

**SCHOOL OF MISSION AND THEOLOGY
STAVANGER**

**THE THEOLOGICAL CHALLENGE TO POLYGAMY
IN
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
IN CAMEROON**

**Thesis submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Degree of
Master of Philosophy in Theology**

**BY
MOGONAN GONDJE**

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

I.1 Motivations and aims

Marriage is an important issue inside human communities. According to the report of the book of Genesis¹, God, in the beginning has created man and woman and ask them to live together. Through centuries, Church's beliefs recognize monogamy as the ideal marriage established by God. In this sense, Christian man or woman should only have one wife or one husband. But the Churches in Africa in general and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, in particular is still facing the phenomenon of polygamy, as a form of marriage customary and legally accepted in the society. John Mbiti agrees it when he said: "Polygamy has evolved as an accepted, honorable and respected form of marriage"². In order to fight against this unbiblical practice, missionaries and church's leaders has applied a strong church's discipline. This strategy seems powerless. The problem of polygamy has not been solved by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon after more than eighty five years since the arrival of the first missionaries³.

In Cameroon's legislation, there is no law against polygamy. It is considered as one of the two valid forms of marriage which take place. During the civil marriage, the couple is asked to choose between polygamy and monogamy. And having a look on this same law, adultery is punished. When one citizen try or has sex with a married person, they, both have to be put into jail because they have committed adultery. Adultery is strongly condemned by civil and social laws while polygamy is accepted as a valid marriage. According to the Bible, is polygamy adultery or a sin? We know that many tribes in Cameroon have a very strict sexual morality. Polygamy was allowed,

¹ Gen. 2.

² John, S. Mbiti. *Love and Marriage in Africa* (London: Longman Group Limited, 1973), 189.

³ Engelbert, Mveng. *Histoire du Cameroun* (Yaoundé : Centre d'Édition et de Production de Manuels et d'Auxiliaires de l'Enseignement, 1974), 230.

but adultery was severely punished and divorce practically unknown. And nowadays, another form of polygamy spread more and more in the society since the church seems strict.

According to the policy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, people engaged into the plural marriage should no longer remain members of the church and are not allowed to participate to Holy Communion and to receive baptism even their children until they give up living in such sinful state. Members of the church adopt a third form of marriage which is commonly called in the society “*deuxième bureau*”⁴: it means the second office. It is a new form of polygamy that one can find in the church among leaders (pastors, elders, deacons). And Christians are still living according to the law of the church with one wife but try to multiply wives that they hide. This practice helps them to remain a true member of the church because if the church knows that one Christian is polygamist, he has to be excluded. There is a lot of hypocrisy among Christians and a lot of hidden, illegal polygamy or rather adultery. And also, marriage in the Church becomes rare because many people are afraid of Church blessing of the marriage and according to them; it is not possible to keep the promises they have to say during the celebration in front of the community and before God. Many people in the Church agree with this author when he said that polygamy in African context works happily in some cases and fails in others⁵.

Polygamy remains a cultural practice and is perpetuated. People living in the rural areas are not satisfied with the practice of monogamy brought by missionaries. Mbinan goes not too far by saying that monogamy is a form of marriage and is considered as the western civilization imposed by missionaries⁶. It is difficult to adopt monogamy as the Bible teaches. There is no difference between the attitude of the churches and the Government in Western in this particular issue which is marriage. Monogamy is accepted. This makes the practice well propagated. The church is generally strongly antipolygamic, but the legislation in Cameroon is another matter.

⁴ The common Cameroonian way to call other wives of a husband who practices non official polygamy. Instead to have them in his compound, he tries to hide them in order to be safe from the church policies. This type of polygamy is found almost among Christians. *Deuxième bureau* is the French group of word which can be translated in English by ‘second office’. That means that the husband who has not the consent of his legitimate wife to contract this marriage, always try to lie to his wife that he is working when one could find that he is absent a home.

⁵ Mbiti, 195.

⁶ Mbinan is a Traditional chief in the village called *Mbitom*, 12 km to *Touboro* locality in Cameroon..

Here polygamy is recognized and acknowledged through a legal procedure. This creates another difficulty and makes weak the impression that monogamy, from European point of view, is the only possible and accepted type of marriage.

Our aim is thus to investigate the new form of polygamy found among Christians and what actions must be taken to fight against hypocrisy. As Mbiti John has written: “the church and Christians spent nearly all their energy condemning polygamy and forgetting now to assist even members of the monogamous to realize more fully the ideals of monogamy”⁷. This study could help the Church to be opened to these polygamists who are already excluded and to modify the policy against polygamy which is already existed. The purpose of this thesis is also to acquire knowledge in order to take care of children born outside the official marriage and also to offer the Church in Cameroon that contribution of theological, moral and pastoral reflection without which the propagation of the Gospel would lack an essential aid. It is an attempt to address one burning pastoral problem. The spread of HIV-AIDS could be reduced if Christians adopt a new way of life according to Holy Scriptures.

I.2 Overview of the situation

In Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, one solution has to be found in order to end the situation which happens and still a great challenge. There are three categories of official polygamists, those who are excluded by the church according to the church’s discipline. One category is constituted by polygamists who loose their status as member, realized that it is not important to go to church’s meeting on Sunday because, it is a waste of time since they are great sinners and destined to God’s condemnation. According to them, to loose the membership is synonym to not be accepted by God. The second group tries to attend the Sunday’s services but they refuse to give offering because, according to their feelings, God cannot accept what sinners offer to him. Their presence is with doubt: maybe despise their situation of sinners God could have mercy on them. The last category is those who recognize their situation as sinners and rejected by the church. They try to compensate the pains they have made to God by being present to all ecclesial meeting, by participating in all activities, by serving and offering

⁷ Mbiti, 189.

more than ordinary members of the church. In some villages, it is difficult to establish the office of elders and deacons since all those who are in Church are polygamists.

This way of life of many polygamists put in doubt their salvation. One question has to be asked, if polygamy is seen like a sin, is it also forgiveness to such sin or is it no place for polygamists in the kingdom of God? The Church loses more and more authority in rural areas because of the challenge to islamization. Many village's chiefs, according to the culture that occurs through century, has to be polygamists according the high rang they occupy in the society. And it is easier for them to become Muslim than to be a true member of the church. Islam remains the barrier to the fight against polygamy. Islam is spreading rapidly among polygamists. For them; it is better to be a true Muslim with several wives than to be an excluded member in the Church. This goes together with the concept of shame in many Cameroonian cultures. To appreciate the tendency of almost all men to become polygamous, one polygamist has said that if there is one church which is opened to polygamist and accepts them as full member, the existing churches will disappear.

I.3 Methods

This study is based on Systematic theology. The material will be concentrated on theological books concerning polygamy in Africa and especially in Cameroon. Oral interviews among church's leaders, Christians and official authorities will be important for this study. They are aware and agree that they will be quoted by names. I have to build this study also on my experience from numerous verbal discussions with common people during six years I work in Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon as pastor because this study is an effort to address an issue I confront in my ministry almost every day.

I.4 Dispositions

This thesis is divided into six chapters.

The first is an introductory chapter which presents the articulations of this study.

In the second chapter, I will present the context of my study: Cameroon and the Evangelical Lutheran Church, cultures found, the missions and missionaries and the relationship between the state and the church.

The third will put focus on the biblical understanding of marriage. And I have to show how the Old Testament is important in Christian ethics.

Chapter four will be reserved to the presentation of polygamy in Cameroon in general and in Evangelical Lutheran Church in particular and how missionaries have dealt with the question during the arrival of the gospel among people living in Cameroon.

In the fifth chapter, we will show how the church still facing the recurrent problem of polygamy today, the question of church disciplines and pastoral care.

The last chapter has the task to look for the new approach: how could the church will do to integrate existed polygamous couple and how to end the hypocrisy which destroys the testimony of the church concerning evangelization?

I.5 Definition of polygamy

According to the Dictionary, polygamy means plurality of marriage of one man to two or more woman⁸. The dictionary definition of polygamy is that it is the custom or habit of having more than one male or female partner. The word polygamy is a comprehensive term which embraces various types of marriage unions that are not monogamous. If one has to specify a particular variation of polygamous marriages, then one has to use the words polygyny or polyandry. Polygyny is the custom of having a husband common to several wives, and polyandry is the opposite of this. Polygyny is

⁸ Hornby, A.S., Cowie, A.P. *Oxford Advanced Learner's dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1954, 53.

the more prevalent form of polygamy in Cameroon, and consequently there is a tendency to ignore polyandry, and to use the word polygamy mainly with reference to polygyny. In popular usage, moreover, the words polygamy and polygyny end to be interchangeable because they refer to the system of plural marriage which occur in Africa in general and in Cameroon in particular. So discussion of polygamy in this paper will be concerned mainly with the polygynous type of polygamy. Polygamy is the most practiced form of marriage in Cameroonian societies.

Chapter Two

CONTEXT OF OUR STUDY

II.1 Presentation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the country Cameroon

II.1.1 Geographical situation

Cameroon is situated by the Gulf of Guinea on the west coast of Africa. The name of the country derives from the term used for the *Wouri* River by Portuguese explorers. Reaching the Cameroon coast near the modern port city of *Douala* around 1472, those explorers named the river *Rio Dos Camaroes* (River of Prawns) after the variety of crayfish they found there.⁹ Cameroon shared borders with Nigeria, Chad, Central African Republic, Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon. The capital, Yaoundé, is in the center region. According to the recent statistic, the population is estimated to twenty millions. Cameroon is known as the hinge of Africa.

The territory of Cameroon has an area of 475 000 square kilometers. Cameroon is one of the countries located along the West African coast and this exposure made her one of the first countries to be visited by missionaries in the nineteenth century. At the time that the Christian missionaries arrived in Cameroon, the more than two hundred ethnic groups of Cameroon were worshippers of the African traditional religion. This religion was characterized by sacrifices, belief in the Supreme Being. After many years of propagation of their ideology, Islam and Christianity operated freely throughout the country. According to the recent statistics, there is approximately forty percent of the population Christian, twenty percent Muslim and forty percent practiced traditional religions or no religion¹⁰. Among Christians, one can find Catholics and Protestants. Christians are concentrated in the South and West. And Muslims were found in large numbers in the North. In big cities, there are significant populations of every religion, with mosques and churches often located near each other. Traditional religions were

⁹ Mveng, 74.

¹⁰ "Statistique de l'appartenance religieuse au Cameroon," *L'Effort Camerounais*, Newspaper of the National Bishops' Conference of Cameroon, February 1999.

practiced in rural areas throughout the country but rarely were practiced in public in towns.

Roman Catholic, Muslim, Presbyterian, Baptist, Baha'I Faith, Methodist, Evangelic Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh's Day Adventist, are missionary groups which were present throughout the country.

II.1.2 Cultures

The culture of Cameroon is very interesting and unique in many ways because there is a multitude of ethnic groups. It has over two hundred tribes and languages and three Europeans colonial traditions: German, French and British¹¹. In this sense, it represents the meeting place of English-speaking and French-speaking. The linguistic and ethnic diversity is remarkable. Cameroon has distinct regional, cultural, religious and political traditions as well as ethnic variety. There are many chiefdoms each ruled by a king. Most of these chiefdoms have patrilineal system. Polygamy and fertility are important cultural values. The general impression is that men and women in the primitive community and now accept polygamy as a sound form of marriage. A sense of a common national culture has been created through shared history, schooling, national holidays and symbols, and enthusiasm for soccer. Living conditions are characterized by extreme regional differences. The Evangelical Lutheran Church has occupied most northern part of Cameroon but now the church tries to reach other cities in the south. The traditional subordination of women in Cameroonians society has persisted despite legal efforts to grant them equal rights with men. Polygamy is permitted by law. It is culturally accepted, as a legitimate form of marriage. And the marriage is still a contract between two families. Women suffer legal disabilities in many areas, but particularly in regard to inheritance, divorce and education. For many Cameroonians, polygamy is an old custom which has to be preserved.

There are basically three common ways in which Cameroonians marry. The first is the traditional one. In this form of marriage, there is a gathering of the two families involved in the marriage in front of the elders of the community. The man having chosen his wife or his parents will pay her father a certain amount of money requested by him for bride wealth. This practice is called a dowry system, and it is practiced by

¹¹ Mark, W. Delancey. *Cameroon, Dependence and Independence* (London : Westview Press, 1989), 8.

almost all tribes. The difference sets in the amount to give to the family-in-law. This varies from one ethnic group to another. It is important to consider how people perceive the legal status of traditional marriage. In order to make a marriage to take place, it needs the agreement of both families. It is one step in the process of marriage. But, according to the law of the Republic of Cameroon, this traditional marriage is considered as being legally inadequate and therefore insecure. The official marriage certificate is required for married couples.

