

ARC.

**TANGAZA COLLEGE
CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA**

**INCULTURATION OF MARRIAGE AMONG THE BEMBA
PEOPLE OF ZAMBIA**

**ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF BACHELOR OF ARTS IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES**

BY

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FEBRUARY, 2002

NAIROBI-KENYA

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my family for fostering love in me and showing me the path to traditional and Christian Values. Through whose spiritual support, prayers and encouragement, they have helped me attain this work.

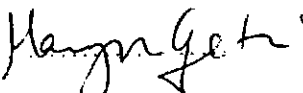
STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this essay is my original work achieved through personal reading, research and reflection. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. I acknowledge all information from other sources.

Signed .....

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Dr. Mary Getui

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I acknowledge the guidance and motherly advice, comments and corrections of my moderator Dr Mary Getui with deep sense of gratitude, without which this thesis could not have been achieved. With heart full of appreciation I thank Fr. Alexander Ngosa, OFM, who read and made corrections on my work. I thank my fellow student from Zambia, Saviour Nundwe, and Julius Tapera, from Zimbabwe, for reading my essay with attention and care. I express my sincere thanks to Sr. Theresa Katongo, MIC, and Sr. Ruth Nyalazi, MIC, from Zambia, for their advice and help during my work.

I am grateful to the SVD confreres, here in our common Formation Centre, for their support and encouraging words during my work on this essay. I also thank all those who have contributed to my work in one way or another.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.1.0. INTRODUCTION

1.1.1 Background to the problem

One of the deepest aspirations and desires that the Bemba have and long to see fulfilled is marriage. When we have some knowledge about their marriage encounter, it will help us to understand on the way they respond to their Christian faith. This understanding is important for our pastoral work as ministers of the Word of God.

A good number of marriages, among the Bemba, are traditional ones. Some of these Christians prefer traditional marriage to ratified marriage in the church. Among the Bemba, there are polygamous families and polygamy is accepted. Within their marriage practice, there are some elements that do not conform to Christian values. At the same time, the Bemba are in favour of Christianity. The Christian and traditional point of view have to meet and embrace each other somewhere.

In Africa today, inculturation continues to be an urgent issue. The Bemba should experience the Good News of the Gospel in their cultural situation. Traditional marriage practices should be enriched by the Gospel message and vice-versa. Christianity has to grow in an African environment where each Christian will feel at home. The issue of traditional marriage has persisted since the early missionaries. The early missionaries addressed this matter with less success. The search for better understanding of traditional marriage continues. The church should look for suitable ways by which to accept traditional marriage. In the process of reinterpretation of the Bemba traditional marriage, the Bemba community and the church should be faithful to each other.

We are aware, at the same time, that there is some progress in inculturation. The Synod of Episcopal conferences have continued to reflect on the issue of marriage. My work, in this paper, is simply to contribute to the ongoing debate by sharing some information on the Bemba traditional marriage. It is an effort to gain a better understanding of the values of

traditional marriage. We should discover how the Bemba traditional marriage practices could become means by which the Bemba can respond in faith to the message of Christ.

My research work on the Bemba helps me prepare myself for an authentic witness to the faith in my African cultural situation. My experience among my people makes me feel that and arrive at the conclusion that traditional marriage, especially polygamy, needs a bit more attention. Therefore, I utilize this chance to write on my Bemba community.

1.1.2. Statement of the problem

I have been brought up in the Bemba ethnic group and noticed some practices which we cannot harmonize with Christianity. For example, marriage is so stressed to the extent that a person who is not married is seen as contributing almost nothing to the community no matter how successful he or she may be in other areas of life. Yet the Christian emphasis is supposed to be on love and dignity of a human person. In the same way, a woman may be encouraged to a polygamous union in favour of child bearing. But man and woman are equal in the eyes of God and she has birth- rights and freedom to choose what is right for herself. In spite of some practices such as polygamy, the Bemba are religious people, in need for the Word of God.

In Africa, we come across similar situations whereby some Christians find themselves split and made to live in this dualistic mode. Therefore, it is a task for the church ministers today to enter into dialogue with these Christians. The steps may be long and tiresome, and requires openness and sharing between church ministers and the community.

1.1.3. The objective of the Study

Culture gives identity to a human person and the Bemba identify themselves in their own culture, especially in their traditional marriage practices. Preservation of culture is the norm, hence my effort at doing this for the Bemba. At the same time we find that there are values that do not promote Christianity, for example polygamy, hence the need to suggest how to

address this dualism. For example, encouraging polygamy may not be a good Christian attitude. Polygamy is accepted despite that it seems to have more disadvantages.

My aim in this essay is therefore to contribute in a small way to the reality of traditional marriage practices among the Bemba and see how we can harmonize with Christianity.

1.1.4. The Scope and limitation

In this essay, I am not intending to exhaust Bemba traditional marriage. But I am bringing out significant areas of this traditional marriage especially as relates to Christianity. I am going to air out what takes place in this traditional marriage.

1.1.5. The Methodology

In my research, I used the method of oral interviews, reading various books and articles related to the Bemba traditional marriage. My experience among the Bemba has also helped me a great deal in my research work. I looked for informants who know people well and places where we were to go. I looked for seven informants from different places but same Bemba community. Of the seven, one was a lady of nineteen years and a young man of twenty-one years. The other five informants were two women and three men. Two women were thirty-eight and fifty four years respectively. The three men were thirty-two, forty-five and sixty one years of age. I also interacted informally with many more people who would be open enough to share their personal experience about traditional marriage in the community. I noticed that some could share important information if I allowed them to talk and share their experience. They could not have felt free if I used questionnaires.

Of the seven people we interviewed, five of them were in favour of traditional marriage. The main reason for favoring traditional marriage was that it keeps the families involved and the community together. Marriage is a long process, from courtship to the wedding day; therefore a boy and a girl together with their families come to know one another better. We were told this long process contributes to the stability in marriage.

The reasons against church marriage were that the church does not prepare a boy and a girl adequately for marriage. The procedure is short and there is not enough time to know one another properly. In church marriage, the celebration is short and there is little or no follow-up on the part of church ministers. Nevertheless, two of our informants, a man and a lady expressed their desire for monogamy. We were told monogamy has an advantage in that the couple is officially recognized in the church. As such, a couple can enjoy fellowship in the church and also participate in the Sacraments.

I had also carried interviews to a parish priest and catechist at a parish in Bemba community. In the morning we could cycle with one of my informants to the parish where we could meet some few people. But members of the community were free at home in the afternoon. This was a suitable time to visit them and share views.

1.1.6. Organization of the work

My work is divided into four chapters. In the first chapter we have discussed the general introduction to the study, the statement of the problem, the objectives of the study, the scope and limitation of the study, and organization of chapters.

The second chapter will deal with the origin of the Bemba, where they are found, how they trace their descent and their livelihood and their socio-economic and political dimension. We elaborate their practices of marriage and how it is done. The purposes of our work is to analyse how the Bemba traditional practices can become a means by which the Bemba can respond in faith to the message of Christ

In the third chapter, we will address Christian marriage. We look at Christian marriage in the Old Testament and the New Testament Scriptures. We will also express the view of the church on marriage and show the position of Vatican II on marriage. Chapter four is our final chapter in which we have put forward suggestions on the inculturation of the Bemba traditional marriage. We have made some recommendations pointing out some Bemba traditional practices, which could be improved or discarded. We have also proposed

that the Church should help the Bemba for integration of their traditional marriage with Christianity. In our conclusion, we make some comments for the Bemba, the Christians and the church leaders.

CHAPTER TWO

2.1.0. THE BEMBA TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE

In this chapter, we will discuss the present location of the Bemba people. We will give their historical background and their socio-economic and political structure. We will also explain their origin and their way of life. In addition, we will elaborate on their practice of marriage.

2.1.1. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE BEMBA

The Northern Province is the largest Province in Zambia. *Kasama* is the Provincial headquarters and is the largest city in the Province. Although there are ten ethnic groups in Northern Province, the major groups are *Bemba, Bisa, Lungu, Mambwe and Namwanga*. The Bemba compose the second largest tribe in Zambia after the Tonga. *The Bemba forefathers are believed to have begun their migrations eastwards from the Luba heartland in the Congo basin possibly as early as 1600.*¹ The Bemba split off from the parent stem in search of independence and new territory. They crossed the Luapula River into what is now Zambia about the beginning of the eighteenth century.

The Bemba established themselves from the Luapula to Lake Tanganyika. Their war-like habits seem to have developed later, when they spread into the surrounding districts. To the south they drove the Lungu people to the north-west, the Bisa into the Bangweulu swamps and eastwards to the Luangwa valley, the Lala to the West, and the Cewa to the East. The dominance of the Bemba chiefs was more effectively enforced by the import of Arab guns in the nineteenth century. Where they did not dislodge the occupants of the surrounding country, their chiefs appointed members of the royal family or faithful subjects to hold the district for them, *ukulashika*. The one appointed had to collect tribute of ivory tusks, grain, iron-work, salt or other goods. Near the end of their migration they crossed the *Chambeshi*

¹Michael O'shea, Missionaries and Miners (Ndola: Mission Press. 1986) 25.

