



MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF ARTS



**AN AFRICAN THEOLOGY DISCOURSE ON MARRIAGE WITH
SPECIAL FOCUS ON THE METHODIST CHURCH IN ZIMBABWE**

BY

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**Submitted to the Faculty of Arts: Department of Theology and
Religious Studies of the Midlands State University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Honours Degree in Theology and
Religious**

Approved by : Mr Moyo , M

MAY 2014

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged. This dissertation has not been submitted for my degree or examination at any other University.

Signed

As the supervisor, I have agreed to the submission of this dissertation.

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APPROVAL FORM

The undersigned hereby certify that they have supervised the student Tarisai Mavhuka’s dissertation entitled. “An African Theological Discourse on Marriage with special focus on the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe.” The dissertation was submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts Honours Degree in Theology and Religions Studies at Midlands State University.

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Year this degree granted 2014

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DEDICATION

To my late father Judge Mavhuka.

ABSTRACT

The issues raised in the African theological discourse on marriage with special focus on the Methodist church in Zimbabwe are crucial and pertinent to the faith and well-being of the African Christians who make up its congregation. The research document seeks to come up with a sound theology of marriage that will reconcile the three worlds of marriage that has caused confusion and dilemma to African Christians who find themselves torn apart in their traditional culture, the civil or legal world and the European Christian values of marriage. The African Christian theology of marriage will help to shape the faith of the Africans as well as serve as a policy document that will inform the authorities and policy makers in the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe.

This research work seeks to diffuse the notion that European marriage is the Christian marriage and prove that there is nothing that is convincingly Christian marriage. Instead what is called Christian marriage is an amalgamation of ancient Greco-Roman cultures. The conception that Christian marriage should be monogamous is an issue of scriptural interpretation otherwise the notion does not find scriptural basing. Marriage in the bible has evolved from monogamous to polygamous marriages arranged privately by family patrons and later given to the secular authorities without the involvement of church priests as the case might be.

The research explores the African traditional marriage values and how they can inform and influence a theology of marriage with an African color. It will take into account the social and communitarian dimension of marriage, the dynamic process of marriage, centrality of procreation, the sacred and religious dimension of marriage which gives birth to the aspect of the indissolubility of marriage and the importance of *lobola*. The above mentioned principles of African marriage will shape the African Christian marriage. This research work will explore the attitudes of the missionaries upon encounter with the African traditions of marriage and how marriage evolved from a private family affair into a civil affair and eventually the involvement of the church.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my profound gratitude to Mr. M Moyo my supervisor for the valuable guidance and assistance. It is through his immense contribution and steadfast enduring support that I have managed to achieve a task that was so involving. When academic road became bump, he was always there to assist in negotiating the academic curves through provision of necessary literature, insights and ideas.

I am also indebted to the Methodist church in Zimbabwe for allowing me the opportune time to study as well as use their archival documents and minutes of Conference. Heartfelt gratitude goes to friends and colleagues for their precious time and constructive criticism that saw this project as a dream come true. My sincere thanks go to Ms. S. Tagwireyi for her unwavering support, endurance and resilience in spending long sleepless nights typing out this project. Over and above, I want to thank my wife Takudzwa and family for the love, care support and encouragement emotionally, spiritually and financially.

CHAPTER ONE (1)

INTRODUCING THE STUDY

1.1 CONTEXT OF RESEARCH:

The Methodist Church in Zimbabwe better known as the Wesleyan Methodist is one of the missionary seeded churches in Zimbabwe. The teachings and doctrinal formulation at large depend on the teachings and sermons of the founding fathers John Wesley and Charles Wesley respectively. The great winds of Methodism reached Zimbabwe and impacted its horizons. The coming of the missionaries should be understood positively and negatively. They erected hospitals, schools and vocational training centers as means of developing and evangelizing the Africans. However the Methodist missionaries had the attitude and mentality that saw Africans as a people without religion and culture. Any religious practices they came across among the Africans were regarded heathen and had to be eradicated (Banana, 1991:63). The missionaries never focused on cultural development, rather ignored the existing culture in order to impart their Western culture on the African mind.