The marriage by civil law is the second step. People are free to marry by civil rites. In this form of marriage, the man and the woman are married by the Meyer. To show that the couple agrees to share love and to live together, one certificate signed by them, the witnesses, the members of the families and the state officer is given to them. The certificate constitutes a legal evidence of their married status. There is no reason other than pragmatic one that motivates people to attain a legal marriage certificate. Couples who reach this step are generally Christian leaders and those who are working in the government.

The last step is the Church marriage or church's blessing. Although this form of marriage, unless carried out by a legal marriage officer, is not legally recognized by the authorities. It is dependent of the traditional and civil marriage. The document given by the civil officer is an essential one. Church marriage is always regarded as an almost extravagance.

Traditional religions are followed by around forty percent of populations. Islam is well spread in the three northern regions. The Churches are strongest in Southern Cameroon. In the Central and northern parts of the country, Christians have faced resistance from Islam.¹²

¹² Eyongetah, Mbuagbaw and Robert Brain. *A History of the Cameroon* (London: Longman Group Limited, 1974), 32.

II.1.3 Missions and missionaries

The first Christian missionaries in Cameroon were from the London Baptist Missionary society who arrived in Cameroon in 1845. These first missionaries came under the leadership of Alfred Saker. In 1866, he ordained the first Cameroonian pastor, George Nkwe, a native Bamileke. The Missionary group that came immediately after the Baptists were the American Presbyterians who together with the Baptist planted the first seeds of Christianity in Cameroon¹³.

The first attempt of the Catholic Church to come to Cameroon was on 11th November 1883 when Fathers Davezac and Bichet (Holy Ghost Missionaries) from Gabon came to Cameroon in search of new lands to preach the Gospel but this attempt was not successful because of the larger presence of the Germans in the country and Bismarck's hatred for Jesuit and affiliated societies¹⁴.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon was founded by two missions: the Norwegian Missionary Society and the Sudan Mission led by missionaries from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. Sudan Mission was the work of the American Adolphus Eugene Gunderson, Norwegian citizen of origin. He was Lutheran, but worked in Nigeria from 1912 to 1916. During this time, he felt the call of God to preach the Gospel in Cameroon. A missionary work was begun *Mboula* and *Binako*. These missions have worked hard to establish what we call today the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon.

Their task was to preach the Gospel of Jesus in order to make new Christians. Those who have been converted to the new religion have to change their way of life. This made a tension between the local cultures and what the Christianity has brought. Churches have been built and now the church covered nine of the ten regions of Cameroon. But Christianity is closely linked with the colonial history of the country. The beginning of the mission was difficult both for people found in Cameroon and for missionaries. Their cultures were different. The missionaries were very strict to baptize candidates. They never agreed to baptize a polygamist or other candidates whose conduct and private life are not conformed to the gospel. Christians remained under the

¹³ Mveng, 105-107.

¹⁴ Louis, Ngongo. *Histoire des Forces Religieuses au Cameroun, De la première Guerre Mondiale à l'indépendance (1916-1955)*, (Paris : Karthala 1982), 16

control of the missionaries, the elders and deacons. It was often the case that one of them was put under discipline. This means that he was excluded from communion for six or twelve months depending on the case. Adultery, drunkenness and murder were the most frequent mistakes. Deacons had the task of resolving disputes between Christians. Missionaries in General were strongly against the use of music and traditional instruments because they thought it was the work of Satan. In *Mboula*, only organ was used in worship.¹⁵

Many factors were behind the success of the Christian missions in Cameroon. First, there was lack of proper organization among the Cameroonian traditional religions. Secondly, the early missionaries observed that Cameroonians were open-minded on religious matters and many of them readily accepted Christianity. Thirdly, many people welcomed the new educational system and Christianity as a religion of the new age. Fourthly, missionaries laid special emphasis on education and they also trained many catechists who helped in the mission. Finally, the missionaries have started to learn the language of the people they were ministering to and also appreciate the good in them and work with them¹⁶.

II.1.4 Relationship between the state and the church

In January 1st, 1960, Cameroon became independent. He has adopted his first Constitution in 1960. And with the Law N° 96-06 of the 18th January 1996, this Constitution has been amended. The aim of the Constitution is to guarantee the rights of every citizen and to present how the country has to be organized or structured. In the Preamble of the Constitution¹⁷ of the Republic of Cameroon, it is declared that the State shall be secular. This neutrality and independence of the State in respect of all religions shall be guaranteed, freedom of religion and worship shall be guaranteed. This means that Cameroon has adopted the secular principle. This principle is an imperative in a multi-religious society. The country is neutral and has no consideration for any religion. Every religion is considered as an association and has to follow rules about any kind of association. In Cameroon, no denomination could be erected to the State

¹⁵ Lode, Kâre. *Appelés à la liberté, Histoire de l'Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne de Cameroun*, (Amstelveen : Imrocep Edition, 1990), 23

¹⁶ Ngongo, 132.

¹⁷ The first Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon was adopted on February 21st, 1960.

religion. The Government is said be "secular", "neutral" to any religion. This does not mean that it is built against religion. The Cameroonian Government remained secular but believing.

The Constitution of Cameroon provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. Government policy contributes to the generally free practice of religion. The country is generally characterized by a high degree of religious tolerance. There were no reports of social abuses and discriminations based on religious belief or practice. The Law on Religious Congregations governs relations between the Government and religious groups. The government had granted freedom of worship to all religious sects, but the practice should be exercised within the limit of the law of the land. The MINATD¹⁸ must approve and register religious groups in order for them to function legally. It is illegal for a religious group to operate without official recognition, but the law prescribes no specific penalties. Several religious denominations operate primary and secondary schools. Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. As a result the citizens are free to practice any religion of their own choice.

Cameroon is declared to be secular state. In this situation how can the church assume his role of being the national conscience, especially in matters of cultural deviances allowed by the State's law? Church and state are for different purposes. The government is to keep law and order in society. Without this civil order, no society can exist at all. The role of the church is to contribute to the building of value systems upon which the human society may be built. The church has also the responsibility of offering prayers for the state's leaders. So the church has to serve the state and still independent. The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The State at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

There is no official state religion. Christian and Muslim religious holidays are celebrated as national holidays. These include Good Friday, Ascension, Assumption Day, Christmas Day, the Feast of the Lamb (Muslim), and the End of Ramadan (Muslim). The regulation on Religious Congregations governs relations between the

¹⁸ The Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization of Cameroon in charge of organizing the country.

Government and religious groups. Religious groups must be approved by and registered with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization to function legally. There were no reports that the State refused to register any group; however, the process can take a number of years. It is illegal for a religious group to operate without official recognition, but the law prescribes no specific penalties. This is evidenced by the nowadays' proliferation within the big towns of what one can call sects, but that their leaders claim are subgroups of some Protestant denominations. Few of those are registered, and all of them operate freely. Although official recognition confers no general tax benefits; it allows religious groups to receive real estate as tax-free gifts and legacies for the conduct of their activities. To register, a religious group must fulfill the legal requirement to qualify as a religious congregation. The file must include the request for authorization, a copy of the group's charter describing planned activities, and the names and respective functions of the group's officials.

According to MINAT statistics released in 2002, there are thirty-eight officially registered denominations, most of which are Christian. There are numerous unregistered small religious groups that operate illegally but freely. The State does not register traditional religious groups, stating that the practice of traditional religion is a private concern observed by members of a particular ethnic or kinship group or the residents of a particular locality. Missionary groups are present in Cameroon and operate. They required the same registration for domestic religious groups¹⁹. The church remains sufficiently independent of all political systems. There is a friendly relationship between church and state. The church and state can all the same work together in the task of building societies. And the church recognizes that the administration of public affairs belongs to the state. Therefore, it is no interference in politics for the church to warn the state that unrighteousness on public matters will bring calamity to the people. In the past, government officials have disapproved of and questioned criticism of the State by religious institutions and leaders; however, there were no reports that government officials used force to suppress such criticism. The church has a message from God which must be proclaimed whether people like it or

¹⁹ Informant Viang Mekala, Subdivisional Officer State Representative Administrator in Touboro, translated from French to English by Magonan Gondje.

not. The officers of the church have no official standing in matters of the government and state officials have no special status within the church.

But, every citizen has the duty to follow the law of the government. When it comes to the issue of marriage, no legislation in Cameroon is against polygamy. For example the marriage codes represent an ingenious compromise with customary laws. The law recognizes two distinct types of marriage: the monogamous and the polygamous marriages. The customary laws which permit polygamy were strongly supported. In order to eliminate any conflict between civil and religious law, even Christian marriages should be recognized as potentially polygamous. According to authorities, monogamy is considered as a foreign western custom drove by missionaries who are against the traditional African way of polygamy.

At the end of these analyses, there is no doubt that Cameroon remains one of the African countries which continues to struggle with many cultural problems like polygamy. But what is the biblical understanding of marriage?

Chapter Three

THE BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF MARRIAGE

The Bible is the book of God's dealings with men. There, we see how he talked to people, how he treated them and how they responded to him. A first remark is necessary to underline: the Bible is not primarily an ethic manual and less a Christian ethics manual because it is not every figure in the Bible is an example. It is first the testimony of the beneficial action of the living God in the history of men, the history of his people in particular. It is about all that human beings must do or not do in order to obey the law of God. If we are interested in men and women of the Bible, this is not first to find first ethical examples to imitate or to keep, but to see how the True God was revealing his presence in their live. So men and actions are only partners with whom God works in order to maintain the world. In this chapter we will explore the concept of marriage in the Old Testament and then we will focus on this important topic as it is presented in the New Testament. Mainly we will look at what the Bible says about marriage, about married life between husband and wife. Key words like celibacy, divorce and adultery involved in the marital relationship will not be left behind. We shall see what man and woman are meant to be for one another in the plan God has made from the beginning.

III.1 Marriage in the Old Testament

The Old Testament is essential when we want to understand God through the history of humanity. Every human culture in the world has it own set of customs and rules concerning marriage. What does God have to say in the Old Testament about marriage? Since it was God himself who created mankind as male and female, and since it was God who joined them together in marriage as it is written in the Bible: God said, "It is

not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”²⁰ and“ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”²¹ »

From the beginning, marriage was the idea of God. It was not man’s idea. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia defined marriage as that lifelong and exclusive state in which a man and a woman are wholly committed to live with each other in sexual relationship under conditions normally approved and witnessed to by their social group or society²². The two first chapters of the book of Genesis presented the background of the marriage as God wants it to be. We are told:

God blessed them and said to them, « Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground. (Gen. 1:28)

In the second story we can read:

*So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleeps and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said,
This is now bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh
She shall be called woman
For she was taken out of man. (Gen. 2:21-23)*

The first text tells us that God created human beings. He made them like him. He made them man and woman and gave them to be fruitful and be master of all creatures. The second text explains that a man is made for companionship; it is not good for him to be alone. Man and woman are equal in God’s sight. They will leave their own family and will join together, one man, one wife. This is God’s plan. Marriage was established by God before all other human institutions. This shows us that marriage is the foundation of human society. Then comes this conclusion: “For this

²⁰ Gen. 2:18

²¹ Gen. 1 :27

²² Geoffrey, W. Bromiley. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Grand Rapids, Mich. : Eerdmans, 261

reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh”²³. The union that a married couple forms is the basis for a new life and a new existence. The man does not simply join his wife to himself, in such a way that she becomes his servant, or an instrument in his hand. When man rejected what God has said, he always meets with difficulties and problems. Many actors in the Old Testament seem to do the opposite of God’s plan. There are many stories in the Old Testament about the marriage. When we take these stories together, we find that there is a considerable difference between God’s prescription and mankind’s practice. For this reason, we will need to distinguish between the divine will in marriages and Old Testament marriages as they are illustrated. Our next task is to have a look on different forms of marriages which happened in the Old Testament.

III.1.1 Forms of marriage in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, we have a patriarchal structure. It is important to note that in Hebrew culture, society was built on the family, and the family in turn on the institution of marriage. In this society, man has supremacy. He could decide to have more than one wife, he could divorce her but she could not divorce him²⁴. The ideal marriage in Old Testament society was a monogamous one, one man for one woman and woman for one man. The story of the creation makes this point by asking a man to abandon his parents and cleave with his wife (not wives). But this prescription has been violated by many men whom God used in Bible times. Some of them were polygamists.