River and settled at *Ituna*. The Bemba called their paramount chief Chitimukulu “the great tree.” *Chitimukulu* established a kingdom among the people who were probably already known as Bemba and were already ruled by small chiefs of *Luba* origin.

2.1.2. Social structure of the *Bemba*

The Bemba are a matrilineal people who practice matrilocal marriage. Descent is reckoned through the mother. A man’s membership of this matrilocal group determines his residence. Though it is more usual to live with kinsmen on the matrilineal side, a man may choose to live with his father’s people. They play an important part at all the great ceremonial occasions in life. He also belongs to a wider descent group, the clan *umukowa*, which is also traced in the woman’s line. Apart from the descent group that determines his status, there is a body of kinsmen with whom a Bemba cooperates actively in daily life. The original kinship structure is still apparent. *All the social groups to which a man belongs are ultimately based on kinship.*² These are the people with whom he may choose to live. They gather together at any important event in his life such as marriage, the birth of a child, illness or a death. This group is known by a distinct term, the *ulupwa*. It has a bilateral basis, since it is composed of the near relatives on both sides of the family and also relatives in-law.

2.1.3. Economic structure of the *Bemba*

The population density in Northern Province is low. The Bemba live in a sparsely populated area. The Bemba society are an agricultural people and have no pastoral traditions. Their marriage contracts are fulfilled by service and not by the passage of cattle. They practice shifting cultivation of the slash and burn type called *citemene*. *Citemene* depends on the use of axes, for lopping the branches of trees. *To make a garden the men lop branches from the trees and the women pile them in the centre of a cleared patch so that they*

² Evans Pritchard, *African Political Systems* 11th ed (London: Oxford university Press, 1967), 94.

may be burned to form an ash bed on which the seeds are sown.³ After burning, ash acts as fertilizer and reduces the acid in the soil. The Bemba system of cultivation provides them with subsistence food. Their staple food is finger millet but they also grow maize, groundnuts, beans, sorghum, peas and cassava. *The Bemba families have the rights of use of land but no permanent ownership or claims of inheritance over it.*⁴ A person could not cultivate as an isolated individual.

There is little specialization in Bemba economy, but crafts are well developed. Men make baskets, mats, furniture and drums. Pottery is the main craft for women. Hunting and fishing contribute only a small share on the food supply.

2.1.4. Political structure of the Bemba

The original kinship structure of the Bemba is still apparent. *Political power and prerogatives tend to be concentrated in the hands of descendants of the original lineage group of which the chief is the living representative.*⁵ The hierarchy of the Bemba society allows only one type of authority and one basis of power. The Bemba are a homogeneous group. They form a quite distinct political unity from the Bisa, Lala, Lunda, and other neighboring tribes within similar traditions of origin. The hierarchical structure of the Bemba chieftainship starts with the paramount chief at the top, chiefs, sub-chiefs and headmen and women.

The heart of the Bembaland, ruled by Chitimukulu himself, is known as Ituna. Ituna is approximately confined within a curve of the Chambeshi River. Chitimukulu ruled all the neighboring ethnic groups. Today also his rule includes areas such as Kaliminwa, Mpolokoso, Mpika and Chinsali. *The people believed that supernatural powers were invested*

³ Audrey I. Richards, *A Girl's Initiation Ceremony among the Bemba of Zambia* (London: Tavistock publications, 1982), 25.

⁴ Radcliffe A. Brown and Darry Forde. *African Systems of Kinship* 2nd Ed (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 22.

⁵ Pritchard, *op. cit.*, 83.

*in Chitimukulu, the prosperity of the land and the welfare of the people depended upon him, and so he had unquestioned rule over them and demanded absolute loyalty.*⁶

2.1.5. THE BEMBA TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE

As already noted, the Bemba are a matrilineal people. According to Bemba beliefs, blood passes through a woman and not through the man. Although a man possesses this blood, he cannot pass it on to his children. *Among the Bemba it is believed that a child is made from the blood of a woman which she is able to transmit to her male and female children.*⁷ The Bemba stress the link of a man with his sister. Children belong to their mother's clan.

*When a girl is about to get married, her mother's brothers must be consulted and should be given part of the marriage payment.*⁸ The rules of succession follow matrilineal pattern, in which a man succeeds his brother, or sister's son. In the Bemba society, boys of about 16 years of age engage young girls below the age of puberty. The engagement or betrothal was called *ukukobekela*.⁹ *Ukukobekela* was not considered very serious or a binding step, but merely first stage in the process of contracting marriage. Initiation plays an important role in the marriage process.

2.1.6. Initiation Ceremony

Initiation rite is a transitional ritual. A girl is going to pass from childhood to adulthood. The initiate will be trained to assume her duties as a responsible adult in the community. She will be prepared for life as a mature lady. The initiate will be instructed about sex and love in family life. Initiation rite, among the Bemba, was essential to make a girl eligible for marriage. This ritual is an event with a social meaning and symbolic actions.

⁶ Brown and Forde, *op. cit.*, 22.

⁷ Pritchard, *op. cit.*, 96.

⁸ Thera Rasing, Passing on the Rites of Passage: Girl's initiation Rites in the context of an Urban Roman Catholic community on the Zambian Copperbelt (Leiden: African Studies Centre, 1995), 44.

⁹ John Parrat, Inheritance in Zambia: A Study in Cultural History. (Ndola: Mision Press, 1988), 89.

*The initiation rite is basically a symbolic activity using actions, language and images to explain and effect their world-view and specifically what it means to be an adult and a married woman in the community.*¹⁰

There are three significant phases in the initiation rites according to traditional Bemba. The first phase is *ukufuma ku bantu*, which means the withdrawal from the community into seclusion. This symbolizes “death”. When a girl has reached sexual maturity, which is characterized by her first menstruation, she is entrusted to a wise and experienced elderly woman called *nacimbusa*. The term means, “mother of secrets.” The girl is secluded from public life. In the past this withdrawal from the *community* or seclusion used to last about half a year. Now, due to change in social structures and patterns of education this period has been shortened considerably. In the second stage called *ukufunda nacisungu*, an initiate is given intensive instructions. The instructions are about the life, rights and responsibilities of a mature lady in her society. This is followed by the last phase known as *ukulanga icisungu*, which means presenting the initiated girl to the public. *Girl's initiation, cisungu, was public, involving many people, much singing and dancing, as well as secret symbols.*¹¹ She is brought back to life, as it were. During her appearance, she is offered gifts from the community. She is integrated into the life of the grownups.

The whole period, from seclusion of the girl till her public appearance is called *ukucindile cisungu*, which means to dance for the puberty initiate girl. To dance for someone, in this case, means to instruct intensively. *The explicit purpose of the cisungu is to change a girl into a woman, by transforming her in the course of the experience.*¹² The knowledge to which girls are introduced is secret. It is only for those who are initiated. When a girl goes through the initiation ceremony, she is considered to be a mature lady. Thus she is allowed to

¹⁰ Raising, *op cit.*, 45.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹² *Ibid.*

proceed to another rite of passage called marriage. In our next sub section, we are going to speak about Bemba rituals that are carried out during the marriage ceremony.

2.1.7. Courtship

When a man became old enough to marry, he was encouraged by his family or relatives to marry. The man approached a member of his family, preferably a grandfather to tell him of his intentions to marry. This information is never given to the parents directly. In some cases the young man participated in the selection of his wife. In other cases the parents made the initial decision on who their son should marry. When a man found one he told some close members of his family, either uncle, brothers, grand parents or aunts.

If his family accepted his choice, an intermediary called *shibukombe* was chosen to represent the family in their marriage arrangements. A woman acting as an intermediary was called *nabukombe*. The *shibukombe* was in many cases a man. He did not belong to the family of the girl or of the man. He was from an independent family and it was a great honor to be chosen by a family to perform the duties of a *shibukombe*. It was a duty performed with great care, skill and diplomacy and raised one's status among the people in the neighborhood. The sister of the father of the girl is called *nasenge*. She is respected and plays an important role in the Bemba matrilineal society. *Nasenge* is actively involved in marriage rituals.

After securing the services of a *shibukombe*, the man's family organized a betrothal or engagement present called *insalamu* to the father of the girl. *It consisted of a small amount of money or copper wire bracelet known as ulusambo, bead, ubulungu and other small valuables were also accepted as insalamu.*¹³ In this matrilineal society where the children, will belong to bride's lineage, this payment is usually low. It is considered a gain on the girl's family because a boy is going to stay there and help the in-laws. The *shibukombe* carried the

¹³ Chondoka Yizenge, *Traditional Marriage in Zambia: A Study in Cultural History* (Ndola: Mission Press). 89.

insalamu traditionally to the father of the girl. It was put in a basket, made from reeds, called *icipe*.