Missionaries imposed their western thinking of marriage upon the Africans which Banana argued was not informed by the biblical findings and thoughts, but the colonialist mind set of cultural imperialism (Banana, 1991:71). The result was that marriage customs, rituals and rites had no place in the white missionaries' religion. The greatest hindrance to Christianity was the institution of polygamy a form of marriage and its concomitant, the *roora/lobola* (Zvobgo, 1996:104). Missionaries thought themselves as civilizing the Africans, bringing light into the darker Continent and bringing a superior religion to the Africans. Their tradition and custom of marriage was the norm, the tradition of monogamous marriage as compared to polygamous marriage. The Missionaries saw polygamy as evil and wife enslavement and *lobola* as another way of commoditization of women and enslaving them the rest of their lives. It was a source for jealousy and hatred in families. Polygamous families never experienced peace missionaries concluded Zvobgo, (1996:104). The above thinking is indicative of the fact

that missionaries could not tolerate anything short of a monogamous marriage. Any form of marriage that could not match their notion would be upgraded. The marriages included Civil marriage, Registered Customary marriage, Unregistered Customary marriage and Living together.

The missionaries regarded Civil Marriage Act as the Christian marriage. It was called Chapter 37 currently Marriage Act 5:11. It provided for one husband to one wife and was basically given to the white community and those Africans that would have converted to Christianity. They must be single, divorced, widowed or widowers. It was the supreme marriage and was the Christian marriage. The other marriage acts were under the customary side such the Registered Customary Act 5:07, the Unregistered and Living together. These for missionaries were on the inferior side due to tendentiousness to polygamy. The African marriage unions allowed man to marry more than one wife and were perceived as lacking the civil effects of marriage. In the eyes of the missionaries, marriages should safeguard the unity of marriage and the concern for the well-being of both spouses at every level. It is the above mental and cultural superiority of the missionaries that led to the upgrading of the Unregistered and Registered customary marriages to Civil Marriage Act 5:11.

The Methodist Synod conceded that those who marry the customary way could not be accepted as full members in the church and consequently in the year 1944 the highest body of the church declared all African customary marriages inferior and heathen but recognizes the civil marriage as the “Christian marriage,” (Banana, 1991: 73). This has been the position held by the Methodist church until year 2013. These submissions by C.S Banana was a clear signal and point that the church could not tolerate the African customary marriage, worse off seek to coin a sound theological understanding and teaching that addresses and satisfies the Africans. The attitude of the church would mean a lot of Africans would be disqualified from the community of faith since some were polygamists and a lot were already married when they converted to Christianity. Africans seeking and converting to the Christian faith would have to denounce the African marriage ritual and remarry the Christian way. Polygamists had torrid times in

the faith of the missionary as they were often expelled from attending the church services (Zvobgo, 1996:113). Women in polygamous marriages were in the eyes of the missionary slaves, working to please their husbands who in this regard were the masters. The inevitable solution to the African situation was the upgrading of the African customary marriage to suit the civil marriage that was more western and valuable to the missionaries. This has been the understanding, teaching and thinking of the Methodist church in Zimbabwe. In his book entitled “A Century of Methodism”, Banana points out that Zimbabwean Methodists adopted and perpetuated the missionary mentality of upgrading all African marriages. They did the upgrading without giving a deep theological engagement with the Africans (Banana, 1991:73). It is not surprising that the Methodists have continued to marry the African customary way. This is an indication that the western marriage has failed to meet the inner and deeper needs of the African Christians. In critical moments of marriage life or when their marriages encounter challenges, the Africans revert to traditional practices and customary beliefs. It becomes evidently clear that there is need to fill up the vacuum that has been created by the two schools of thought, between the Africans whose marriage is validated with the birth of the first child and that of the missionary whose marriage is validated the moment the two give each other their consent in marriage.