III.1.1.1 Polygamy of prestige

This form of polygamy is the practice of men who occupied leadership positions and who were wealthy.

The most well known is that practiced by the Kings of Jerusalem. Solomon here beats all records, it has "seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines and his wives led him astray"²⁵, figure perhaps exaggerated by deuteronomist author of this book have to aggravate the unfaithfulness of Solomon to

²³ Gen. 2 :24

²⁴ Bromiley , 262

²⁵ 1 Kings 11: 3

better explain his punishment by the Schism. And also in another book²⁶, it is mentioned about sixty Queens, there may be, and eighty concubines and virgins beyond number of Solomon.

His son Rehoboam will still have its eighteen women and sixty concubines court by which it produced twenty-eight sons and sixty daughters²⁷. His successor King Abiyam takes fourteen women and generating twenty-two sons and sixteen daughters²⁸.

This Royal practice becomes customary that the biblical texts have more need to talk about. The book of second Chronicles which stipulated: “Joash did what was right in the eyes of the Lord all the years of Jehoiada the priest. Jehoiada chose two wives for him, and he had sons and daughters²⁹”, breaks the silence by revealing that the senior priest of Jerusalem ensures available two women to the King Joash. By an oracle of Jeremiah³⁰, we know that the last King of Jerusalem Zedekiah has several women and many children.

Before Solomon, we are well informed about the marriage of David, which we know by name eight women: first Michal, daughter of King Saul and gave him no children and six other women, whose wise Abigail³¹. Their official list serves to legitimize the order of succession of the sons of the King³². Finally comes the Bathsheba, and the young Avishag who was to warm the King in his old age. Unlike Solomon, the number of women is not blamed to David. The history of David’s marriages is long and complicated. His first marriage with Michal was, apparently, a monogamous one. She saved David’s life and helped him to escape from her father, Saul, who was intent up on killing him, as a political rival. Later, Saul gave Michal in marriage to someone else and David began his long series of marriages.

After David, Saul, who has not shined, has a wife and later a concubine³³. Before the establishment of the kingship in Israel parts of records kept by the book of judges attest that some of the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel League imposed by

²⁶ Song of Songs 6: 8

²⁷ 2 Chronicles 11: 21

²⁸ 2 Chronicles 13: 21

²⁹ 2 Chronicles 24: 3

³⁰ Jeremy 38: 23

³¹ 1 Samuel 18: 20-27

³² 2 Samuel 3: 2-5

³³ 2 Samuel 3: 7

the number of their wives and their children: Gideon had "seventy sons of his blood, because it was a lot of women"³⁴.

All these texts attest the custom of polygamy in Israel, prestige at least post-royal and royal period.

III.1.1.2 The polygamy of necessity

I call this second form of polygamy in the Old Testament "bi-gyny" because it is the case of a man who takes a second wife beside the first, more rarely a third (tri-gyny). Old Testament knows nine cases of this "bi - or tri-gyny". Before going into details, we have to recognize that Hebrew marriage was from the beginning essentially monogamous but since a man needed a male heir he could marry another wife if the first wife was childless.

Apart the two wives of Lamech, we recall Abraham with Sarah and his concubines Hagar and Keturah³⁵. The classic case of bi-gyny is Abraham. The son of the second wife is not what God had in view. Jacob had got married to Leah and Rachel³⁶, Esau with three wives³⁷, Elkanah, the father of Samuel, with Hannah and Peninnah³⁸. His bi-gyny was explicitly attested. Although the biblical text does not explicitly say, sterility of Hannah is most likely the cause of the bi-gyny of Elkanah. We are told that Hannah has no child, while Peninnah, the second wife has several. Nevertheless, despite the fact that she had presented him with no heirs, Elkanah loved Hannah more than Peninnah according to the report of the first book of Samuel: "But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the Lord had closed her womb"³⁹.

All in all, looking at these lists of polygamists, one is led to the conclusion that polygamy may have been limited to men who occupied leadership positions or who had some other claim to distinction, as we have said above.

Reading more closely the story of all these households, it is clear that in most instances of polygamy, there are numerous problems according to this status chosen by

³⁴ Judges. 8: 30

³⁵ Genesis 16 ; 25 :1-2

³⁶ Genesis 29 :15-30

³⁷ Genesis 26 :34 ;36 :2 ;28 :9,

³⁸ 1 Samuel 1 :2

³⁹ 1 Samuel 1 :5

these men in order to satisfy their need. Witness the conflict between Hagar and Sarah, or Rachel's envying of Leah's fertility or the frustration of Esau's parents, or the liquidation of Gideon's seventy sons by Abimelech, his son by concubine, or Peninnah's provocation of Hannah, or David's in-house squabbling and treachery among half-brothers and half-sisters, or Salomon's forfeiture of his empire.

III.1.1.3 Levirate marriage

This form of marriage allowed a man to receive his deceased brother's property and manage it for the widow. He has to keep the family property intact. If the deceased brother left no male children, then the surviving brother was expected to take the deceased's wife. Any son born of this relationship to the widow would be counted as the dead brother's heir, who would then be expected to continue the family line⁴⁰. Levirate practice extended beyond immediate brothers to other relatives; for example Boaz took Ruth as his wife after a closer kinsman waived his right to her⁴¹.

In other words, even though polygamy was accepted as a way of life, the writers of the Old Testament do not hide the many troubles it can bring to family life. It makes life bitter. It causes people to be set against one another and to hate each other. It gives birth to envy and anger. There is injustice towards the children and hostility and jealousy between them. But it is only the coming of Christ that man will get the full meaning of God's wish for mankind. So we can say that while allowing polygamy for some time, God was waiting for man to come to a better understanding of what he, God, wants marriage to be.

It is taken as evident that that the Genesis accounts of creation, and of life in the garden, depict monogamy as something intended by God from the beginning. And we can see some Old Testament's actors like Isaac and Joseph, who have chosen to live the will of God, how their life has been blessed. For Isaac, the son of Abraham, and the heir to the divine promise, seems living a happy life with Rebekah. Isaac claimed her to be her sister, instead of his wife. Polygamy is problematical even in the Old Testament, because, it somehow implies adultery. Polygamy is not the will of God. The Bible personalities who practiced polygamy violated God's commands. Since he provided

⁴⁰ Deuternom 25 :5-10.

⁴¹ Ruth 4 :5

one woman for one man at the creation, polygamy is not the same thing as adultery. The truth is that God allowed Old Testament's polygamists to suffer the consequences for taking more than one wife. This can be seen in the life of Abraham:

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar; so she said to Abram, "The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her." Abram agreed to what Sarai said. So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. Then Sarai said to Abram, "you are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the Lord judge between you and me. "Your servant is in your hands", Abram said. "Do with her whatever you think best." Then Sarai ill-treated Hagar; so she fled from her. (Gen. 16:1-6)

The Bible was gradually revealing God's preference for monogamy. It starts in the Old Testament and the definitive step in this evolutionary process is found only in the New Testament. We can now look to the New Testament. We must not forget that the Old Testament in itself is not sufficient to give a definitive answer on any major aspect of revealed doctrine such as marriage. It has often been said by biblical scholars that the Old Testament should be used as the basis for the interpretation of the New Testament and that the New Testament is a commentary of the Old Testament.

III.2 Marriage in the New Testament

There is relatively little statement on marriage in the New Testament. This should not lead us to think that it was not seen as an important aspect of man's life. The reason is that God's plan and God's purpose for marriage are already spelled out in the Old Testament as we have seen above. Christ will give a new emphasis to it. Here, we will show the statement of Jesus on marriage in the synoptics' periscope, the point of view of Paul and other pastoral letters on this subject. To be clearer, we wish to discover if Christ or the New Testament writer give any affirmation about marriage.

III.2.1 Jesus' teaching on marriage in the four gospels

In the Gospels the most important passages, dealing with marriage, do not speak of married love, primarily, but rather, the problem of divorce and adultery. First, we see Christ sharing in the joy and the happy celebration of a wedding feast in Cana. There, we are told, he worked his first sign as God's special messenger. He changed water into wine so that the joy of the feast be not spoiled by a lack of wine⁴².

In his teachings, Jesus tried to go back to what is said in the Old Testament:

In the beginning he [God] made them male and female. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and will be joined to his wife, and the two will be one flesh, so that they are no longer two but one flesh”⁴³. And then he add his own word of command based on what was implied but not made explicit in the ancient biblical texts, “Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate. (Mark 10:9)

Jesus thus taught that marriage was a divine institution and was blessed by God. It was to be monogamous, lifelong, united by God that man and woman are no longer two but one. The issue of divorce is practically forbidden by Jesus. So he showed his position when he was conversing with the Pharisees, who asked about the issue of divorce:

Haven't you read, “he replied that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female; and said, for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh? (Matt 19:4-5)

The ideal marriage relationship of one man one wife is established in this passage. That means what the New Testament says about marriage is then seen as a clear confirmation of the monogamy hypothesis. It is assumed that, so far as Christians are concerned, polygamy was finally 'abolished by Christ'. It is clear that what Jesus says about marriage implies monogamy. By implication there is now a divine prohibition against polygamy. By way of corroboration, the whole biblical case against the practice of polygamy is developed only by inferences. At the time of Christ, monogamy was not the most common form of marriage. Divorce and remarriage was common in relation

⁴² John 2 :1-12

⁴³ Mark 10:6-7; cf. Genesis 1:27; 2:24.

of the law of Roman Empire among Jews. It was a kind of what I call a serial monogamy or a consecutive polygamy distinct from the simultaneous polygamous which occurs in Africa.

The teaching of Jesus on marriage is limited to his affirmations of its indissolubility. Polygamy is simply not treated directly and explicitly by the New Testament.

Concerning adultery, Jesus stood with the law against it. This law is fully supported by the ancient prescription: “Thou shall not commit adultery!” But he went beyond it in two significant ways. First, he said that the man who looks at a woman for the express purpose of lusting for her has already committed adultery with her⁴⁴. Thus for him such a culpable act as adultery can be committed in the mind as well as in the bed. And second, Jesus also said that any man who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, or any woman who divorces her husband and marries another man commits adultery⁴⁵.

In sum, Christ saw the ideal for marriage as a man and a woman joined together in a permanent and inviolable union that only God has the right to dissolve it. He was against divorce and forbade remarriage. Adultery, divorce, polyandry and consecutive polygamy (serial monogamy while the first wife is still living) are manifestly repudiated in the New Testament.

The Gospel of Jesus reaffirmed that monogamy is the divine ideal marriage, which must be fully accepted and adopted by the people of God. Jesus was totally against the idea of divorce and remarriage. Christian tradition followed Jesus’ attitude by seeing in divorce an evil that should not be. This implies prohibition of divorce and of remarriage, and by implication; it also implies opposition to polygamy and approval of monogamy. God’s will about marriage, and not human law, is stressed by Christ, as being the basis of the doctrine of monogamy, and as conforming to God’s origin purpose at the creation of man and woman.

⁴⁴ Matthew 5 :27-28.

⁴⁵ Mark 10 :11

Jesus Christ, himself, was unmarried. Sharing the apocalyptic perspective of many Jews of his day, Jesus recorded in the synoptic, regarded the life of the resurrection as an angelic life, “where they neither marry nor are given in marriage⁴⁶”.

Among the synoptic stories, however, one passage sheds a somewhat different light on Jesus’ teaching. All the three synoptic gospels report a discussion with Pharisees regarding the permissibility of divorce. In Mark’s version Jesus responds to the statement that the Mosaic Law allowed a man to divorce his wife:

Because of your hardness of heart (Moses) wrote this commandment for you. But from the beginning of creation, “God made them male and female”. “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh” (Gen.1/27; 2/24). So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate. (Mark 10:5-9)

His teaching on the indissolubility of marriage seems to have been closely to his eschatological preaching. Those entering the kingdom of God were expected to manifest that holiness and perfection which was characteristic of God’s original creation, and this included monogamous unions.

Matthew places this significant exception on the lips of Jesus: “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery”⁴⁷. These texts affirm that the normal state of marriage is indissoluble: remarriage after divorce is adultery.

As a devoted follower and apostle of Jesus Christ, Paul was heir to all these teachings.