The journey to the girl's parents was always at dusk. In the village of the girl's family, the *shibukombe* was expected to know the house of the girl's parents and know how to approach them. In the house, he used polite language when presenting his case. He spoke as if he was the one intending to marry the daughter of the host family. After the usual warm welcome by the parents of the girl, the *shibukombe* slowly unfolded the news, saying, *ndefwaya kukakila*, meaning, "I have come to engage your daughter." He went on explaining his intentions to marry the girl. Having said this, the *shibukombe* handed the *insalamu* presents to the father of the girl who accepted them. The *shibukombe* was told to come for the answer on a later date. The girl's family had to meet and decide before the go-between came back. If the man is accepted, the girl's family calls the girl to find out the truth about her relationship with the man. If the girl confirms, procedures for marriage proceeded.

*The insalamu was not very binding.*¹⁴ It was only an assurance that the man was serious and committed to marrying the girl. It was also an official claim over the girl and it avoided other men from proposing marriage to her. But if the engagement was broken, the *insalamu* presents were not refunded.

The *shibukombe* came back after some days, as asked by the parents of a girl. He was well received by the girl's family. After that time there was much humor and many jokes as they talked to each other. Then, if the decision is favorable the *shibukombe* was told of the good news to the family of the man. Should the general opinion favor refusal, the *shibukombe* was told so.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 89.

2.1.8. Engagement

Engagement was extended from the time of courtship up to the wedding day. It was the opportunity that enabled a boy and a girl get to know each other. During this time, there were some rituals performed. The *insalamu* was paid when the girl had not yet reached the age of puberty. *She was allowed by her parents to be going to the future husband's house, sometimes alone, but in most cases with her friends.*¹⁵

The presence of her friends is necessary to avoid temptation to indulge in pre-marital sex. On her first trip to a boy's house whether with her friends or not, she did not talk to him or enter his house. Only after a boy presented her with small presents did she begin to talk to him and did some work for him such as drawing water and sweeping the house for him. These tasks were performed whenever the girl thought it necessary and at any time she went to the boy's house. She did what she thought was good for her future husband. She was at this time showing him that she would be a good wife once marriage procedures were finalized. It was a period of courtship locally known as *ukwishisha or ukwisha*.¹⁶ The family of the girl was responsible for the boy's daily food requirements from the time of accepting the *insalamu*. The boy built his house in the village and the girl was allowed to visit him in his house.

Marriage is uxori-local among the Bemba. *A young man who marries goes to live in his wife's village where he builds himself a hut and becomes a member of her extended family.*¹⁷ For the service given to him by the girl and her family, he had to work for her family. The boy does various tasks, usually cutting down trees in the *citemene* system, for his parents-in-law. The boy asked his parents-in-law where their field was, through the *shibukombe*.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 89-94.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁷ Raising, *op. cit.*, 40.

On the first day, the boy was allowed to invite his relatives, two or three. Together with the *shibukombe*, they all worked in the field of the parents of the girl. On the first day, after work, they were given some gifts by the parents of the girl. However, on subsequent days, the man went alone and was not given gifts after work.

When it was noticed by her parents that she was about to experience her first menstruation, she was stopped from visiting or staying at her future husband's house for fear of becoming pregnant before marriage. If it happened, it brought shame and serious problems to both parties. Her withdrawal from the boy's house was one way of warning the groom that his future wife was about to have her first menstruation. When she had her first menstruation, she became known as *nacisungu*. This marked the beginning of an initiation ceremony called *cisungu*, during which she underwent a number of activities as already noted. The boy was informed about this.

2.1.9. Showing of fire

Also during the courtship stage, the woman's family organizes a ceremony called *ukulanga umulilo*, literally translated as "showing of fire". From the time of *insalamu* up to this stage, the traditions did not allow the man to eat some type of food prepared by the girl's mother.

However, time was now ripe for him to begin eating food prepared by the girl's mother. A food offering ceremony was organized for the boy. It was called *ukutebeta*.¹⁸ The *shibukombe* went to the girl's parents and announced that, "the stranger's child, the groom, is wasting with hunger," *Mwana wabene aleonda ku nsala*.

This is a hint that the big feast of admission of the son-in-law should take place. *The idea is to make the man free to eat food cooked by the woman's family and to expose him to a*

¹⁸ Yezinge, *op. cit.*, 92.

variety of food stuffs that a typical Bemba family eats.¹⁹ The ceremony also symbolizes that she will be preparing food for him when they are married. It took a long time before this ceremony was done. This was to make sure that the boy was proved fit to be their son-in-law that he had been found to be a hardworking person. For this reason, the ceremony took place about six months after accepting *insalamu* or after the girl's initiation ceremony.

The girl's family prepared different types of food. This could be at the house of the mother-in-law or at the house of the girl's aunt. The food types prepared by the girl's family were those that were common and eaten by their members of the family. *For the Bemba chicken was prepared as dignified relish.*²⁰ Each prepared chicken had to be with a gizzard, a failure to which it was not offered as relish for such a ceremony. Beef was common and was offered for ceremony. Each of these foods was presented ceremonially by putting a gift on top of the plate or lid covering it. The gifts consisted of either small valuables or money. The food with the respective gifts was taken to the boy's house.

The *shibukombe* was there to receive the foods and to welcome the invited relatives of the boy. The elderly woman from the bride's family went into the house where there was food, and invited relatives of the boy and other close friends of their son-in-law. They explained to the boy the significance of each food. If there was any food that the boy did not eat he pointed at it, and told them that he did not eat that food. That way, they knew the foods that their son-in-law did not eat.

The whole activity was accompanied with plenty of utulation. After the women explained the significance of each food, they left the house. The elderly people distributed the food and they all started eating. However, the plates that came in the house with food or beer had to leave the house with double the amount of gifts brought with it.

¹⁹ Parrat, *op. cit.*, 197.

²⁰ Yezinge, *op. cit.*, 93.

From that day, the man did not ask where the food sent to his house came from. It had already been ritualized. However, they were not considered married until the wedding festivals have finished. From that time, the man was called *Lumbwe*, the husband of the girl. Likewise, the girl was called *Nankobekela*, the wife of the boy.

2.2.0. Bridewealth

After the food offering ceremony, the most important stage was the wedding ceremony. It took place a year or two after the girl's initiation ceremony or *insalamu*. That was a way of confirming that he was hard working son-in-law. Before the wedding, the groom asked *shibukombe* to go and find out from the bride's family the amount of bridewealth called *impango*, the main marriage payment. Besides that the groom wanted his wife to join him. That was also a way of telling a bride's family to decide on the wedding date after the groom paid the *impango*.

The *impango* was very important. *It legalized the marriage, and it was non-refundable in special circumstances.*²¹ It consisted of two to three bark-cloths *ifilundu*. Sometimes other valuable *ifyuma* included hoes, beads, blankets, salt and so on, which could be paid instead of bark-cloths. No animals were exchanged in the *Bemba* marriages. Once the *shibukombe* was told how much *impango* the man was to pay, he reported this to the groom's family. The amount was organized. In many cases, before the wedding could take place, more than half of the *impango* would be paid. It meant that he would pay the rest after the wedding. He told *shibukombe* to tell the parents-in-law, *Bankake mimwe*, meaning that at least let me use my legs while my hands are tied. Do not tie my legs as well. I will use them to look around for the remaining *impango*.

²¹ Parrat, *op. cit.*, 199.

2.3.0. WEDDING PREPARATIONS

Once the betrothal ceremonies have been concluded, there was nothing to prevent the groom and the bride from getting married. *The couple, from now, is commonly referred to as husband and wife.*²² The family of the groom and the bride consult each other and agree on the wedding day. All relatives and friends on both sides are formerly invited. Women help repair and smear the walls and floors of the huts. The young men fetch firewood for use on the day of the celebration. The wedding day takes place two or three weeks after the start of the wedding preparations.

2.4.0. WEDDING CELEBRATION

Early in the morning the married female guest start going to the bride's home with the beer they have made. As they walk they sing as a sign of joy. They prepared many different foods also. If the groom's family lived very far from the girl's village, they came and camped in the bride's village, usually at a relative's house or a friend's house. The wedding ceremony began in the afternoon.

2.5.0. Taking the bride to the groom, *ukumutwala kuli wiha*

The first procedure was the taking of the wife to the husband, *ukumutwala kuli wiha* followed by the wedding, *ubwanga*. Early in the evening of the wedding day, the bride was taken to the house of her paternal aunt by the *nacimbusa*. She was told the rituals of family life. Her aunt was involved in giving her the last tidbits on married life. The groom was taught the secrets of married life by elderly male relatives, in his house. That was also the time when people began drinking beer, beating drums and dancing. Many people from neighbouring villages came to participate in the activities.