The problem befalling the Methodist community of Zimbabwe is further compounded by the declaration made by the Registrar General of Marriages that “The parliament of Zimbabwe upholds and values all parliamentary acts of marriage law as crucial and valid. There shall not be upgrading of the African customary marriages to the Civil Marriage Act 5:11”. The office of the registrar further told the churches they had no legal right to upgrade the African marriages in the article titled, “Marriage Officers in no Show”. In any case the church religious ministers or clergy were agents and an extended arm of the government of Zimbabwe. The above development left the Methodist church in a theological quandary. The upgrading system was used as a qualification into church full membership strictly for men but lightly for woman. The Civil Marriage Act 5:11 was viewed and conceived as Christian marriage in the Methodist church. The declaration, development and position taken by the government meant that the church needed to

revise its conflation arrangement with the state above all come up with a sound theological position of what they conceive to be Christian marriage and develop a pastoral theology that suits the Zimbabwean domain. The move taken by government should be seen as a matchstick that started the fire of marriage debate. Otherwise the problem had long simmered affecting even the numerical returns of men in the church.

R. Hatendi has it that despite all efforts by the missionaries to discredit and discount the African customs, Africans continued to marry the African way observing the ritualistic elements associated with marriages such as *lobola* paying (Dachs, 1973: 135). J. Baur has thus noted that the most difficult area in the history of Christianity in African that seem to resist inculturation and that affect most personally the lives of the majority of people in Africa is marriage (Baur, 2005 : 469). Africans hold cardinal pillars that they think build the marriage institution. These includes among others the centrality of procreation and parenthood, the dynamic process of marriage, the indissolubility of marriage, to the social and communitarian dimension of marriage to mention only the most pertinent ones. The relevance of Christianity and marriage for Africans should take into consideration the values Africans cherish as key to marriage, without which marrying the western way remains an act of keeping up appearances. The Methodist church in Zimbabwe has been caught up in this inescapable network of confusion whether to understand marriage from the African view or to hold up the missionary thinking. What then is the theological stand point of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, what is their relationship with the State with regard to marriage, it becomes critical that a road-map of theological thinking should be outlined and sought after as a matter of urgency to try and shape the pastoral theology that will correct the misconceptions about African marriage customs and values.

The research document seeks to build from the Methodist Church`s working definition of marriage mooted at conference 2013. The Church tried to define marriage as a monogamous union of husband and wife having been blessed by the parents through acceptance of the bride price (Conference Resolution 2013). The definition proffered is neither definitive nor exhaustive, it does not explain adequately the nature of marriage

above all fails to outline when marriage is consummated. It has also left out key issues that define the African marriage. Arguably the definition fails to link with the Methodist Deeds and Standing Orders (930) that emphasizes the binding and lifelong character of the marriage vows as set in the marriage service. The Christian marriage is lifelong and divinely ordained while on the other side it remains solely a human decision and commitment. It ought to be permanent as stated in the scriptures and emphasized by the Lord Jesus, his Apostles and further reiterated through history by the church. It should be terminated only by the death of one partner (Standing Orders 930). The Methodist Deed and Standing Orders also do not provide us with the definition of marriage but it only provides for the purposes of marriage. This research paper is an attempt to fill the vacuum created by the missionaries as well as reconcile the beliefs of the Africans to the Christian values. A Shorter has it that marriage is a dynamic institution that takes many cultural forms but remains an intimate union between man and woman of which mating is an essential and sacred expression, an alliance between two family communities and not merely a contract between two family communities and not merely a contract between two people of opposite sex (Shorter, 1998: 89). In the same vein Hatendi values marriage to bring into existence the smallest comprehensive unit of society, of which procreation and child upbringing presupposes its institution. It is a covenantal relationship for mutual benefits, it is meant to be lifelong and further takes into cognizance the involvement and role of the divinities or ancestors. It is a happy functional alliance aimed at mutual service mutual trust as such African marriages are pregnant with symbolism (Dachs, 1973:135). The claims and submissions by Hatendi provokes and provides the basis on which to take a closer look at the deeper African understanding of marriage, thereby coming out with sound formulation of a theology on marriage.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The current situation obtaining in the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe is that of theological crisis with regards to marriage. There is a serious need for a clear policy with regards to marriage that will help to shape and inform the theology of marriage in the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe. The scholars who have contributed to the marriage debate have seldom addressed the theological teachings of marriage that are in tandem with the African society, but they have rather looked at how the missionary mentality and

attitude have negatively impacted on numerical returns of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe. Furthermore the writings and teachings of the founding fathers John and Charles Wesley do not give a clear defined systematic theology on marriage. A worse scenario is that John Wesley only struggled with his attempt at marriage. We are not privy to the siblings of his marriage if he had any.