III.2.2 Paul’s Letters on marriage

While Paul was himself a celibate and considered celibacy a gift of God that all should desire, he recognized that not all men possessed this gift, and he expressly recommends that men marry rather than be consumed with unsatisfied sexual desires⁴⁸. His view of marriage is complex because all his remarks have to be examined carefully. Within the

⁴⁶ Mark 12:25

⁴⁷ Matthew 19:9.

⁴⁸ 1 Corinthians 7 :9

marriage bond, Paul counsels unselfishness and self-giving. Neither husband nor wife should withhold sexual pleasure from the other but each should be concerned to provide satisfaction for the other. Sex is here regarded not merely as a means of procreation but of mutual pleasure. Paul considered that marriage was for life and that this union was to be maintained holy. He reiterates the understanding of the lifelong permanence of the marriage union, repeating and affirming the law of Christ:

To the married, I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife. (1 Corinthians 7:10-11)

Paul refuses divorce on the authority of the Lord. If a separation occurs, the woman must not marry again, and the husband may not divorce his wife .

One text of the apostle is important for reflection on marriage. In chapter seven of his first letter to the Corinthians, he said:

Now for the matter you wrote about: It is not good for a man not to marry. But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way; the husband's body does not belong to him but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourself to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. (I Corinthians 7:1-5)

Paul is facing an ascetic group who seem to take pride in the spiritual gifts and spiritual knowledge. These Corinthian Christians are questioning the value, and even the permissibility of marriage. Their slogan appears to be: "It is well for a man not to touch a woman". Paul carefully distances himself from the views of such ascetics. He strongly resists the attempts those Christians to impose a requirement of celibacy and of sexual renunciation on the community. Again, like that of Jesus, Paul accepts marriage as an alternative to fornication. He insists that sexual relations between spouses are allowed. Abstention from sex should occur only by mutual consent, and only for a limited time . For him, the married state is to be normal and is the expected state for people within the Christian church.

Toward the end of chapter seven, Paul reveals the reason for his ambivalent view of Christian marriage: "I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none... For the present form of this world is passing away"⁴⁹. Like Jesus, Paul views the lives and duties of married Christians through the lens of the expectation of the imminent end of time.

Paul has also a high estimation of marriage in the church leadership. He commends marriage to the bishop. He was implicitly against polygamy, remarriage, and divorce. In Eph 5, monogamy is depicted, as a new reality, which unites husband and wife. This text presents what God plans for husbands and wives. In order for a marriage to work the way God wants it to be, each partner must carry out certain responsibilities God has given. Christian marriage is used here as an image of what the church should be in relationship to Christ. Christ's love for the congregation is set as an example for the love a man should have for his wife. The congregation is one; therefore the wife and the husband should be one. This marital union is one of lifelong fidelity and disinterested love. This point is important for us, because it helps us to understand better the image of Christian marriage.

Like Jesus, Paul also taught celibacy instead of marriage was a legitimate option for Christians. He said that celibacy provided advantages to the one who would choose this way of life for the sake of the kingdom of God. In this sense, celibacy was considered by him and Jesus as a charisma, a gift from God⁵⁰.

Concerning adultery, Paul has said very little. It is clear that he considers adultery to be a destructive perversion of the divine ideal and stands under God's punishment. It is a violation of the will of God and according to his opinion those who commit adultery will not inherit the kingdom of God⁵¹. The severity of his judgment is because this practice destroys the marriage union, the oneness that God had planned for marriage.

⁴⁹ 1 Corinthians 7:29, 31b

⁵⁰ 1 Corinthians 7:7

⁵¹ 1 Corinthians 6:9

III.2.3 Pastoral Epistles on marriage

The Pastoral Epistles go so far as to make marriage, along with the successful management of a household, a condition for appointment to the position of overseer or bishop in the Christian community:

Here is a trustworthy saying: if anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to much wine, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?). (1 Timothy 3:1-5)

This close identification of the clerical structure of the church and the households of married Christians is significant because marriage has its place in the real world in which Christians are called to live⁵².

Our conclusion has been that, despite the lack of explicit biblical affirmations regarding polygamy or monogamy, there is no evidence to suggest that Jesus, Paul and Pastoral Epistles' writers supported or accepted polygamy. Old Testament had a lot of polygamy and the New Testament did not say one word directly against polygamy. At the time of Christ polygamy was practically extinct. If the New Testament does not directly forbid or mention it, it is because there was no longer any need to deal with the problem. The New Testament always uses singular form, "wife" not wives when speaking about marriage. Christian love demands of a man that he disciplines his desires, considers woman's interest and therefore abstains from polygamy. Polygamy entails a lot of social evils. It is unfair that a man has more than one woman, depriving other men of their opportunities. Monogamy builds on the firm tradition of the church. It excludes the equality of man and woman. The New Testament puts a lot of emphasis on love in marriage.

However, if we take it for granted that the New Testament expects monogamy to be the proper form of Christian marriage, we still cannot be sure, if it does not provide for some exceptions to this basic understanding of the reality of Christian

⁵² Titus 2 :4

marriage, most especially for couple who had been married before their conversion to Christianity or who have contracted polygamous union after being baptized.

In the New Testament, marriage is regarded as the work of a good Creator, and any attempt to forbid marriage is repudiated⁵³. The New Testament like the Old Testament contains no explicit statement on polygamy, but the silence does not imply approval of that form of marriage. Although there is no explicit prescription of monogamy, there is ample evidence in the New Testament, in favor of that form of marriage.

It is only after we have seen what teaching the Bible presents, regarding the form of marriage, that we can study the pastoral approach to the matter of polygamy by missionaries through policies.

⁵³ 1 Tim 4 :1-5.

Chapter Four

POLYGAMY AS A CHALLENGE FOR MISSIONARIES

After his resurrection, Jesus Christ appeared to his Apostles and entrusted to them a mission by saying:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age. (Matt. 28:18b-20)

Many western countries have followed this order by sending missionaries all over the world and mainly in Africa in order to make known the Good News of the Salvation through Jesus Christ. The preaching of the gospel made believers of Christ, eradicated fetishism and paganism, communities or churches were founded and local leaders established. Cameroon is also one of the countries in Africa where missionaries were sent. These missionaries have done their duty with success despite the resistance of some people who have decided to remain in the traditional religion. Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon is the fruit of the work of two societies of mission: Sudan Mission, from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Norwegian Missionary Society. Their success could be seen through the foundation of churches, the training of leaders, the creation of hospitals, schools. Quartey has written the same thing about what has happened in Cameroon when he is quoting Schweizer describing the work of missionary in Gold Coast:

The importance of the missionary activities for the development of the society can hardly be overemphasized [...] while pioneering their works of development in the spiritual, educational, medical and economic sector, the missionaries revealed an astonishing disregard for all sorts of discomforts. Among those, the deadly menace of malaria, yellow fever and similar killer diseases was prominent.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Quartey Seth, *Missionary practices on the Gold Coast, 1932-1895, Discourse, Gaze and Gender in the Basel Mission in Pre-Colonial West Africa*, (New York: Cambria Press, 2007), 5.

But from its earliest days, communities in mission's field faced the problem of adapting Christ's teaching to different cultures found among people. The task was not always easy. The missionaries sought to present the authentic message of Christ. Sometimes they had to decide whether or not a particular tradition of a society was compatible with the Gospel because the Christianity is a religion in which new converted will change their way of life in order to fight against any kind of syncretism⁵⁵. Our task is to give an overview of the attitude of the missions towards polygamy and their influence.

IV.1 Polygamy as an obstacle of mission

For the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, polygamy is a problem which has still the same great difficulties at first contact. But it was just one aspect of people's life in Cameroon. We will be able to discover some of the reasons why it has persisted over such a long period of time. And finally, we shall see how polygamy is now changing, and what some of the causes of these changes are. Many African pioneers assert that polygamy was the biggest obstacle in social life for the introduction of Christianity⁵⁶.

IV.1.1 Polygamy as an expression of cultural personality

For many tribes in Cameroon, marriage is a way to keep and continue life, to preserve immortality⁵⁷. This reason allows them to practice polygamy. Women and children give prestige because they are tangible symbols of this power of life which must be respected and continued the life of the family group. The man who wants to marry a second wife will have to pay a second price, and the woman will work for him, polygamy becomes at the same time sign of wealth. Another reason which cannot be minimized is that the marriage is not only a relationship between two partners, but also between their respective family groups, polygamy increases the number of social relations in a family and thus contributes to the integration in the society. For these

⁵⁵ Paul, G. Hiebert. *Anthropological insights for missionaries*, (Grand Rapids, Mich. : Baker Book House, 1985), 30

⁵⁶ Informant Jean Tami, retired pastor, translated from Fulfulde to English by Mogonan Gondje.

⁵⁷ Mbiti, 62

reasons, polygamy is the ideal form of marriage, and subsequently monogamy in Cameroon has a tendency to not remain the best marriage type. It is obvious that to eliminate polygamy is equivalent to disintegrate the culture and the society to which it belongs. Many of our respondents have been pointed out the following arguments⁵⁸:

1. Having several wives has been a symbol of power, wealth and influence in traditional societies. The same pattern probably explains why kings in the Old Testament often had several wives.
2. It is important for a man to continue his family name into future generation. Having several wives usually ensures that he will have many male children to continue his name.
3. Closely related to the continuation of one's family name is the idea that having many children and grandchildren, one will be remembered and honored long after death. This is very important in traditional society.
4. In agricultural societies, several wives is a way to ensure having many children and hence the necessary laborers for farming, cattle herding and housework. This includes the provision of help when needed, as when some are sick. A large family community is seen as a sign of strength.
5. Since it is common for many African wives to refuse to have sexual relations with their husband for up to two years after the birth of a child, having several wives is a way for the husband to avoid sexual immorality.
6. Because African culture has very strong community values, having many wives ensures having a large family, which is seen as the way to increase happiness and meaning in life.
7. If a person has many daughters, his wealth will increase significantly through the bride-price at the time of the marriage of such daughters.
8. In Cameroon, it is a general conception that it is very bad to be a single woman and have no children. Because of this, many African women prefer to be one of several wives rather than to be single.

⁵⁸ These arguments are based on my interview with people.

There is also the idea that a woman who remains single will be the cause of sexual immorality and bring shame on the community.

9. Polygamy solves the problem of single parent mothers.
10. To have several wives, and many children, makes a person feel secure about his or her care in old age.

IV.1.2 Monogamy as an expression of Western personality

The conception of marriage in the Western countries has primarily an individualistic perspective and based on Christian ethics. Marriage is mostly voluntary two partners, although their families are not without influence. People are independent and there is a strict control of the economic, no shame to divorce because it is accepted. Women use conceptions to prevent pregnancy, not all men want children. The purpose of marriage is not primarily the posterity but the relationship between spouses. Absence of children will not be reason for divorce or polygamy.

IV.1.3 Arguments of the missions for monogamy and against polygamy

Due to the contrast between the two mentalities that I have described above, it is difficult to find a compromise. These points of view are diametrically opposite. It is clear that conciliation is almost excluded because each position seems to be natural. The attitude of missions has evolved from an opinion of considering polygamy as a sin, promiscuity, sign of chaos and inconsistency to the idea that polygamy is a less perfect but regular wedding style because monogamy is the only form of marriage permitted. At first contact, polygamy was represented on a basis of insufficient knowledge and only the erotic aspects have been presented. And later, said one pastor, the problem has been reduced to its true dimensions, the attitude towards polygamy and the arguments become more accurate⁵⁹. These arguments referred to a servile role of women impeding the development of their personality and thus maintain education at a lower level. To contradict this point of view, this author remarks:

⁵⁹ Informant Andre Kemgner, retired pastor, translated from Fulfulde to English by Mogonan Gondje.

” African women traditionally occupied an inferior position within the society. To say that African women occupied inferior position does not imply that they lacked rights, or lived in continual servitude. It means that, generally, the women were dependent upon men for overall protection, including that of their rights”⁶⁰.

It has also criticized the male perspective and focus on the posterity. These reasons were taken from the Bible. This defense was inconsistent. Often the Bible is taken as a witness. Since it is not possible to find in the Bible text which prohibits explicitly polygamy, the law that prohibits adultery has been used, applying a false reason which began by saying that polygamy is adultery in order to conclude that the Bible condemns it⁶¹. Similarly, the polygamy of the heroes of the Old Testament has been rejected and missionaries said that Christians shouldn't imitate polygamy.

