impose monogamy on African Christians as the only ideal and legitimate form of marriage, they are probably ignorant of the fact that they are causing harm and social instability by asking polygamists to send away their “extra” wives. Blankenhorn (1995) captures the problem thus:

The two-parent family is the fundamental institution of the society – the setting in which adults achieve a sense of meaning, stability, and social security and the setting in which children develop into healthy, competent and productive citizens... the spread of single-parent families contributes to many social problems, including poverty, crime, substance abuse, declining academic standards and the erosion of neighbourhood’s communities (p. 2).

Marital dissolution in most African settings could cause a lot of problems. The women would have to fend for themselves in most cases. Economic hardship may set in. One common effect is the tendency for the affected women to be exposed to the selfish and promiscuous antics of most men. When a woman is divorced, she faces economic hardship in most cases. It can lead to serial marriages as well. The women could also be vulnerable to deadly sex-related diseases due to sexual patronage from different men. Nnorom (2006) affirms that marriage forms affect sexuality and health. According to her, the high number of HIV/AIDS patients in Nigeria is mostly due to marriage problems and sex practices of Nigerians. As Kayser (2003) noted, marital disruption is a stressful life transition to which adults, especially women have to adjust. A woman in a divorce dilemma is usually trapped in a web of estrangement and this could be traumatic and may affect the health of the woman. Depression, alcoholism and moral degeneration have been identified as possible effects of marital conflict (Hope et al, 1995).

On the part of the children, the change in family contexts could cause a lot of harm, especially in terms of behavioural pattern. Leon (2003) submits that:

Throughout the years, children develop greater self-control and the ability to regulate their behaviour. However, young children still may have difficulty regulating their behaviour when intense feelings such as fear, anger, or sorrow are involved. The process of parental divorce may evoke strong emotions in children that affect their behaviour regulation, because in early childhood, stress often is expressed behaviourally because of children's limited verbal abilities (p259).

Apart from the psychological aspects, divorce may lead to inadequate parental care which may in turn cause waywardness, juvenile delinquency, educational defects, social deviance, and other forms of dysfunctional consequences. Children under such circumstances may develop poor self-concept which is often a contributive factor to the numerous abuses unleashed on young children, especially the female folk. It is true in our society that victims of early pregnancy are from divorced or separated

homes. Therefore, divorce which may be the result of some Churches' stance against polygamists may have serious negative impacts. It does not only tear families apart, but also causes such crises that have serious socio-economic implications for the individuals in particular and the society at large.

By forcing families to dissolve, women are not only rendered homeless in most cases, but they are equally exposed to various kinds of abuses. They face life with difficulties. Most of them take to prostitution and become vulnerable to deadly diseases. Most divorcees become liabilities as well. Children of such unions are exposed to different kinds of social hazards and unwholesome life styles. Many drop out of school, some cultivate antisocial habits such as drug addiction, alcoholism, hooliganism, robbery, among other acts of criminality.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the theological stances of some Churches on polygyny. The assumed biblical foundation of the Church's monogamy doctrine is disputable. Some conclusions are implicit in the foregoing analysis of the text. First, the narrative serves to account for the creation of mankind and other creatures; second, the statements in verses 24 and 25 appear to be editorial interpolations with the theological intention of providing the basis for the institution of marriage; third, the idea of monogamy is an imposition on the text since there is no categorical or absolute prohibition of it in the text; fourth, the idea of monogamy may have come from the influence of the monotheistic concept of later (post-exilic) Judaism which also influenced early Christian interpretation of the text. Thus, the bible did not categorically prohibit polygyny.

Although the paper does not advocate polygamy as a preferred form of marriage, but it directs attention to the fact that the text of the Old Testament upon which the monogamy doctrine of the Church is often based is misinterpreted and misapplied. Polygamy is a cultural phenomenon and its acceptability is a matter of cultural relativity. It would amount to theological inconsistency to argue that God originally intended marriage to be monogamous but only allowed it for the patriarchs as an act of grace. At least God would have condemned the practice *ab initio*. More so, that Paul stipulated monogamy as a condition

for becoming a Bishop or an Elder (1 Tim. 3: 2 and Titus 1: 6) implies that polygamy was still an acceptable practice even in his time.

The text when placed in its appropriate setting or context would have nothing to do with monogamy. Gen. 2: 24-25 was most likely not originally part of the narrative but has been interpolated to provide a foundation for the institution of marriage by a later editor. Certainly, the text in its pristine context and oral stage could not have conceived the idea of monogamy; hence it was not a problem in early Israel. Later redaction of the text has engendered its interpretation as a monogamy text in conformity with the dynamics of social change or in consonance with the monotheistic drive of Yahwism as manifested in the post-exilic era, or both. Thus, to insist that the text speaks of monogamy is to betray its meaning and its social context, and to insist that polygamous African Christian converts must divorce their other wives does not only alienate them from their cultural right and deny them access to Christianity but also orchestrates social crises. The monogamy doctrine of the church reflects the intellectual contexts of the West.

From a postmodern point of view, it is a matter of fact that worldviews and social contexts matter in writing and reading of texts because prevailing ideas would be reflected. The text in view was written and edited to reflect the worldview and socio-religious circumstances of the time it was penned or edited. Thus, the interpretation of the text should also take cognizance of this fact and factor in the worldview and the socio-religious realities in the environment of the interpreter where it is applied. As Adamo (2005) rightly noted, many of the western biblical interpretations and theologies nourished in the Western intellectualist contexts can have no roots in the life of the African communities. The Bible should not be read to alienate Africans. There is need for the church to review its stance on such monogamy doctrines so as to respond positively to the realities in the African environment and promote the gospel of Christ and socio-economic stability.

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