The Methodist church finds itself in a schizophrenic state of mind, it is a lived reality that on the other hand it follows the white men`s mentality and tradition of marriage, while on the other hand the environment on which it operates and its clergy work, relates and testify to the lived realities of the African marriage customs. A brief exploration of the white missionary mentality points to the fact that marriage obtains between couples. It calls for the involvement of only the two bound together by mutual consent, better defined as love. The Christian teaching considers love as a structurally essential element of marriage. Love is understood as making marriage (Rigby, 1969: 275-276). This view suggest that where there is no love then there is no marriage, this view disregards and militates against the possibility of permanent commitment in marriage. Contrastingly the Africans regards not the centrality of love in marriage, it is a modern conception and foreign notion that came with Western civilization. Africans marry for sexual satisfaction, to secure an economic partner, to obtain children, and not for companionship. There is only a limited field in which men and women can associate. They sleep together and produce children together, and their union finds an economic unit, but in general social and public life contacts are limited (Gluckman, M. 1968: 79).

The African perception of marriage varies from that of the Europeans in that the marriage is a dynamic process that does not follow a laid down procedure or protocol. In the Christian tradition marriage ceremonies follow a given liturgical format. Marriage from an African view becomes a covenantal relationship for mutual benefit. It is a reality that is both personal and communitarian, above all a social uniting event (Dachs, 1973: 140). Africans celebrate marriage religiously as a drama acted and lived full of ritual and symbolism that connects the living and the departed members of their communities. The climax is sealed by the exchange of bride wealth, of which the subsequent conjugal act is

an integral part of the marriage (Dachs, 1973: 140). The above notion validates the indissolubility of marriage as it connects with the world of the living dead. In a related development marriage is consummated only when the couple witnesses the birth of the first child, especially a boy. In the Shona community, a childless marriage is always almost a bitter disappointment. Husband and wife are not fully spouses until the day when they give birth to the first child (Gelfand, C. 1982: 175). It is the fertility of the couples that makes them truly married, for it is through fertility that they project into the future the life of their predecessors and prolong their own life through their descendants (Mulago, C. 1986: 58).

Mulago talks of key principles that build the African perception of marriage and these include among others the indissolubility of marriage, the priority of procreation made crucial by emphases on fertility over against infertility, in Africa marriage is a dynamic process, which values the social and communitarian aspect of life. Marriage is not a contract of the bride and the groom but an involvement of families or clan. The struggle is trying to strike a balance between the missionary preferred perceptions of marriage which fails to articulate the African understanding of marriage or to relate the African experiences to that of biblical traditions, thereby coming out with sound African grounded theology of marriage.

In an attempt to arrive at a Christian marriage and its dictate, the founder and brains from which Christianity hails Jesus Christ was not himself married making him somehow ignorant to the marriage obligations, demands and customs. Where Jesus comments, it is to allude to the lifelong nature of marriage and to affirm that it's an earthly arrangement where- off in the eschaton the marriage bond does not count, this gives a theological quandary. The Methodist Church has become an impediment to a whole lot of those married in the African customary way. These cannot access full membership of the church and partake of the Holy Communion sacrament that demanded Christian marriage as a qualification for those unmarried. The canon and structures of the church should provide with an important structure and teaching upon which to stand while serving,

instead of becoming antagonistic to the great commission of making disciples of all nations.