Around midnight, after the instructions on married life, the aunt carried the bride on her back covered with cloth. She took her to a special house where the groom was waiting for

²² Yezinge, *op. cit.*, 87.

her arrival. The cloth used when carrying the bride was supposed to be bought or prepared by the groom and sent in advance to the paternal aunt for this ritual. It was sent in advance to ensure that it has been bought and kept for that purpose. There were ululations as the aunt carrying the bride went to the house where the groom was waiting for her. In the house where the groom was waiting for her arrival, the bride was put on the bed or mat. The groom gave both the bride and aunt a gift each. The paternal aunt told the groom to sleep with the bride, and she left the house and stood outside not very far from the house. *Traditionally marriage was never complete without conjugal intercourse, the act of knowing each other.*²³

The trip made by the aunt with the bride was very important and attracted people's attention. Some elderly women accompanying her sing a wedding song, known as *sense tubatwalile*, meaning that, "we are bringing a virgin, what happens to her after we have given her to you is your own affair".

In the house, the man strikes a match to show that he has succeeded in sexual intercourse. It was a sign that everything is okay. The aunt and all people outside became very happy and many ululations followed. That meant that the man was strong. It was, in fact, a test of virility of the man rather than of the virginity of the girl.

The following morning, the girl was questioned as to how many times they had made love. Four times was regarded as the yardstick for a real man.

After the first sexual intercourse, it was acknowledged that the next morning the two were mature persons who should be responsible for each other. They were counted as adults who could serve the society as responsible persons. The ritual also publicly confirmed the couple's marriage alliance.

²³ Sebastian K. Lutahoire, The human Life Cycle Among the Bantu (Tanzania: Makumira Publications, 1974), 60.

Many chickens were slaughtered for the occasion. However, if he failed to perform as expected, the girl rushed out of the house.

That marked the end of the marriage. The aunt took the girl to her mother. The live chickens brought for slaughtering were freed and people who came for the festival dispersed. It brought great shame to the groom and his entire family. If the performance by the groom was good the celebrations went on until the following day, while the bride and the groom slept.

2.6.0. Sacred bath and the pot ritual

Early the following morning at dawn, the elderly woman from the bride's family leads the couple to the stream or river to bath. The process was called *ukowa*.²⁴ *Ukowa* was a sacred bath meaning cleansing. From the stream, they found the house where they slept cleaned and the spot where they slept washed. This has a meaning of purification; husband and wife are now entering a new life. The old fire was cleared out of the house. The older men made a new fire using fire sticks. In the morning the old fire is extinguished, a ritual act of intercourse takes place and a new fire is lit *ukusangulula*. The same morning after the aunt, *nasenge*, prepared breakfast or *ubwali* for the couple, using the marriage pot called *akalongo*.

When the meal was ready, the aunt took a small ball of it, *uhutshi*, and put it into the mouth of the husband and did likewise to the wife. She did this until the *ubwali* was finished. The people in the village were still dancing, eating, drinking and singing. The families of the couple exchanged different types of food.

Food and drink have been provided as abundantly as the parents and other relatives can afford. Feasting continues until the following day, accompanied by singing and dancing.

The little pot remained on the hearth until the fire went out. To have a little pot taken away by *nasenge* the couple had to give her a piece of bark cloth.

²⁴ Yezinge, *op.cit.* 97.

When this is done, the aunt put another small pot in its place. That was the pot for use by the young couple in their marriage life. After that *ubwali* was rubbed over the man's body and another over the woman's body by the aunt and thereafter she anointed them with some oil. Oil has the effect of healing in their time of trouble.

2.7.0. Presenting the couple to the public and end of marriage ceremony

The couple was brought outside and sat on the mat for the ceremony called *ukushikula*²⁵ At this ceremony the couple received some advice on married life from parents, relatives, friends and well-wishers. Whoever gave such advice put a small gift on the mat. Such gifts were for the couple. The father of the girl was the first to give advice, followed by her mother and other close relatives. Then the parents of the man and his relatives followed. After members of the two families presented their gifts, the father of the bride gave the groom an arrow and bow and advised, "this arrow and bow I give you, if a man steals or seduces your wife, shoot and kill him with this arrow". In the absence of an arrow and a bow, a spear was given. Other people also gave symbolic gifts with specific meanings. These are called *amashikulo*.²⁶ They include axes for *citemene* system or agriculture as the *Bemba* are still the major ethnic group still practicing this type of farming in Zambia.

In the afternoon the bridegroom's relatives ask permission to take their bride to visit their home. The bridal party proceeds to the husband's home.

The man's people time their departure to reach home before dark. On arrival, the procession is welcomed with great jubilation. The couple is shown into a hut. They sit there for a while, receiving visitors who congratulate them and welcome the bride to their home. Another small feast has been prepared. The people continue to sing and dance until it is late.

²⁵ *Ibid* . 101.

²⁶ Mwewa S. Kapita, Traditional Zambia Eschatology and Ethics Confronting the Advent of Christianity: A Dissertation presented at the theological Faculty of the university of Innbruck for the Degree of Doctor of theology on 31st March 1977, 147

The next day finally, the newly married couple and their companions go in the afternoon to the bride's home. On departing, they take the rest of his personal belongings. The man remains at his wife's place. That was the end of marriage ceremony, *icupo*. The man is free to visit his family whenever he pleases and his family is free to visit him.

We have elaborated on the Bemba society. We have looked into their origin, present location in Zambia and their way of life. We have explained broadly on Bemba monogamous marriage. The foregoing will help us enter our next section of Polygamy among the Bemba.

2.8.0. THE PRACTICE OF POLYGAMY AMONG THE BEMBA

In this section we are going to see some reasons, which makes polygamy to be a valid form of marriage in the Bemba society. We will look at factors that made it possible for men to have more than one wife. We will say something on the advantages and disadvantages of this system. *In the strict meaning of the term, polygamy means marrying more than once.*²⁷ If a man has several wives at the same time, this is strictly not polygamy but polygyny. But in this chapter, and for the Bemba, we will use the word polygamy to mean having more than one wife at the same time.

The emphasis on marriage, in the Bemba society, is laid upon procreation. Children meant wealth, prestige and blessing of God and the ancestors. *It is believed, in traditional Zambian life, that procreation is regarded as a very high value. Love, in marriage, is recognized as great but the begetting of children often overshadows everything else forcing love to take the second place*²⁸. A Bemba proverb hints at this view: *Imiti ikula empanga*, meaning that "The growing young trees are the forest". The underlying idea is that children are the future of their people. It was necessary to transmit life, and this was regarded as an

²⁷ Eugene H: Ilman. Polygamy Reconsidered: African Plural Marriages and the Christian Churches (New York: Mary knoll, 1975), 114.

²⁸ Kapita S op.cit., 114.

essential aspect of being alive. It was an assurance that one's memory will be cherished after death.

2.8.1. Advantages of polygamy

The Bemba society stressed the importance of large families. They looked upon a large number of children as a great human achievement. The desire for as many children as possible was paramount. A man with more than one wife normally had more children than a man with only one wife. A woman naturally saw her own personal self-fulfillment through child bearing. The mother of several children was greatly respected by her relatives and neighbours. Child bearing is so important that couples without children often feel that their childlessness is a personal humiliation and a tragedy, however successful they may be in other fields of their lives. Polygamy gave a possibility to have many children. Polygamy in the Bemba society had social functions and advantages.

Personal relationships, among the Bemba, were always regarded as more important than possession of things. They had strong feelings of family solidarity, rooted in their psychology as well as their experiences. The deep sense of solidarity, which may even be traced back to the past generation, imposes the duty to continue each family through offspring. Thus family continuity was important for maintaining cultural traditions. As such the failure to leave behind a sufficient number of offspring to ensure the continuation of the family was a disaster.

Among the Bemba, childlessness is seen as a curse. Polygamy gave way for the childless union and offered a lenient solution than that of divorce when a wife was barren. This form of marriage helped to satisfy the need and the desire of having a large family. Polygamy helped to build the bonds of society and broaden the circle of relatives and associates. However, though polygamy was the most honorable form of *Bemba* traditional marriage few men were able to marry more than one wife. As a matter of fact, monogamy was the most prominent form of marriage.

A marriage in which children were not born was considered to be problematic, and sometimes the man might request her husband to take a second wife. *Although it is known that it is not always the woman's fault because her husband can be infertile, it is she who is blamed*²⁹. Being remembered after death was important in the Bemba society. When a person dies, she will leave her own blood and spirit through the child he leaves behind. Then as long as that child relays forward the life of the parent by a turn of having her own children, her grandparents as well as all those who come before those grandparents shall never perish, but will live forever.

Personal immortality after death was only possible as the living descendants remembered the living dead by name and poured out drink offerings to honor them.