IV.1.3 Measures taken by the missions

Here, we will present the general attitude of missions in Africa facing polygamy question. Many missionaries, working in Cameroon, have somewhat analogical experience. From time to time they encounter a pagan man who has married more than one wife, in complete accordance with the traditions of his tribe. The priest in such a situation is faced with a dilemma, when such a man asks to be baptized. Is it possible to baptize this polygamist? The attitude that recognizes only the institution of polygamy, without seeing the mentality that it is the expression, guided missions to take measures against it. As polygamy was regarded as lust, what could be done in order to get it outside the community of people who have been converted? According to Matthieu Domba, one polygamous, who first has received the call to become a pastor, then rejected it after some months of training at Ecole de Théologie de Meiganga, many measures have been discussed by missionaries. These measures were different from the area evangelized by Norwegians and American. The attitudes of missionaries seemed to be in contrast but the common character is the exclusion of the church of the polygamous man. The controversy was concentrated on the baptism of a converted man, married to many women. The majority found that this baptism was not permitted.

⁶⁰ William, G. Blum. *Forms of Marriage: monogamy reconsidered*, (Nairobi: AMECEA Gaba Publications, 1989), 119-120.

⁶¹ Mbiti, 82

One can distinguish three methods applied by the missions: method of cancellation, the catechumenal method and the method of legitimacy⁶².

Missionaries who followed the first method agreed that no polygamists whatsoever and however deep and sincere his conversion may be should be accepted by the church, unless he is willing to send away the rest of these wives and have only one. If for example, polygamy is declared to be rejected by the words of the Bible and therefore can not be tolerated in the church, not even during a time of transition. At the same time, polygamy was seen as unchristian since it was built on male selfishness, lack of consideration for woman's interests and cruelty against her. It is said that people with more than one wife will not go to heaven. Missionaries didn't know that is wrong to break up already existing loving relationship and it is also wrong to deny baptism to a person who loves their wives. It is demanded to the polygamist to divorce the mothers of this own children. Does this approach reflect the Gospel message of unity, liberation and joy? The choice of women allowed to stay was delicate issue. There are several possibilities: the first woman because with her the man married in a way suitable as monogamous; or even women who have children, or even Christian women, or even a woman (most often the youngest). If therefore the man felt the Church affiliation as more important than the unity of the family, he created disorder where first, order had prevailed. The aim of this method is to proclaim monogamy as the truly Christian type of marriage because polygamy is sinful and represents a lower and more primitive morality. That's what Tomas Drønen remarks when he wrote saying that receiving baptism depends on the behavior of the converted. There is a long list of misbehavior and sometimes they are difficult to avoid. The first thing is about the matrimonial status. Marriage certificate is required as a testimony of their choice of monogamy. The question of polygamy was always discussed during missionary conferences. Polygamy is seen as a sin and incompatible with the Christian faith. Baptism was refused to the polygamist man⁶³. The monogamous form of marriage is therefore not set, as an ideal, but it is prescribed as the only form to be observed by Christians.

The second method is the result of the desire to maintain the benefits of the first method and delete the disadvantages. This method allowed only the monogamous man

⁶² Informant Thomas Niywe, National Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon.

⁶³ Tomas, Sundnes Dronen. *Communication, Conversion et Conservation, Les Dii et les Missionnaires norvégien. Adamaoua 1934-1960* (Leiden : Brill, 2009), 85

to receive baptism because they were afraid of the consequences of the dismissal of the wives. For this reason, polygamous men were still in catechetical teaching with the hope that they will decide to become monogamous. The aim of the message they received during this period will surely help to discover that they have contracted a wrong union. The result has been a perpetual training and in addition the importance of the sacrament of baptism. But the advantage was that the polygamist was under the influence of the Church. The two methods generally admitted that polygamous man could be baptized on his deathbed.

Concerning the method of legitimacy, polygamy has been accepted as legitimate. Polygamy was not considered as a barrier to baptism. This method has been applied by a small minority of Protestant missions. This decision was taken during the conference of missionaries. They tried to adapt the Christian standards with African religion and custom. One of the members of this great meeting argued as quoted by Bengt Sundkler:

Granted that polygamy is a heathen abuse of the divine order of things, we nevertheless maintain that the Christian Mission has no right to treat as illegal conjugal unions contracted by heathen according to the legal standards of their people. We further hold that the Christian Mission has no right to refuse to such, if they believe in Christ, the sacrament of baptism and with it the right of entrance into the Christian Church⁶⁴.

The only condition is usually asked, was thus baptized man could not have to add other wives after his conversion and his entering in the Christian community. Bachmann's attitude quoted by the above author is positive for polygamy: "God does not make the ugly distinctions between monogamists and polygamists"⁶⁵. The polygamist was held under the pastoral care. The new Member of the Church was warned that he could not extend his polygamous State to his sons or daughters, and that monogamy was the Christian ideal. He remained a full member of the church but could not be appointed to the leadership position according to the first letter to Timothy: "Now the overseer must be the husband of but one wife"⁶⁶. This position will be more explained when we will present the attitude of the church.

⁶⁴ Bengt, Sundkler and Christopher Stead. *A History of the Church in Africa*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 634.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 539

⁶⁶ 1 Timothy 3 :2

One drawback of this method was if a Christian monogamous man who decided to contract a second marriage was subject to the discipline of the Church, while those who were polygamous and being converted, were not the subject of this norm.

This method was similar to the Baptist approach to the problem. They stipulated in their constitution the following rules:

- A Christian having two or more wives to whom he was married during the time of this ignorance, may join the church but he is not eligible for church office.

- Any member of the church who having a wife shall marry another shall be expelled from the church.⁶⁷

V.1.4 The value of these measures

The third approach was the least frequently applied during the period of western missions. But it was the method that increases the legitimacy of polygamy and which was not opposed to the biblical understanding of the mission. The period of transition between the conversion and the status of the converted must be considered. In this sense, polygamy was tolerated but monogamy remained the ideal. This approach was more useful than the two others because in some mission's fields there is the invasion of Islam which makes more converted because it was opened to polygamists. For example in West Cameroon, Christian Missions have failed among Bamoun people because of their position against polygamy. The Chief of this area has decided to send away missionaries and to welcome Islam and asked his people to follow the religion which is the expression of their identity. The same situation occurred in the North of Cameroon where a great majority village's chiefs have been converted to Islam. This situation has made the task not easier to establish Christian Church.

Applying especially the other two methods, missions attacked the institution, without achieving a sufficient way to fight it. The problem is whether the polygamy is in good faith. And the breaking-up of the polygamous family has a lot of consequences in the society. That's why John Mbiti explained:

Polygamy is a marriage situation and not a problem, as far as I am concerned. But Christians in a number of Churches have converted it into a problem without, however, solving the problem they pose. Since the coming of missionaries in the present era of evangelizing Africa,

⁶⁷ Bengt, Sundkler and Christopher Steed, 307.

polygamy has been attacked, despised, condemned and even made into a test of churchmanship. Polygamous families, or some of their members, are denied the sacraments of Baptism and/or Holy Eucharist. Membership of the church has been restricted to monogamous families whatever else they might do. Some polygamous families had to pay the price of divorce and separation, commanded, directed and sanctioned by the very church of which they then become members and which in other breath preaches the indissolubility of marriage [...] The fact is that polygamous marriages in Africa have not ceased and have in fact continued unabated⁶⁸.

Most of the mass excommunication of the missionary era has been due to the refusal of the missionaries to recognize the way in which African have married from time immemorial. Fighting against polygamy was spending much energy for nothing. It was good to take positive measures to change the mind of the neophytes. It is for this reason that can say that the missions have mainly introduced the monogamy instead of Christian marriage. Some methods used were legalistic so that the Church was seen primarily as an instrument of punishment, instead of being the canal by which people have to know the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ. Because the role of the mission is first to preach Christ and to shed the light of the Gospel in that dark region of the world; for God would have all men saved, even polygamists. He had not forgotten them.

Moreover, as long as if people had not understood the essence of marriage, according to the New Testament, they are not well equipped to fight this mentality. It is for this reason also, perhaps, one can see the perpetuation of the situation up to today among church leaders, Christians. The problem remains without convincing solution. The author of *Communication, Conversion et Conservation* affirmed that there many Christians who are still polygamists because the message of missionaries are not fully accepted⁶⁹. Since the polygamous mentality was institutionalized in an intensive way, it is not easy to eradicate it by using violence. All the same, for many Christians, monogamy became a visible and outside sign of conversion.

⁶⁸ Mbiti, 189-190.

⁶⁹ Tomas Sundnes Drønen, 85

IV.1.4 The effect of these measures

It is notorious that the introduction of enforced monogamy contributes in no small measure to the establishment and increase of institutionalized prostitution, while it also encourages casual concubinage and adultery. Although some peoples do not even have in their language a word for prostitution, this institution has developed among them side by side with Christianity. Where the custom of sexual abstinence is maintained during the wife's period of pregnancy and lactation, the monogamous husband tends to seek sexual satisfaction with prostitutes, or temporary concubines, or the wives of other men. This behavior in turn increases the chances of introducing several diseases into monogamous families, thus reducing the fertility rate. Where polygamy is preferred, even though in fact the majority of marriages are monogamous, the women themselves generally have an uncritical attitude toward the cultural institution of plural marriage because it is a kind of liberation. With other co-wives, it is possible for her to have a rest after household duties, which are considered as women reserved task. From our traditional religious background, it is a shame, as members of the church, polygamists cannot participate in the Holy Communion. And we can understand the meaning of the Eucharist to every people and why it is so painful when a believing Christian is unable to participate fully. It means one is excluded from the covenantal relationship.

IV.1.5 New tendencies

In the fields of mission where the first approach to polygamy was applied, some social deviations that I call new tendencies started to happen. These tendencies were the consequences of the legalistic way to face polygamy and polygamists. People who have chosen to become Christians were not convinced, but tried to follow the rule in order to please missionaries. According to this retired pastor⁷⁰, these tendencies as celibacy, prostitution and adultery were mainly found among Christians.

- **Celibacy:** In Cameroon as one can see in many African countries, celibacy was a rare phenomenon and generally unknown. In Western, for example it is common to see some people who decide to be single according to following reasons: some are people who have received a special call in religious matter, other fail to find a husband or wife suitable for them. Other are too shy to get a partner and do not know what to do

⁷⁰ Informant Jean Tami, retired pastor, translated from Fulfulde to English by Mogonan Gondje.

even though they would like to get married. They are either unmarried persons who remain so because they hate men or women. Other single persons have been forced to remain so by the nature of their studies or position (job), which have lasted too long or do not permit a settled form of life. There are other who cannot afford to get married while some have a mental or physical sickness which make them unable to live a normal married life and should not, therefore, enter into a marriage.

But this choice of African Christian women during the missions' period was mostly due to the repudiation of extra-wives, and the rejection of polygamy by young girls converted to Christianity or their parents. It was not the celibacy that Paul advised in his letter. This celibacy which is seen as a gift of God: a consecrated one. It led to the depravation when married husbands used these single women for sexual intercourse when their wives were pregnant or after the birth of children.

- **Prostitution:** This situation was generated when converted polygamists has to divorce one or many extra-wives and sometimes with some children. The life became more and more difficult for these divorced women. In order to take care of themselves and their children, they have no choices than to welcome all men who need them. It is important to know, has said Moussa, that prostitution is not mentioned or observed in the traditional African societies. He argued that women who became prostitutes turn their sexual organs into a means of economic gain, since some of them are poor, have no shelter or have been driven away by their parents or husbands, and must earn a living for themselves and perhaps their children or other dependants. Prostitution becomes, therefore, an economic shelter or necessity, earning money easily and sometimes quickly.

- **Concubinage:** According to the dictionary, it is a situation in which a man and woman live together without intending to be married. It is an extended form of prostitution and of polygamy. After divorcing his numerous wives in order to follow the law of the church, husbands have not cancelled the relationship with their wives. They are still a couple with sexual relations. The marriage inside the household has been changed to this which happened outside because it is difficult and even impossible for the man to get married and have his wives with him anymore. The concubinage is an act of unfaithfulness but as it doesn't happen in the view of missionaries, it maintained a certain tension in the society.

Our aim here is not to approve polygamy as a valid form of marriage for Christians in order to avoid such problems happen but to present the consequence of the application of mission's policies. Polygamy has also many disadvantages in the society even if it is culturally founded and accepted.