*Marriage is related to the perpetuation of the lineage and personal immortality, so childlessness blocks the channel through which the stream of life flows; hence infertility and sterility bring a great strain on the stability of marriage.*³⁰

There was also the need to have many children in order to carry one's name. Many wives bore many children who could remember the parents after death. The more children a woman had, the better were their chances of being long remembered by his descendants.

Polygamy provided more wives who could work. When a man's first wife found too much work to do, she often initiated the idea that her husband should marry a second wife. *An elderly wife finds herself unable to continue all the household chores, and is willing that her husband should take a second wife in order to do the house work for the older wife.*³¹

A second wife may be needed to bear girls. Marriage to many wives gave hope of having girls. Girls were needed in the matrilineal family. The more daughters one had the greater the possibility that one of those daughters would get married. Many wives meant

²⁹ Raising, *op. cit.*, 32.

³⁰ Luigi Policarpo, *Customary Marriage in Zambia. In the light of Canon Law: A Dissertation* Presented at the Faculty of Canon Law of the university of Urbaniana for the Degree of Doctor of Canon Law, 1986 p.480.

³¹ Blum, *Forms of Marriage: Monogamy Reconsidered* (Nairobi: Gaba Publications, 1989), 99.

wealth and prestige. By having many wives and many children a man had more hands to work in the fields and build up his wealth. In Hugene's words, *polygamy is normally preferred because of its socio-economic functions.*³² Polygamy was a form of security and a guarantee of prosperity when a large family was necessary to exploit the environment and provide for basic needs.

In the Bemba community there is a traditional belief that the mother's milk will fail, if sexual intercourse takes place during lactation. The period of breast-feeding was long and it was usually 2 years at least before a baby was weaned. This custom and belief imposed a very long period of sexual abstinence. If the husband was not capable of abstinence, he could only satisfy his needs outside of his marriage, if he was monogamous. If on the other hand, he was polygamous, he had some chance of having a legitimate second wife at hand while another wife nursed the child. The man lived at the house of the first wife, but could only have sex with the second wife who was not nursing a child.

2.8.2. Disadvantages of Polygamy today

In the past there were village elders who actually encouraged men to marry a second wife because the wife bore no children or she bore only boys. But conditions have changed.

Polygamy is less favored because of the cost of living. *Frequently, husbands are reluctant to seek additional wives because of the greater burdens and responsibilities that go with management of polygamous households.*³³ In some cases, a man may take a second wife only out of a sense of social obligation, in response to a particular pressure. For example, a situation where a man is requested to marry his brother's widow, even though he himself may be married. Some parents find it hard to pay school fees for many children, clothe them and provide other necessities for them. They have little or no education, because they are so

³² Hillman, *op. cit.*, 114.

³³ *Ibid.*, 120.

many. They quarrel and disputes arise among themselves, particularly after the death of their parents.

For the women, the association of several wives with one husband takes it to be loss of dignity and true liberty. *Jealousy between co-wives is almost inevitable, and that the most frequent cause of it is the resentment the wives felt from sharing the right of sexual access to a husband.*³⁴ A large number of wives and children is now less regarded as a sign of high status. People feel less obliged by traditional, social and economic needs to produce many Children in multiple families. And if no children are born today, it is possible to adopt a child. Although polygamy is on the decrease in some communities, there is a situation in which a man leaves his wife in the countryside and spends most of his working life in the city. The lonely city life has often driven some men into a second, unplanned marriage which takes place without knowledge of the first wife who is in the countryside. Another habit is the development of an older man taking a young woman and being a sugar daddy. The young woman has better clothes, a better house and may have some more material than the actual wife.

We have done an overview of Bemba polygamous marriage and the place of polygamy in our society today. In chapter two, we are now going to look at the background of Christian marriage with reference to polygamy.

³⁴ Blum, *op. cit.*, 111.

CHAPTER THREE

3.1.0. CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

The church in its mission of Evangelization must examine carefully the implication of local culture. During the initial stages of evangelization, missionaries did not fully understand all the elements of indigenous customs. However since the second Vatican Council and with better anthropological studies the indigenous customs have been most and more carefully observed and better understood. Nowadays the church, with a new approach to African culture, shows a deeper appreciation of indigenous customs and mentalities.

3.1.1. CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

In this chapter we will examine some Biblical teachings on marriage. In (Gen 2:18), The Lord God after creating Adam, said that, "It is not good that man should be alone. I will make a partner suitable for him." This partner was Eve, the first woman. Adam and Eve were the first to contract marriage. *God provided marriage as one of the ways by which men and women by giving that service, which is love, could reach perfection.*³⁵ God then blessed Adam and Eve to be productive. The Ancient Israel valued marriage. For instance, in the book of Hosea, we will see the covenant relationship of God and his chosen people.

In the New Testament we will examine the statements about marriage that are found in the Gospels and in the Pauline literatures. We will see if the New Testament writers further deepen the theological teaching on marriage. We will try to determine, if the New Testament gives any indication of possible exceptions to monogamous type of marriage. We will look at church teaching on marriage and especially monogamy as the preferred Sacrament of marriage. We will also consider some magisterial statements on marriage.

³⁵ John Marshall, Preparing for Marriage (London: Fletcher and Son Ltd, 1969), 9.

There is no *systematic doctrine of marriage*³⁶ in the books of the Old Testament. We have only fragments that describe the beliefs and practices of the Hebrew people. They are important for our purposes because they influenced and inspired the beliefs and practices of the early Christian communities. *In the Hebrew's understanding of marriage, the institutional aspect dominated.*³⁷ Similarly the beliefs and practices of Christians influence their response to Christianity. That is why we should pay attention to their traditional marriage. *In the Hebrew's understanding of marriage, the institutional aspect dominated.*³⁸ The family was the primary source of the strength of the community.

In the Bemba ethnic group, the family is highly valued. To have children in abundance was a great blessing, the survival and future prosperity depended on them. Children are a source of joy and blessing among the Bemba. Although children are a precious gift from God, they should not defeat the primary purpose of marriage, which is love. The creation narrative contains a culturally advanced understanding of marriage

3.1.2. Marriage in the Old Testament

The second chapter of Genesis is important for our considerations of marriage because it presents the first human couple, portrayed in the Bible.

The image of the couple, presented in verse twenty-four of the second chapter of Genesis shows that a deeper relationship exists between man and woman, than just mutual sexual attraction. "A man leaves his father and mother and the two become one."

This affirms that after a man's marriage his relationship to his father and mother is different, from what it used to be when he was still unmarried. The autonomy that a man has after being married is not something he possesses in himself, simply as an individual.

570.

³⁶ Theodore Mackin, *Marriage in the Church: The marital sacrament* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 571.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

The autonomy is only experienced when he is joined to his wife. Their union is not simply based on their sexual complementarity, but it is also based on a spirit of affection and love. The separation, which the couple makes from their parents, is not something negative. It has a positive end in view. When they are joined together a new reality takes form. They become one body, and one flesh. *To be husband and wife a man and woman enter and live a covenant of commitment to one another.*³⁹ It is in this light that the Bemba should see the primacy of marriage, which is love between husband and wife. Marriage should not run a danger of being dissolved or try to look for a second wife when there are no children.

The first human beings appear in a sacred context. They appear as couple, as equals, in conversation with their God. In the more primitive “Yahwist” tradition “the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (Gen 2:7); then “God said, it is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helper fit for him,” (Gen 2:18). *The motive for his bringing the woman into existence is clear.*⁴⁰

“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; and the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man” (Gen 2: 21-22). *The story implies that man and woman are different, thus they can complement each other; yet it points also to their unity.*⁴¹ In the Christian community, husband and wife should be encouraged to appreciate and understand each other. There should be mutual respect and sharing even when their problems in the family.

The more developed “sacred” priestly tradition completes and corrects the Yahwist one. It places the origin of both, man and woman, in the creative strength of God’s word; so

³⁹ Theodore Mackin, Marriage in the Catholic Church: Genesis account of the first couple (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 45.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁴¹ Ladislav Orsy, Marriage in Canon Law: Reflections and Questions (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1986), 16.

God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27). The source of their equality and unity is now placed directly into God’s own powerful word. He gave them also the task of continuing his work in this creation; And God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth “ (Gen 1:28). This task they received together.

*The ideal put forward in the creation is that of the monogamous marriage.*⁴² This orientation towards monogamy was certainly supported and strengthened by the developing symbolism attached to marriage: Israel used the image of the human couple to describe and to understand with increasing depth the nation’s relationship to Yahweh; he was the “bridegroom,” they the “bride.” It was a jealous relationship; as Yahweh was the God of Israel, Israel had to be the people of Yahweh.