V.1.6 Disadvantages of polygamy in the society

Many people point out many reasons which lead them to choose polygamy as a form of marriage, but we don't believe that all are well in the home of the polygamist. It would be pretentious not to present the dangers of polygamy. In polygamous household, there is a dehumanization of women⁷¹. In a society where women contribute to the work force and are valued for what they can produce in the farms rather than for whom they are, such women ceased to be what God designed them to be in the marriage relationship. They are more often subjected to treatment which makes them less than human beings. This is violence against women. They have no rights. They are maltreated in various ways: marriages are ended often on the pretext of barrenness or childless. Adultery is punished by beating. There is no real love. Polygamy seems to imply the inferior state of women, their use as property if not as chattels, when chief and rich men take extra wives to enhance their prestige. As we have already mentioned, quarrels and jealousy are not uncommon among polygamous families. In a family where the wives and children are not treated on an equal basis, there is nothing more to expect than a disorganized and turbulent atmosphere. And the man with more wives may try to satisfy the sexual needs of his wives at all costs but one cannot truly say how well he is able to do this. The main cause of the sexual perversion among women who are polygamously married may be the lack of sexual satisfaction. Another problem to add is the inadequate care of children. It is quite difficult for a father of two or more wives and ten children to be able to fulfill his role: child discipline, hunger in time of drought, lack of money to send them to school.

What shall we say at the end of these analyses? Over centuries, the Gospel has been preached in societies which have radically different conception of marriage. In that regard, the evangelizer is faced with a pastoral problem of presenting the Christian teaching on marriage. It is important to remark that plural marriage or polygamy is

⁷¹ Mbiti, 190.

found throughout the world in a variety of form that is culturally determined. For western people, we note the existence of a consecutive polygamy which consists to have one spouse after another in a sequence involving divorce and remarriage. For Africans and other people, it is a simultaneous polygamy: to have more than one wife at the same time. With all these forms of polygamy, is the African one which seems to be evil and in this sense missionary have tried to impose a strong rule to follow in order to be Christian. In many areas, missions in Cameroon often opposed polygamy and even called it an “unforgivable sin” and expelled people who were polygamists. They tried to make a cultural change as a condition of faith and baptism. But in areas where polygamy is a preferential and socially integrated form of marriage, where it is accepted as a legitimate one, missionaries who were sent were bound always to take a positive, respectful and sympathetic approach to the way of the peoples to whom they were sent. They harmonized culture and Christianity as what one author has written: in view of the church’s universal mission and her need to be fully at home among all people, missionaries have to adapt the Gospel to the culture found.

Chapter Five

THE ATTITUDES OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CAMEROON VIS-A-VIS OF POLYGAMY

The problem of polygamous marriage is not a new one for the church in Cameroon, it was been faced by missionaries during the period of missions. The policies of the missions and the colonial laws have tried to eradicate the practices of sexual unions found in the colonized and Christianized countries⁷². In Cameroon, the French colonial law was against polygamy and the dowry system⁷³. It was forbidden for every citizen to contract plural marriage and to perceive a certain amount in exchange of his daughters. During colonial period, those who needed to be considered as civilized and to belong to the first class citizen were rejected if they were polygamists. The Church has inherited policies left by missions concerning polygamy and as the situation of polygamous doesn't change, new church leaders have also to make any news decisions in order to preserve the truth of the Gospel they have received. These decisions are about the proper pastoral approach to the problem of polygamous and of course, in the light of the Holy Scripture. At the beginning, two important points of view could be found among church leaders about the challenge to fight polygamy outside the church: the traditional and the progressive points of view. Then come some rules when the constitution of the church has been edited.

V.1 The traditional point of view

The baptism of polygamist, according to the traditional point of view of the church is incompatible with the Gospel. This group follows the first method used by missionaries. For them, the verse twenty-four of the book of Genesis, chapter two, is essential. The main argument here is that the promises of God to Abraham have been fulfilled in Isaac and not in Ishmael, the son of Agar, the second wife of Abraham. This shows that God accepts only monogamous marriage. According to Church leaders,

⁷² Ngongo, 156

⁷³ Informant Viang Mekala.

they don't be anymore children of the promise. A person has a value in the sight of God if he is treated a good way. Two recommendations have been adopted about polygamy during the conference of African Lutheran Churches in 1960:

1. We affirm, said the participants that the monogamy is the plan of God on marriage; it is an ideal relationship which presents the love between a man and a woman, and it reveals the situation of a good Christian family. Contracting a polygamous marriage is against the law of the Church.
2. Every Church is responsible to guide through the Gospel; with the help of the Holy Spirit those who are already Christian and young people in their future choice.⁷⁴

According to these recommendations, a polygamist could never be baptized. One Catholic Bishop in East Africa affirms clearly this point of view when he said:

If our faith is the result of our Lord's teaching, then, we will never conceive the baptism of polygamists. Because, the faith is the condition to be baptized and is the part of Jesus' teaching. Polygamists have to be non-baptized⁷⁵. This position of the non acceptance of polygamy is the strength of this traditional point of view. It considers polygamy as a past social structure. Monogamy is reflecting the new person in the society which has wore Christ. This position generated a pastoral approach of the church which didn't accept the baptism of a converted polygamist and also in the church except when he divorced all his wives but only the first.

Using these recommendations, the church was more concerned by total conversion than influence polygamous couples by teaching how to live in this kind marriage, and then the final decision has to be taken by them. This policy ignored the cohesion, the love and the joy of some polygamous families. Separating these partners in the name of baptism and the Holy Communion and forcing extra-wives to enter irregular situations, is the contrary of evangelic teaching. What Jesus has said in Matthew 23:15 could be applied to those who follow this traditional point of view about polygamous household: "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you

⁷⁴ Report of the conference of African Lutheran Churches in 1960.

⁷⁵ « The Baptism of Polygamous Families: Theory and practice in an East African Church », Journal of Religion in Africa, Volume III, n°2. A.J Brill, Leiden, 1970, 138.

hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are⁷⁶,”

The traditional pastoral is harmful. It didn't make a good condition to accept a Christian faith. One Christian has claimed that when the Church arrived, the native has his wives. It is said that polygamy is a mortal sin and he has to send away all his wives except one with whom he will receive the Church's blessing. This converted man sent immediately his wives but in clandestine, he used as concubines. Doing so, the door of heaven is already opened for him even if he continues immorality. But there is a common law in the society which affirms that a divorced wife becomes the wife of no one. This situation could be seen in every day life. It is difficult for a divorce woman to contract a second marriage.

V.2 The progressive point of view⁷⁷

This position is more liberal than the above. Theologically, the doctrine of the justification of the sinner through faith becomes the factor which obliges the church to consider the baptism of polygamists and their inclusion in the Church. The grace, according to this position, is the only condition for a man to receive salvation. The human law must not be seen as important. To oblige the polygamist to send away his wives in order to receive baptism and to participate in Holy Communion is contrary to the Gospel. The “Commission de Réflexion théologique et de liturgie” in Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon affirms:

It is important to notice that baptism is the manifestation of the grace of God through Jesus Christ and it is the first step of the new life, where the converted will discover that God loves him and what God is waiting from him in response of his grace. In any case, baptism must become a diploma which attests that the converted has already known who is God and how he is practicing his law. No biblical reference could allow us to baptize an adult and refuse him to participate in Holy Communion⁷⁸.

This second position leads to these two main following pastoral directives:

1. The polygamist is received to the baptism without asking him to repudiate his wives; he could not participate in Holy Communion neither in

⁷⁷ « Le Baptême des Polygames », Flambeau n°14, mai 1967, 94 (Translated to English by Mogonan Gondje) :

⁷⁸ Report of the meeting, May 1992. (Translated into English by Mogonan Gondje).

the Church's meeting where important decisions have to be taken. Only his first wife is welcome and is full member.

2. Without divorcing his wives, the polygamist is able to receive the baptism with his entire household: wives and children who manifest a true conversion. They can participate to the Holy Communion and can attend the Christian meeting but can not be elected as leader in the Church.

To restrict Holy Communion to the husband and his place in Church's life means to ignore the teaching of justice according to the Gospel. This position could be taken only by those who ignore the cultural dynamic of the polygamous marriage in the traditional thought and the conscious and unconscious factors which have lead them to polygamy. This pastoral directive ignores also the dynamism of the social structures where the individual can play an important role. The invisible power in the society is sometimes more important than the visible one. Some have been refused people fundamental rights. Because, the man has this right to marry a number of wives he wants. These measures are irrationalized to polygamists. They are rejected by Church and in the same time, Church's leaders ask them to contribute financially in the church. It is what has said Omodo, one Cameroonian, in the booklet of Walter Trobisch⁷⁹.

The second directive has been adopted recently. It has to be applied in new areas where the Gospel has not been heard. But the difficult case is that there is no restoration for those who have contacted the polygamous union after being converted, and the unofficial polygamy. What are the recent decisions about this difficult matter?

V.3 The recent policies in the Church

This part will present some rules adopted by Church in order to review the previous inherited from the missions founders of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon. Then we will go through the concept of church discipline, its purpose, its practice and the procedure of restoration and forgiveness. Finally, we will present application of Church discipline in Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon.

In the Constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, we can read about the baptism and the Holy Communion:

Are admitted to baptism:

⁷⁹ « Ma femme m'a rendu polygame » : Trobisch, Baden-Baden, 166.

- Adults and young people, more than twelve years old and who have fulfilled the following conditions:
 - To confess the faith in Jesus Christ and to witness this faith in his life
 - To abandon entirely magic practices
 - To have sufficiently Christian knowledge by following the catechumenal teachings
- Children belong to parents who live explicitly as Christian. In this case, the Pastor will first have a meeting with these parents in order to advise them, that the child who will be baptized should receive Christian teaching after his baptism.
- The case of the baptism of polygamists, of children belonging to non Christian parents, and for those who are under discipline, is regularized by a special rule.
- People set under discipline are not permitted to participate in Holy Communion.⁸⁰

The special text about polygamy has been adopted during the meeting of the “Commission de Réflexion Théologie et de Liturgie” in 1994. It stipulates: There has been a long tradition in the church of condemning polygamy. It is possible to adopt a new policy regarding polygamy or those are involved in polygamy. There are two cases:

- **The polygamist who has been converted to Christianity:**

Considering that to enforce divorce is unwanted by the Scriptures, unsanctioned, and condemned by common reason and sense of right. Since Christ has forbidden divorce, it would be wrong to force converts to divorce their wives. A man, converted to Christianity with many wives, can be baptized with all his wives but cannot add another wife after that. Polygamists, who in conformity with the popular culture or the tenets of their former religion married more than one wife, are now free to fully join the community of believers in the Church. His wives and his children also are invited because children have found themselves born in the polygamous union. They can enjoy the sacramental grace of baptism and Holy Communion, but monogamy remains the standard. The aim of this approach to the polygamous situation

⁸⁰ « Constitution de l’Eglise Evangelique Luthérienne au Cameroun” , Garoua, 7 May 2007.

is to accept people involved in such systems and give them guidance on how they could make their marriages work better, just as monogamous families need similar guidance. The church has a right and a duty to guide its members in moral, spiritual and social matters. The starting point of this decision comes from these questions always asked by Christians: can the church, which is the body of Christ, afford to drive out and keep out those men, women and children from polygamous marriages who wish to come into it to find a fuller meaning of life? Did our Lord not accept the Harlots, prostitutes, sinners, lepers, and drunkards of His time? Martin Luther has understood also that marriage belongs to the secular regime in life. Luther writes:

There has been such a thing as marriage itself ever since the beginning of the world and it also exists among unbelievers to the present day. The marriages of our ancestors were no less sacred than our own, nor less real among unbelievers than believers⁸¹.

Those who are already Christians and later become polygamists are under permanent church discipline, and are seen as candidates and kept under Christian instruction. They also decided that the wives of polygamists may be admitted in some cases to baptism, but that it must be left to local authorities of the church to decide under what circumstances they may be baptized. Converts involved in polygamy marriages prior to their conversion to Christianity have now a special treatment. In allowing the admission of polygamists into the church, the Lutherans did so on condition that Church would spare no efforts in teaching monogamy as the Christian ideal, and these men are not allow to marry additional wives.