The horizon, then, in which a theology of marriage developed in the Old Testament was very broad: it stretched from the visible universe to God who made it. *The doctrine of marriage as a sacrament developed only gradually.*⁴³ The human couple was seen as embedded in the world that was altogether sacred even if under some aspect it has been distorted by the fall. In such a horizon marriage could be understood only as good and holy. *The Christian understanding of marriage and family is grounded in the order of creation.*⁴⁴

The Bible is clear that polygamy has not been the preferred form of marriage. From the beginning God only intended monogamous marriage. This is clear from Genesis 2:24. Although there is no doubt there existed some cases of polygamy in the Old Testament

⁴² *Ibid.*, 42

⁴³ Michael Walsh, ed. *Commentary on the Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), 318.

⁴⁴ *The Church’s Confession of Faith: A Catholic Catechism for Adults* ed. German Bishop Conference (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 316.

patriarchal period. Lameck began the practice of polygamy (Gen 4:19), he married two wives, Adah and Zillah.

Scripture describes some of the evil aspects that result from polygamy. For example, there were conflicts between the two wives of Elkanah. Penninah mocked and ridiculed her co-wife Hannah, because she had no children (1 Sam 1:1-8). *Hannah suffers because of the co-wife, and so does her husband, for seeing her so unhappy.*⁴⁵ Among the Bemba, the disadvantages of polygamy outweigh the advantages. For example there are quarrels and conflict sometimes between children and between wives also.

Abraham is also considered a polygamist because of Hagar. Abraham's case may rather be regarded as concubine or extra-marital relationship in search of a child rather than polygamy since Hagar was never presented as a wife. Conflict developed in Abraham's family between Sarah and Hagar (Gen 16:21). Jacob even married two sisters (Gen 29:23-30) and other concubines (Gen 30:4-9).

*The history of King David's marriage is long and complicated.*⁴⁶ David married many wives and concubines (2 Sam 5:13). His first marriage with Michal was, apparently a monogamous one. Michal saved David's life and helped him to escape from her father, Saul, who was intent upon killing him, as a political rival (1 Sam 19: 11-17). Later Saul gave Michal in marriage to someone else and David began his long series of marriages. As he gained new power, he assembled a large harem. Then occurred the incidence with Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:12). God intervenes by sending the prophet Nathan to the king to point out the gravity of the sin of his deeds. Only through the words of the prophet does the king come to realize his guilt. Like prophet Nathan. The Bemba should ensure that marriage includes moral obligation to monogamy and respect for other families.

⁴⁵ Blum, *op. cit.*, 188.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 188-93.

This story can be interpreted as a protest against polygamy itself. In his parable of the rich man with the flocks and herds, and the poor man, with one ewe lamb, Nathan clearly indicated his approval of monogamous marriage; and at the same time, implicitly criticized David's harem. David is criticized, not only for his adultery and murder, but also for taking Bathsheba as his wife. *This story of David shows that a man who starts to give in to his polygamous inclinations comes very easily to the point, where he does not any longer respect the marriage of another man.*⁴⁸ He and his house are both to suffer: because he has shown contempt for Yahweh, and has taken Bathsheba, as his wife. David has committed one sin after another. The rest of his reign is marked by difficulties and sufferings. The lives of David's children were marked by rape, revenge, murder, and bitter struggles for the right to succeed him.

Solomon was a polygamist in this patriarchal period. According to the author of Kings, Solomon had seven hundred wives of royal rank, and three hundred concubines (I Kings 11:3). Yahweh, who had already appeared to Solomon twice is angry, (I Kings 11:9) with Solomon, and announces to him that at his death the Kingdom will be divided into two.

Yahweh punishes him for letting his wives lead him astray from the true religion, and worship of Yahweh. However, the fact that there were instances of polygamy in the Old Testament does not necessarily mean God's approval of the practice.

In this patriarchal period, the Old Testament indicates a tendency toward monogamy. However, the Old Testament moral laws did not consider polygamy as sin. The laws rather indicated that in polygamous marriage, there were sinful practices in which especially wives and children suffered.

⁴⁷ Jasper G., *Polygamy in the Old Testament*; *Africa Theological Journal*, 2, February (1969), 47.

⁴⁸ Blum, *op. cit.*, 188.

The prophets do not regularly speak of the institution of marriage itself. Another institution, the covenant, is of much greater concern for them. The prophets found in marriage a *foreshadowing and testimony of God's intervention in human experience, and a sign of human response to God.*⁴⁹ However, they usually use "the image of marriage, as a means of portraying the relationship between Yahweh and Israel." The prophetic literature reveals that, *the Jewish scriptures take for granted, that among human beings the two sexes, their need for one another and their irresistible attraction for one another are God's intervention.*⁵⁰ The development led the prophets to find in marriage a foreshadowing and testimony of God's intervention in human experience, and a sign of human response to God.

Hosea's astounding insight into God's unfailing love led him to find in "his own wife's infidelity Israel's repeated rejection of Yahweh," *an insight that enabled him to remain faithful and forgiving until reconciliation was won,*⁵¹ despite the pain of his wife's infidelity (Hosea 2:21-22)." This is the value for which the prophets disliked polygamy and used the symbolism of monogamy for the basic relationship between Yahweh and the nation of Israel," as is evident in the prophets: Hosea, Jeremiah, Deutero-Isaiah and Ezekiel, who found in marriage one of the facets of analogy to describe for the people of Israel the grievousness of their episodic apostasy from the God of their fathers. The symbolism of marriage as a relationship and unity is a good expression for the Bemba in trying to realize that marriage calls for total submission to each other.

The prophets defended his position to the extent that at the post-exilic times, *monogamy had become the norm.*⁵² The split of the Israelite kingdom and the erection of two rival capitals provide the prophets with another image to describe Yahweh's love for Israel.

⁴⁹ Mackin, *op. cit.*, 232

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ William P. Roberts, Marriage: Sacrament of Hope and Challenge (U.S.A: Cincinnati, 1988), 25-26.

⁵² Julius Muthengi, "Polygamy and the Church in Africa: Historical Perspective" African Journal of Evangelical Theology, Vol. 14.2, (1995), 61.

Yahweh seems to have two spouses, in violation of the law of holiness. (Leviticus 18:18). However, this situation is not acceptable to Yahweh. In future Yahweh will have only one spouse, with whom to initiate new covenant that will embrace all human beings, including the non-Israelites, the pagans (Ezekiel 16:53-63). This future time is frequently described in terms of a marriage and a wedding banquet. Everything is happening, as if the image of a monogamous marriage is coming to light more and more. This image of an unfaithful wife, who is not forgotten, is used in other ways as well. In Isaiah 54:6, Yahweh calls Israel back. Ezekiel also recalls, how during the time in the desert, Yahweh and Israel first loved each other, and the covenant was celebrated. Later, Israel abandoned Yahweh, but the latter did not do likewise, but punished and brought Israel to repentance“(Ezekiel 16:60).

We have considered, in the life of the prophets, the understanding of marriage as a sign of Sacrament of God’s love, expressed in terms of covenant.

3.1.3. New Testament Teaching on marriage

In the New Testament again, we have fragments, not a systematic exposition of marriage. The important passages are in the Synoptic Gospels, the Gospel of John and in Pauline Literatures. In (Lk.16:18), the Pharisees asks Jesus a question about divorce. Jesus responds to the enquiry by quoting (Gen 1:27).

His reply to the Pharisees *gives a clue to Jesus’ endorsement of monogamy, and not polygamy, as the appropriate form of marriage suitable for the intensity of the witness to faith in God.*⁵³ Jesus treats marriage as a divine willed institution. That is why you cannot divorce for any course. Matthew made sure that the divine will on marriage came first and then Moses’ concession came second. This is why he cited the book of Genesis in reply to the question from the Pharisees. It was because in God’s plan while creating male and female for marriage, He willed that the marriage should be a monogamous one. On the basis of this

⁵³ Robert P. pp. cjl., 26.

property, *divorce and polygamy are excluded.*⁵⁴ Divorce was only an accident. Let no one separate. Jesus explained why divorce was wrong by putting forward the true Biblical image of marriage from the book of Genesis. The affirmation shows that He bases His stress on the permanence union of married couples to be an original plan of the creator. The narrative stresses that from a Jewish and from a Christian perspective marital union is found upon God's creative will. *The narrative intention therefore, vividly proclaim that from a Jewish and from a Christian perspective marital union is found upon God's creative will.*⁵⁵

According to Mark when Jesus was asked, in reply, he enquired from them what the law required them to do. It is different from Matthew that Jesus went straight to explain the plan of God in marriage. When Jesus had got the answer from the question he said it is because of the hardness of People's hearts. And so Jesus challenged this traditional teaching by a scriptural one. *The institution of marriage was no longer at the level of primitive ideal expressed in creation.*

*And as a result in practice the law was adapted partially to the demands of their hardness of heart.*⁵⁶ In Mark, Jesus denounces divorce, as it is not compatible with God's plan. He explained why it is not according to God's plan to divorce by citing Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:24. Jesus too appeals to Torah. However, *he goes not to Moses and Deuteronomy, but to the beginning, to the account of the first couple in Genesis 1 and in Genesis 2.*⁵⁷ In Yahwist account (Gen 2:24) the divine purpose is made explicit in the words "It is not good for a man to be alone; I will make a helper for him who is like him." God created them male and female so that the two can make a marriage. For this purpose male will leave his parents and be joined to his wife and they are no longer two but one flesh.

⁵⁴ Walsh, *op. cit.*, 318.

⁵⁵ David Noel Freedman, et al., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (U.S A: Doubleday, 1992),569.

⁵⁶ Leon Xavier Dufour, *Dictionary of the Bible Theology* (New York: The Sea Bury Press, 1973). 334.

⁵⁷ Mackin, *op. cit.*, 43.

*Jesus had known people treating marriage as a thing of this world, a thing which can blind man to vital decisions.*⁵⁸ He wished that its value should be seen in a proper perspective. In the new law Jesus is giving us in (Mk 10:1-12), there is explicit reference going beyond the law of Moses to the creative plan of Genesis, Jesus affirms the absolute character of marriage and its indissolubility. God had joined together man and woman, bestowing upon them free choice a consecration which goes beyond them. They are one flesh in His eyes. Thereafter explaining the permanence of marriage to be a divine intent from the very beginning, He affirmed that what God has joined together no human being must separate.

According to John, the first miracle Jesus worked took place in Cana during a wedding feast. *He gives new wine, the symbol of new love.*⁵⁹ The episode in Cana shows us how marriage is threatened when love is in danger of running out. With this Sacrament Jesus reveals his own help in an effective way, in order to save and strengthen the couples' love. We can also say that the miracle worked by Jesus at the beginning of his public life is the sign of the importance marriage has in God's saving plan and the mission of the church.

The passages we have examined in the Synoptic Gospels dealing with marriage, do not speak of married love primarily. They rather speak of the problems of divorce and adultery, apart from the Gospel of John.

3.1.4. THEOLOGICAL AND CANONICAL CONCEPT OF MARRIAGE

The church documents expresses that God instituted marriage and it is a Sacrament.

3.1.5. POPE LEO XIII

In his encyclical, *Arcanum divine Sapientiae*, Pope Leo XIII concentrated on the principal points of Catholic teaching. The church...teaches that matrimony is "to be held in

⁵⁸ John L. Mackenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible* (U.S.A: Bruce Publishing Company, 1965), 550.

⁵⁹ John Paul II, *A Catechism of the Creed: The Church Mystery, Sacrament and Community* (U.S.A. Pauline Publication, 1988), 169.

honor by all.” The indissolubility of marriage was the plan of God from the beginning of the world, to propagate and preserve the human race. Marriage took on a more holy permanent condition when Christ designed to elevate it to a Sacrament, presenting it as the image of his union with the church. The Bemba have not yet understood well as to why marriage is a Sacrament which may not be broken. In the on-going research, church ministers should matters relating to Christian marriage in a way that the illiterate will be able to understand.

Speaking about the origin and nature of marriage, the Encyclical Arcanum, of Leo XIII, specifies that right from the beginning of creation, this human institution has been marked through God's providence by two noble qualities, namely unity and perpetuity.⁶⁰

3.1.6. POPE PIUS XI

Pope Pius XI's encyclical *Casti Connubii* takes up much of the teaching of *Arcanum*, by continuing it, and by laying emphasis on some particular points.

...Therefore although the Sacramental element may be absent from marriage, as is the case among the unbelievers, still in such a marriage, in as much as it is a true marriage, there must remain and indeed there does remain that perpetual bond, which by divine right, is so bound up with matrimony from its institution, that it is not subject to any civil power.⁶¹

The abuses of marriage listed and excoriated were those that had been noted in *Arcanum*. Pius XI's most valuable contribution beyond that of *Arcanum* was to attempt in fuller detail an anthropology of marriage, and thus to begin to enrich the marriage in its human development. He brought the human and the divine elements in the sacrament closer together than any of his predecessors. Pope Pius XI makes a strong affirmation of the indissolubility of valid customary forms of marriage. Safeguarding the sanctity and indissolubility of established customary marriage is proclaimed by Pope Pius XI, as part of

⁶⁰ Peter M Kanyadago, *Evangelizing Polygamous Families, Canonical and African Approaches* (Nairobi: AME/CEA Gaba Publications, 1991), 64.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 87.

the Church's pastoral concern. It is in this light that we see Bemba traditional marriage valid in its own rite. The church should more and more recognize this institution of marriage. Then through research and understanding, such a marriage may be converted into a Christian marriage.

3.1.7. VATICAN II

The Vatican Council states that,

The peculiarity of Christian marriage being guarded by magisterial proclamations is therefore the elevation of the human reality to the level of saving mystery; characterized by permanency, perfect reciprocity and unity. This symbolizes basic equality in a life of freedom, depth and fulfillment in a very personal and concrete way.⁶²

The intimate union of marriage as a mutual giving of two persons, and the good of the children demand total fidelity from the spouses and require an unbreakable unity between them. The human act, "by which," as the council says, "the partners mutually surrender themselves to each other," has been raised to the dignity of a sacrament.

The sacrament shows the value of the man and woman's free consent, as a statement of their personality and an expression of mutual love. The council also said that through the sacrament Christian married couples "signify and partake of the mystery of that unity and fruitful love which exists between Christ and his church (LG 11). The use of marriage was taken up in the pastoral constitution of the Church in the modern World, *Gaudium et spes*, which recovered the biblical pattern; first, God had given a mate to man to release his solitude, then procreation followed.

We have seen from the Church teaching a gradual transformation of marriage from a secular into a Sacramental reality. Marriage has properties of indissolubility and permanence. In the fourth chapter we will look again at church teaching and Bemba traditional marriage.

⁶² Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et Spes, No. 48*. Ed. Walter M. Abbott (London: Geoffrey Chapman. 1967). 250.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.1.0. CHRISTIAN TEACHING AND BEMBA TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE

Interaction between Christian teaching and African culture is one of the most difficult pastoral problems that pastors, bishops and Episcopal conferences in central and are facing in Africa today. The process of inculturation plays an important role in Evangelization. It is recognition that, there are many elements of indigenous culture, which can enrich the doctrines of the church.

It is a fact that many Christians who are active in the church do not receive church marriage for one reason or another. It is still a widely held view that everything that belongs to African tradition is pagan and therefore evil. But this is not true; for example, there are many things of great value that could be introduced or adapted into Christian marriage without conflict with the Gospel, as we have seen among the Bemba.

We adhere to the old teaching of the Church that marriage is God's plan for human person. A union properly entered into, with full consent, by a man and a woman competent to marry one another, and publicly recognized in the society in which they live is a valid marriage in its own right. Therefore the Church, if it is to be true to its teaching, ought to recognize traditional marriage. We must distinguish between those persons married before conversion, and those marrying when they are already Christians. If we remain true to the ordinance of God we shall teach the indissolubility of all marriages, not of Church marriage only.

4.1.1. Some Values found in the Bemba traditional marriage

In marriage, a boy's relatives choose for him a girl for marriage. In some few cases, a boy may choose a girl he wishes to marry. This choice is usually made before the girl reaches the stage of puberty. Normally when such a choice has been made, the first part of the bride wealth is handed over from the boy's family to the girl's family. From this point onwards the boy then leaves all the arrangements to his parents and the extended family, and it is they

who will approach the other family for marriage negotiations. Marriage is an arrangement between two families and not only between the two individuals themselves. It is a covenant between two extended families or between two communities. This helps towards the stability of the new household. The church should aim at building upon this foundation, whereby the ministers can be visiting families to understand their way of life. Small Christian communities should be encouraged as this is a background of a Christian family. When Christians meet in small groups, they share joy and problems affecting their families.

In choosing a spouse it is important to know what kind of person he or she is. Each family tries to find out as much as possible of the person who is going to be married to the son or daughter, but also of the general background of the opposite family. The basic knowledge thus gathered helps towards the stability and happiness of the marriage. It is regrettable that marriage today is often undertaken in haste. The Church should aim at preserving this insistence on mutual knowledge and understanding, and to this end, it should discourage hasty marriages. For this reason the two future families-in-law try to get more intimate knowledge of each other. Usually a boy would have to undergo various tests in order to put his character to the proof. A good character could be seen in the politeness, in the greetings, the services rendered, in his patience and his capacity to work. When the two families are satisfied, they then sealed the covenant by interchanging gifts. The Church should use a symbol, which conveys marriage such as bangle, *icikosa*. (This is a ring worn round the wrist. This bangle is one unbroken ring, which among the Bemba symbolizes unity between the couple and the two families. The church could use give other symbols like Bible to remind them of vital passages that speaks about Christian monogamy.