- **The already converted Christian who becomes polygamist:**

The man and the second wife are under church discipline. The first wife is exempt because in principle it is the first wife in chronological order, who was considered to be

⁸¹ John, Dillenberger. *God hidden, and revealed: the interpretation of Luther's deus absconditus and its significance for religious thought.* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press. 1953), 326

the true wife. But if she is the one who has negotiated the marriage of the second wife; she is also under discipline. If the second wife is very young, the husband and her parents (if they are Christians) are under discipline⁸². If not, she is under discipline, unless she separate from their common husband.

This policy created more problems than solutions. The man and the second wife are under church discipline all their life if there are no changes in their status. This seems difficult because they loose their full membership and cannot participate in Holy Communion. The situation becomes more complicated because the church preaches the Gospel of salvation through faith but rejects polygamists who are under church discipline. According to what every Christian thinks (it is not a doctrine of the church), being under church discipline for these people means that they are waiting for eternal damnation. That's why many of them fall into apostasy, quit the church and embrace Islam which receives them with opened hand. For the accommodating role which polygamy played in Islamization was absent in Christianity. The conception of the plurality of wives thus became a force in the Islamization policy in Northern Cameroon among chiefs of the villages. As polygamy was rooted in African culture and was natural in Islam, many Africans went and still go into polygamy innocently. When such men encounter the Gospel and want to serve God in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, they find that they cannot fully belong unless they are prepared to divorce their extra wives with their children. This tolerance or presentation of certain African practices had, indeed, persuaded some people to proclaim Islam the religion of Africa⁸³.

This policy creates also another category of polygamists. In order not to loose their membership inside the church, some men adopt an unofficial polygamy. They are still full members of the church with one wife at home, but they hide one or more unofficial wives. So to say, official polygamy seems not to be that great a challenge to Christian marriage as the unofficial polygamy is. Due to social change, sequential polygamy is increasing, and the custom of keeping concubines and mistresses is widely practiced in urban centers. This situation seems to be very common in contemporary Cameroonian society, and this increases the crisis of Christian marriage. If many

⁸² Report of the Commission de Reflexion Theologique et de Liturgie of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon in 1994.

⁸³ Ngongo, 207.

families are living in polygamous situation it would be better to do it openly than to do in secret. This is one kind of hypocrisies. What does it help if the pastor closes his eyes to a husband who lives with another wife in town and an official wife in the village? And does it help more if the pastor puts this husband under church discipline? What difference does the church discipline make in the situation at home? What is really church discipline? What is its purpose, its practices?

V.4 The church discipline

*A New Dictionary of Christian Theology*⁸⁴ defined the word ‘discipline’ in four ways. Firstly, means all those forms of asceticism and mortification which are associated with monastic tradition. Secondly, it could be the scourge, a kind of whip of knotted cords used in monastic practices of discipline. Thirdly, discipline is a way of life prescribed by the church and enforced upon its practitioners. The fourth definition and the last is more closed to this above meaning. The discipline is the way of life prescribed by the Church and represented by regulations and rules. When using the word ‘discipline’ in this thesis, it is related to the third and the fourth senses. We will add the noun ‘Church’ or the adjective ‘ecclesiastic’.

In the context of Church life, this term is used to describe the practical methods and rules by which Christ, through the influence of the whole community, seek to help each member to be healthy in his own Christian growth. Doing so, the community tries to give his best contribution to the life and witness. Jesus himself has presented this image by saying:

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Matt. 5:13-16)

⁸⁴ Richardson, Alan & John, Bowden, *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology*, (London: SCM. 1983), 158.

As a community of believers, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon has adopted some rules in order to punish some mistakes or sins. These mistakes are looked upon and examined in relation with the Ten Commandments by leaders. They are seen as sins the disorderly conduct is behavior clearly out of line with the prescribed commands of Scripture. That means a way of life which negatively influences the testimony and unity of the church: adultery, divorce, witchcraft, magic, esoteric sciences, drunkenness, concubinage, polygamy, incest, immorality, idolatry, false teaching, erroneous teaching, difficulties between members, and divisions in the church⁸⁵. Those who have been found guilty are under Church discipline. During the Mission period, from 1925 to 1957, the church discipline was introduced in order to avoid some elements of the cultures that are, according to missionaries, in opposite to the Gospel. After the “independence” of the church, many leaders have seen these methods of disciplining the offenders as contrary to the teachings of the Lutherans who believe that Christ came for sinners and not for righteous one⁸⁶. The practice of discipline is bringing a problem of misunderstanding in families and violates the rights of men and women. The practice of the church discipline didn't follow the meaning of discipline as a method of training to produce obedience and self-control. But what could be the foundations of Church Discipline? Our task is to present the church discipline, its biblical background.

V.4.1 Foundations of Church Discipline

When we read the bible, the concept “Church Discipline” doesn't exist. However there are passages in both New and Old Testament, showing the act of disciplining an offender.

V.4.1.1 The Old Testament and the Church Discipline

In the Old Testament, during the patriarchal period, there are some sins which could not be forgiven. These sins are adultery, according to this following text:

⁸⁵ « Constitution et Règlement Intérieur de l'Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne au Cameroun », article 55, 53

⁸⁶ Informant Jean Tami, retired pastor

Do not have sexual relations with your brother's wife; that would dishonor your brother. Do not have sexual relations with both a woman and her daughter or her daughter's daughter; they are her closed relatives. That is wickedness. Do not take your wife's sister as a rival wife and have sexual relations with her while your wife is living. Do not approach a woman to have sexual relations during her uncleanness of her monthly period. Do not have intercourse with your neighbor's wife and defile yourself with her . (Leviticus 18:16-20)

When one had fallen into these sins one was stoned to death as a way of purifying the society. These punishments continued even during the time of Christ.

V.4.1.2 The New Testament and the Church Discipline

Contrary of the teaching of the Old Testament, Jesus Christ wanted to bring a new understanding on this practice when he has said:

If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector .(Matt. 18:15-17)

Firstly the offender is to be admonished privately then before two or three witnesses and finally before the Church. Through this affirmation, Jesus contributed to what can be done when one breaks the law by trying to live contrary to the society; And in the same time, in his ministry, Jesus also showed a negative attitude towards this practice. For example, in the story of a woman caught in adultery⁸⁷, Jesus neither punished the woman nor allowed the religious leaders to kill her. But there is an element of discipline in the last message of Christ: "Go and don't sin anymore". So, the goal of Church discipline is to help and to punish. He helped her to behave as a good Christians. For Jesus, since all were sinners, none has the right to judge the other. In the Gospels, several times Jesus was accused of eating and drinking with people who had bad behaviors or sinners⁸⁸. All these situations did not intend to allow people to distort the community or break the rules and laws in the society, but he wanted the people to

⁸⁷ John 8.1-12

⁸⁸ Luc 7:34, Matthew 9:1, Mark 2:16.

change their attitude and try to help the sinners instead of judging them to death. He continues to teach that, the Christians have to forgive as Jesus has forgiven them⁸⁹. Jesus has said to Peter:

And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give the keys of the Kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven . (Matt. 16:18-19)

According to Paul, he did not send away those who fall into sins. Sometimes, he says that the sinners have to be handed over to Satan. It was the hard way to present the consequences of sins. And the same Paul asks to forgive anyone who does any sin because nothing is impossible to be forgiven in this world⁹⁰. He believes that the church cannot and do not have to judge a person to the extent that he does not have to participate in God's glory but her role is to call the people to discipleship and help them to go in the way of the Lord. The church has to be careful using the teachings of Paul and Jesus because sometimes the contexts are so different. These messages are important for the church in its mission when they are used in the right way.

The Early church and even the Church of today have used these teachings as the basis for church discipline. The power to Peter and other apostle is understood to be the power of forgiving and retaining sins conferred on the whole church. When we take in account the strength and the holiness of the church, and also as a way of making her mission more effective, the church had to concern itself with morality. During the period of mission, the separation was made between serious and less serious sins. Those who have done serious sins were excluded from all functions in the church, less seriously sins excluded one from sacraments⁹¹. All these practices took place in the light of the teaching of Jesus and Paul. It has been stipulated that if one made a mistake, that person must first be warned and if he/she does not listen and change his/her

⁸⁹ Colossians 3:13

⁹⁰ 2 Corinthians 5

⁹¹ Informant Andre Kemgner, retired pastor

attitude, he/she has to be put under discipline. If one does not listen, he has to be sent out from the congregation. It seems that the church may have been mistaken in their previous policies regarding plural marriage. Certain steps were taken against polygamists in the church, as noted below. They were excluded from membership. Secondly they were not allowed to receive the Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Thirdly, they were advised to put away the second or more wives. To impose this upon other defenseless people is a strange way of preparing for baptism. The authorities of the church were clearly presuming the incompatibility of polygamy with Christian life, especially for those who after being converted, contracted a polygamous union. As long as polygamy continues to exist in Cameroon, even though it may be diminishing generally, there are some questions to be faced by church leaders. The theological problem here is a very old one; and it may perhaps be formulated in the question addressed to the people of Galatia "was it through observance of the law that you received the Spirit, or was it through faith in what you heard"⁹²? The attempt of the church to solve the problem seems powerless, since the faith is a condition sine qua non for admission into the Christian fellowship. Having many wives is that losing faith?

V.4.2 The Purpose of the discipline

The aim of the church discipline is not to send sinners away or to feed the self-righteous pride of the ecclesiastical leaders who administer the discipline. Its goal is also to give stern warnings and to help the erring Christian to realize their sins so that they can repent and restart a new life of faith in Christ in a way acceptable to God, the Church and the general public. In other words, the church discipline has the duty to restore a sinning believer to holiness and bring him back into a pure relationship within the assembly. The Church have to enforce some standards for its members, otherwise, it would have lost its quality as light and salt of the world and then rendered its mission unfruitful. In any case, the discipline of the church should never be harsh.

The Church must find room within itself for "weak"⁹³ members, as the Apostle Paul called them, and its aim must be to sustain them and eventually to strengthen

⁹² Galatians.3:2.

⁹³ 1 Corinthians 8:10-13

them. This doesn't mean that the church is encouraging its members to continue to behave in a wrong way but to reconcile and rehabilitate those who have injured the community. The Church discipline implies repentance. The repentance is itself a gift of God. The Gospel of Matthew has underlined the availability in unlimited fashion that sins have to be forgiven in these terms: "Jesus answered, I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times"⁹⁴. But the forgiveness is impossible only for those who deliberately blasphemed, by consigning the forgiving work of the Spirit of God to Satan. This is called the sin against the Holy Spirit⁹⁵.

V.4.3 The application of the discipline in the church

The church has the duty of guiding its individual member with moral problems to repentance, but our experience is that the Church in Cameroon has rather tried to punish than guiding the offender into a Christian life. Discipline tend to become a negative because it often has the connotation exercising power over a reluctant person. Self-discipline sounds more positive. Self-discipline deals with someone gaining self-control. The Christian ideal of discipline is the self-discipline which has its roots in the internal renewal of the Christian community. The church discipline is like the exercise of pressure to people. Believers are always under this external power that they think living under permanent oppression. The expression of freedom in Christian life doesn't exist. For me it is more important to make Christians who are responsible than those who seem to be in their every day life under the church rules.

The church is primarily the community of believers united in one body. However, the church is not only spiritual or immaterial communion, but it also consists of a visible structure and organization. Thus, there are two aspects of the church that need to be taken into account when dealing with ecclesiast self-discipline: communion and organization. In dealing with the communion of believers, we deal with the believers and the communion with Christ. The Church, as defined by Luther, is a community of believers where the sacraments are given and the Gospel preached⁹⁶. There is the visible, organizational church and the invisible church; this is the

⁹⁴ Matthew 18:22.

⁹⁵ Matthew 12:30-31.

⁹⁶ Sinclair, B. Ferguson. *New Dictionary of Theology*, (Leicester : Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 142.

communion of the living branches attached to the true vine. The Visible Church is a mixed body (*corpus permixtum*) where the true believers are mixed with hypocrites, the ones who mostly act as being Christians⁹⁷. Because the human eye cannot see into the hearts of people, we can never clean this mixed body to consist only of true believers. This inspection of human heart belongs only to God.

In practice, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon has inherited from early missionaries the church discipline which has undergone some relative changes. The Constitution of the Church stipulated that the lay preachers, evangelists, pastors, and bishops are church officers who can impose church discipline. Church discipline has to be imposed through *parenesis*⁹⁸ in the preaching, counseling and Bible studies. This way of doing has the aim to rectify the existing moral problem and to equip the believer to face the prevailing problem. The retired pastor Jean Tami has corroborated by saying that this is often used when church leaders are lacking concrete evidence or courage to confront the erring Christian in order to help him. The discipline could be imposed also by involving the administrative organs: elders, congregation, district, regional or synod councils. Depending upon the nature of the error, its mode of commission, the people who are knowledgeable of its commission and the attitude of the erring believer, sometimes and the congregation where the erring Christian resides is unable to decide the matter or lacks the jurisdiction to do so. In such instances, the disciplinary issue is referred to the major church leadership so that they decide the case. The believers under discipline can attend chapel devotion, Sunday worship services, but cannot participate when sacraments are offered. A Christian under church discipline attending the Lord's Supper may be removed by the church elders or passed by the pastor when the pastor distributes the elements. A period of three or six months, according to the gravity of the mistake is given to be under discipline. But what is surprising is that the Christians who are involved in polygamous union are under discipline for all his life. Is he the great sinner? Is polygamy a sin against the Holy Spirit? The situation is so recurrent so that many polygamous households sometimes are resigned because it seems that they are already condemned and they are expecting the eternal damnation. There are no other efforts to undertake. On the other side:

⁹⁷ Braaten, Carl E. *Principles of Lutheran theology*, (Minneapolis, Minn. :Fortress Press), 43-46

⁹⁸ According to *A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics* is a word from Greek meaning advice, admonition, or exhortation.

many monogamous hiding their second wives, are full members. Matthieu Domba complains that I were baptized during the period of mission, but since I become polygamous independently of my will, I have been under church discipline for about twenty-five years. The Church always is very strong to those who live openly in their plural marriage. In our society, individual cases of polygamy can be made to function better and more happily than a good number of monogamous marriages. Polygamy is one form of marriage, monogamy another. Each has its advantages and disadvantages; they are appropriate to different types of society. It is not the task of the church to make any absolute judgment between them. Furthermore, the God of the Bible emerges initially as the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David other patriarchs or most of the religious leaders were polygamist. Were these men not accepted by God? Did they not have faith in Him? Do they not belong to the company of the faithful?⁹⁹

These questions lead us the concrete pastoral care, propositions and the relation between culture and gospel with reference to polygamy.

⁹⁹ Informant Matthieu Domba, official polygamous (two wives), living in Touboro.

Chapter Six

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we should remember that the first missionaries who brought Christianity to Cameroon had to deal with the challenges arising from the encounter between the gospel and various aspects of cultures. Such challenges include the people's unawareness of the Christian doctrine on marriage especially polygamy. Many missionaries sent to Africa have followed what Paul Hiebert has pointed out: "*On the one hand, the gospel belongs to no culture. It is God's revelation of himself and his acts to all people. On the other hand, it must always be understood and expressed within human culture*"¹⁰⁰. The practice of polygamy was deplored and is understood to hurt the dignity of women. Many efforts have been made in order to send away a plural marriage from the Church by missionaries and Cameroonian church leaders. Here a differentiation is to be made between men and women, and between those already in a polygamous marriage who wish to be baptized and those who are already baptized and then enter into a polygamous union. Polygamy is looked upon as a crime. Policies of the church often are considered as cruel and incomprehensible. Missionaries have imposed monogamy as a condition for receiving baptism and for marrying in the church. The erring converts were excommunicated. To place them into confidence, pioneers tried to distinguish between refusing sacraments to a Christian involved in polygamous marriage, excommunicating him or her. They declared that those Christians excluded from receiving sacraments are not necessarily sinners. Without receiving the Eucharist, such Christians can in fact keep enjoying a certain degree of sharing in the overall sacramental life of the church¹⁰¹.

The consequence is that the polygamy has taken many different forms and remains a prevailing challenge for the Church. Polygamy is one of the two forms of marriage which exist in the Cameroonian legislation. It is legal. Many Cameroonians don't attend this step of marriage. They are limited on the customary one which is important. The Church has tried to make his prophetic voice by adopting some policies,

¹⁰⁰ Hiebert, 30

¹⁰¹ Informant Kemgner

which, of course, contradict the freedom of Cameroonians to choose monogamy or polygamy when he decides to get married. As one of the important elements of the culture, people converted to Christianity don't take it away because it is a solution for divorce and for childless family; it provides prestige and power. Many are not convinced by the biblical arguments that the church presents. They claim that monogamy is a western imperialism because there are cases of biblical important figures that are polygamous. Maybe, one day missionaries will preach us to choose also homosexuality which is unbiblical. We believe in God, polygamy is an expression of our culture because we live in community; we are not individualistic; the Cameroonian church must have its own way to believe. With our polygamy, we believe more in God than those who try to preach monogamy. For us, monogamy is also a solution to divorce, said one Christian.

Church discipline makes difficult the evangelism task of the church. Christians who have entered into the polygamous union sometimes joined the Islamic community because they are opened and accepted them as full members. They don't want to be as many baptized and believing Christians who are under permanent church discipline. The church loses more and more members. This is the case for those who want to live their polygamous marriage openly.

Other people who try to keep their membership within the Church, have an official wife but hide one or more others outside. It is better for them to be hypocrite than to be under church discipline. It is a shame to be part of the Community and not take part to Holy Communion¹⁰². And this way of being is not without consequences. The unofficial polygamy is like an extramarital union. It is important to underline that extramarital relationships increase the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. The fear today is of HIV/AIDS. Husband, while having an affair outside of marriage, can bring this problem to his first wife and children. Polygamy is health risks to those are involved in it.

Another situation which occurs now is that the number of Christian marriages has decreased considerably. The church blessings of marriage are possible only if there is the mention "monogamy" in the civil marriage certificate. This policy is not appreciated by those who would like in the future to contract polygamous union. So it

¹⁰² Informant Joseph Houlpou, translate from French to English by Magonan.

is good to not at all have a civil registration and the church blessings. Many Christians are confused about the Christian teachings on marriage. Church authorities are partly responsible for the prevailing situation, especially in their attitude towards polygamy, and in the methods pastors use to rectify them. Preaching about “bad marriage” does not help. The pastor should take time to talk to the people in polygamous families, and to show that they are also interested in them as they are. Such an approach could be used to introduce the couples to a suitable marriage catechumenate. Almost all marriage functions in the church are blessings of marriage. Why do only church employees have church weddings? It seems that the society accepts very well those types of marriages that are later blessed in the Church. The practice of church discipline seems to have very little effect on young couples’ decisions to marry without church wedding. It seems that the time has passed by this practice of church discipline. Counseling and advice are more needed than exclusion from the church.

For people potential converts the discipline and demands of the Christian faith and life are found to be too hard to accept: because they tend to contradict respected cultural norms and values. Distinction should be made between socially recognized forms of polygamy and those which have no social sanction. The rejection of polygamy does not always demand the rejection of men who were polygamists before the Christian message was presented to them. Marriage is a vocation, a state of life¹⁰³.

I recommend strongly that some general pastoral orientations concerning favorable conditions, in which formation and preparation for marriage should take place. The church authorities have to make decisions about the proper pastoral approach to the problem of polygamy according the right and contextual understanding of Scripture. It needs to examine Christian revelation to see if the church’s approach until now has had a solid foundation in the Bible. We should understand that polygamists of good faith, baptized or unbaptized should be treated with considerable compassion. Our study of the subject helps us to know that monogamy is a divine ideal. But polygamy was still the form adopted by most figures in the Old Testament. In the New Testament’s societies, it was common for people to divorce and to remarry. I consider this consecutive monogamy as a variation of polygamy. That’s why Saint Paul wrote to Timothy toward the end of his life and ministry, making a suggestion that

¹⁰³ Mbiti, 92.

leaders in the church should probably have only one wife, because of the demands of ministry:

Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to much wine, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not lover of money. A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well. (1 Timothy 3:2, 12)

Paul's advice about elders and deacons is set in a context describing the necessity for a peaceful and well-regulated home where the church leader has an appropriate setting for study, reflection, and ministry¹⁰⁴.

Clearly, if Paul needed to make a special focus upon an exception of monogamy for elders and deacons, the prevailing practice certainly must have been polygamy (consecutive monogamy). Paul's message has to be adopted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon where the context is similar to this biblical society. Neither monogamy nor polygamy by itself produces true Christian morality. Monogamous or polygamous marriage, according to the Bible, must be a relationship of devotion, cherishing, commitment, faithfulness, and enduring love. As African societies have a high sense of community life, official polygamy seems not to be a problem. It is possible to truly love more than one person at a time and to be in love in love with more than one spouse at a time. In any case, men in general are polygamous by nature. The believers are supposed to be in good, acceptable relationship with the Savior all the time, knowing they may die at any time. It is here recommended to put a simple, short, and workable practice of church discipline in place in the ELCC as shown in the light of Pauline Church discipline. The believers are to be helped to realize their sins as quickly as it is convenient, put under church discipline for a short duration, and thereafter be reinstated in the full Christian fellowship of their respective community. The Church leaders should forthwith reinstate the repentant erring Christian without calling the Church elders council. Christians should be encouraged to have a piety life because monogamy was not required for salvation. Polygamy should be allowed to phase out with time.

¹⁰⁴ Sanders, J. Oswald. *Spiritual leadership : principles of excellence for every believer*, (Chicago : Moody Press, 1994).

Pastoral attitudes towards the polygamists must avoid giving impression that the church condones polygamy. However, the church cannot abandon Christians who find themselves in polygamous state. The church is called to organize a pastoral program; a sort of marriage catechesis for the newly married couples.

The church's mission is to work for conversion and salvation¹⁰⁵, namely by providing the means for acquiring and preserving the faith. In other words, evangelization should not be reduced to administering and reception of sacraments. The church has to care in order to defend and preserve the integrity of marriages which have been contracted validity.

Concerning the Christian who have contracted a polygamous union, the church should readmit him after a sincere repentance, but with the firm decision to not add another wife. For the old solution of having a polygamist on the decision of baptism to dismiss all his wives except one, is now seen as cruel and almost as the equivalent of the death sentence upon those dismissed. Spreading the gospel should take into account the social and personal consequences of pastoral practices upon the lives of the wives who are to be sent away, and their children.

As Marriage is a vocation, is a state of life, a way of Christian holiness, I recommend a sound Christian program of sex education for both youth and especially for prospective spouses. Some general pastoral orientations concerning favorable conditions, in which formation and preparation for marriage should take place.

Our study of the biblical passages on marriage and customs related to marriage has emphasized that monogamy is the form of marriage that is compatible with Christian conception of marriage. Monogamy is, not simply, the ideal form of marriage, but the form proper to Christian married life.

Our studies have led us to conclude that the creation accounts of the Old Testament, as well as the teaching in the New Testament on marriage, show that monogamy is the form of marriage willed by God from the beginning, and that it is not simply a cultural institution, dependent upon the customs and conditions of a particular society. Monogamy is an integral part of the reality of marriage, and not simply a law, which reflects a particular cultural understanding of marriage. Thus, in our planning of a pastoral policy, we must first of all, recognize that monogamy pertains to the essence

¹⁰⁵ Preamble of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon's Constitution.

of Christian marriage. Christian marriage is monogamous and, despite hard cases, it is not open to Christians to choose anything else.

If we accept monogamy as an essential aspect of the reality of Christian marriage, then we must consider the acceptance of polygamists for baptism, as involving an exception to the New Testament teaching on Christian marriage.

Under no circumstances, policies should permit or encourage forced divorce or separation of the spouses.

In previous discussion on polygamy, we have noted that polygamy is most often an option that is manageable by the wealthier members of the community, chiefs, who may also be more influential. Their entrance into the Christian community could thus, encourage others to follow their example. As a baptized Christian, the man might also be able to work more effectively in the Christianization of his environment.

Gradual transformation of the society under the influence of divine grace should be observed. The word and grace of god would be present in the middle of the society, as a leaven.

I think that it is possible to establish an intimate link between the gospel and the culture. In the evangelizing mission, it is good to use the process of inculturation. But it has been noted by some experts of inculturation that a good process of inculturation should not be just juxtaposition of the gospel to a particular culture, but it implies their mutual interpenetration and integration, without prejudice to the revealed truth or to the authenticity of the culture being evangelized. These conditions are indispensable, if the gospel is to accomplish its transforming and renewing role. John Paul II took up this theme in his 1980 and 1985 pastoral visits to Africa. He has said that the construction of the Kingdom of God must assume worthy elements of human cultures¹⁰⁶.

¹⁰⁶ Speech of the Pope John Paul II visiting Cameroon in 1985.

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