Marriage, among the Bemba, has always been based on a covenant: a covenant token plays an important part. The origin of bridewealth is linked with the social pattern of the extended family and the principle of mutual responsibility and support among its members. Marriage establishes a bond not only between a girl and a boy but also between the families

to which they belong. Bridewealth is made over by the family of the boy to the family of the girl. Now as one of the advantages of the bridewealth was that, when it had been paid, the marriage was regarded as having been agreed upon and concluded by both parties and their families. Since Christianity is a covenant religion the Church should make sure that this element is not omitted in a Christian marriage. It is strongly felt that it should if possible be retained in the form of some symbol, which would lead the contract and would witness to the solemnity of the union being entered into. This symbol could be in the form of an exchange between the two partners and their families, as a present or covenant token. The Christian rite could follow the symbol. The receiving and giving of the token sealed the contract. The Bemba have developed their craft in traditional furniture and women mold pots.

Marriage serves, among other purposes, to regulate sexual relations. Premarital chastity is an ideal, the attainment of which is attempted by segregating the older boys and girls. When a girl was being initiated into her age-regiment, she was given a short course of instruction to prepare her for adulthood by selected old women. The church should insist on Christian instructions to those seeking marriage so that they understand its meaning more. The motive should be that the learners are able to understand the meaning and significance for their life. Sexual intercourse is considered proper only if the couple is married to each other. Even then its pattern is culturally determined, in that it is prohibited on certain occasions and prescribed on others. Only married women are entitled to bear children, and if an unmarried girl does so both she and her lover are punished. The Church should emphasize this ideal of chastity before marriage.

4.1.2. Some elements to be changed in the Bemba Marriage

Among the Bemba, marriage is seen in the context of the extended family for continuity of the ethnic group. Therefore emphasis in marriage is laid upon the procreation of children rather than upon interpersonal relationships. Large families are the ideal, and it is part of this reason that polygamy is practiced. Marriage is related to the perpetuation of the

lineage and personal immortality, so childlessness is seen to block the channel through which the stream of life flows. Therefore infertility and sterility bring a great strain on the stability of marriage. The fundamental justification for polygamy often lies in the general good of society and a search for a solution to a problem caused by sterility. As the procreation of children is the primary aim of marriage, the contribution of women is seen above all from this point of view. Even if it is known that it is the man who is sterile, it is often the woman who is blamed. In some Diocese there is a movement called Family Life and laywomen are carrying out tremendous work in taking care of their marriage. These women teach especially young couples on marriage related issues. This group of women is called *ifimbusa*, which means "teachers." The church should empower such women to educate especially young couples. The primary aim of marriage should be love for each other. There must be indissolubility and permanency in marriage, based on love, even when there are no children. We know it may be hard for a Bemba family to remain together for life even when there are no children. Even then we cannot propose divorce or polygamy. But if they have experienced the Word of Christ, faith and hope can sustain husband and wife.

Some marriage rituals, as we have seen, are geared towards procreation. For example if a man did not succeed in sexual intercourse, a day before marriage celebration, marriage would be dissolved. But with more practice and understanding, the Bemba will still preserve such a marriage, and take remedial measures such as seeking medical attention.

Labor force is one of the aims of polygamy in the Bemba community. The relevant tasks are portioned according to Bemba standardized division of labor. In this experience, the activities of each supplement those of the rest. Polygamy has a great advantage in this respect, for it means that more people are available for work. Again the Church should continue to teach that family life should be solely rest on love for one another. A human person matters a lot more that what he or she must contribute to the household.

Sin is whatever is contrary to the holy will of God. It is to do what God forbids, and to refuse to do what he commands. This disobedience occurs when man tries to act as creator and not as creature. God's will for marriage is monogamy. In Genesis 2:24, God says: "A man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, he does not say his "wives," the singular number implies monogamy. To join oneself to several wives is, therefore, to act against God's will for marriage. It is to disobey the Creator; it is a consequence of original sin. In the Old Testament in the story of Abraham (Genesis 21:9-21), God promised posterity to Abraham, not through Ishmael the son of Hagar, but through Isaac, Sarah's son.

In the New Testament, see Matthew 19:5, Mark 10:8. In these passages Jesus cite Gen 2:24, therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh. This word can be fulfilled only in a monogamous marriage. Polygamy is not compatible with the spirit of Christ. The challenge of the church to the modern World is to teach a high ideal of marriage, and of fidelity to one married partner.

Polygamy in itself is a sin, although the Bemba considers it as a lawful union accepted and honored by the community.

4.1.3. RECOMMENDATIONS

We affirm that monogamy is God's plan for marriage and that it is the recommendation of the Old Testament teaching of the New Testament. It is the ideal relationship for the expression of love between a man and a woman. Monogamy is the proper atmosphere within which to develop a Christian family. The Church should give itself greater agency to the task of educating its members at every level of personality for that covenant union which we call marriage. The church should foster a sense of responsibility in the choice of partners for marriage and in preparing them for married life. The church should also take

an active interest in all legislation concerning marriage, divorce and inheritance, and the rights and welfare of children.

We recommend that traditional marriages like that of the Bemba be recognized as valid marriage. Partners to such unions should not be married again upon conversion or reconciliation to the Church; but rather that their marriage be recognized by the church and registered with prayer and thanksgiving. The church should also show some symbolic recognition at holy baptism that the parties are incorporated to Christ in their marriage. The methods should be adopted for integrating customary Christian marriage rites. The church should try to discourage excess expenditure at weddings. Sometimes such expenditure leaves the married couple bankrupt at the end of the celebration. It may also discourage those Christians who may not afford such expenditures. It is true that church weddings sometimes tend to be a bit more expensive compared to traditional weddings. Occasionally church wedding become expensive demanding such costly special clothes, sometimes such expensive entertainment of guests. The church should teach true simplicity in these things. This in fact is one of the reasons, which discourages some Christians from undertaking church marriage. The traditional exchanges be "Christianized" into a token of the covenant between the partners and their families, as part of the integration of customary with Christian marriage rites.

The entering into a polygamous marriage by a Christian, whether through the normal channels of giving a token, or through inheritance, or gift, is an offence against the laws of the Church. It is the responsibility of the church, being guided by the word of God through the Holy Spirit to seek the way, which on the one hand will not weaken her standards of faith and practice.

The contemporary Bemba should jealously safeguard their cultural heritage and performs different rites in their life. The Bemba have come into contact with Christianity which formerly did not exist in this ethnic group. With the acceptance of Christianity the

church is becoming a dominant religious unity. In order for the Bemba to profess Christianity they have to let go of some values which conflict with Christianity. At the same time, the church should discern on those values, which can enrich Christianity.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

In a human person faith and culture are essential components. This gives an identity to a person. Faith and culture prompt one to make life long decisions. Each person practices what has been revealed to her or him in his or her own culture. In this respect, Christians welcome and profess their faith in their own cultural situation, after they encounter the Word of God. It is important, therefore that there should be a continuous experience between the Bemba traditional marriage practices and Christianity. This will enable the church in this ethnic community to grow and mature.

It is true that Bemba traditional marriage, especially polygamy, is complex. However, we appeal for further research, reflection and debate on the issue. Ecclesiastical authority has to acknowledge and accept the fact that tradition marriage is culturally and socially accepted. We point out that various pastoral approaches should be found. It is the authentic Christian witness and effective pastoral action that can conserve and promote the Christian ideal. There should be more pastoral articles, books, combined research programs, workshops and seminars in recognition of this fact. Parish priests and church leaders could find means by which these suggestions could be made available to the faithful. There seems to be a struggle to defend Christian monogamy from the other conflicting forms of marriage, such as polygamy. The church ministers should continue researching and analyze each case of polygamy to determine the causes. Otherwise it will be difficulty for us to only defend Christian monogamy without understanding the underlying causes of polygamy. This encounter between the Bemba traditional marriage and Christianity should be mutual and enriching to the Bemba the Gospel message.

The Bemba respect the institution of marriage like most communities in Africa. Although marriage is important among the Bemba, we would like to suggest that the Gospel should continue challenging some practices such as polygamy, despite the fact that some Bemba might still find some of those marriage practices good. With the coming of

Christianity, the Bemba must review marriage in a different way. Marriage should be more liberating and empowering to both husband and wife and centered on mutual love. In this way the Bemba traditional marriage becomes a fountain and the channel through which God imparts his Grace to the couples and all others.

Furthermore in order for the Bemba traditional marriage to become the means by which they respond to God's call, we suggest that Bemba Christians should manifest their faith by marrying in the church and having their marriages blessed. It is not justifiable why most of the Bemba claim they are Christians yet some of them do not participate fully in the sacraments of the church. They will cling to some of the Bemba practices, which are not compatible with Christianity. For this reason, all the Bemba are challenged to become agents of evangelization in their culture, so that Christianity can grow and mature.

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