The research paper is a clarion call and thought provoking to the church to swiftly look into the theology surrounding the marriage institution. It is a wakeup call to the church that there has been a shift in thinking, in cultural and religious spheres across the globe with regard to marriages. The church needs to find a sound strong foundation of theology of marriage that defines the Methodist character and aptitude, by so doing it will define its understanding of African Christian Theology of marriage.

1.3 AIM:

To come up with a theological position of marriage that responds to needs of the Methodist Community in Zimbabwe.

1.4 OBJECTIVES:

- To come up with a definition and trace the origins and development of marriage.
- To explore the African traditional customs of marriage.
- To trace the Methodist Church's traditions and response to marriage.
- To come up with a theological position of marriage blended with the African traditions and scripture.
- To make an assessment and give future trajectory of marriage in the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe.

1.5 JUSTIFICATION

The research comes as a clarion call to the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe. It seeks to inform the policy makers and inform policy with regards to marriage. It will help the Church with key pillars of African teaching and biblical findings that will be of paramount use in the building of a sound theological teaching of marriage. Additionally it helps to demystify the notion that all African traditions are barbaric and evil. It will also prove that African marriage forms are equally important like any other cultures. It is high

time that a home grown theological solution and teaching be found. The research serves to provide answers to the theological crisis and crossroads the church is facing, thereby adding knowledge to the existing body of theological knowledge.

The exposure and interaction with the Methodist community of the Shona, Ndebele and Xhosa both as a member and clergy gives the researcher more informed dealings of the challenges faced by the members as they try to uphold and relinquish the African thinking, rituals, ceremonies associated with marriage and hold on to the Christian values and ethos. The researcher has had better position and understanding of the position taken by the Registrar General of Marriage since the researcher in question is both a Clergyman and Marriage officer certified by the government of Zimbabwe. The writer has had the experience of upgrading the African customary marriages to the civil marriage and the workshop to demystify the misconceptualization of the African customary marriage and the declaration that marriage could not be upgraded, above all the church had no justification whatsoever to upgrade the marriages.

The author is engaged in pastoral work in the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe which gives ample time to critically diagnose and assess the teachings of the Methodist Church. There is vast time to relate with affected members of the church both as their pastor, Minister of Religion and qualified marriage officer who is informed of the different marriage act that involve Civil Marriage Act 5.11, Unregistered African marriage and the Registered African marriage Act 5.07.

The research could also work as the watershed on a theology of marriage debate since the church had no policy on marriage at the time of writing. The research further seeks to show that the church's historical decision to act as civil agents on marriage has brought upon itself shame, more over it has led to certain compromise of authority and responsibility resulting in a corruption of its present ability to respond pastorally and faithfully to issues related to the marriage. It is also a clarion call for the church to be proactive as it responds to the complicated circumstances presented by marriage in an

attempt to move forward pastorally and faithfully, expanding its biblical understanding and adapting its theological praxis.

1.6 METHODOLOGY

In the course of research, the author will make use of the social scientific method or approach to the study of religion. The comparative and historical method will also be made used to make this project a success. The researcher will make use of documents from the Methodist Church archives, Methodist Standing Orders, Conference minutes and resolutions and the internet as method of data collection. These sources are only used to corroborate and augment as well as compliment information from other different sources. The research will make use of the library. It will make use of portable document files, books, journals among other published materials to investigate the deeper understanding of marriage. These documents will help to unlock and unveil the commonalities and inconsistencies coupled with the value people attach to marriage.

1.6.1 SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC APPROACH

This is a study and method pioneered by Max Webber and Karl Max who was also sociologist and was applied to the study of the Old Testament by Martin North and others. These contends that it is a phase of exegetical task which attempts at analysis of the social and cultural dimensions of the biblical text and the environment context through utilization of perspectives, theories, models and research of the social sciences (Griffin. D, 2014).

The method investigates biblical texts as meaningful configuration of a language intended to communicate a message between composers and audience. It studies not only the social aspects of the form and content of the text but also the conditioning factors and the intended consequences of the communication processes. Social scientific approach becomes key and vital in the biblical traditions.

It will also help study the core relations of the texts, linguistic, literal, theological and social dimensions of the marriage in the biblical traditions as well as the African environment. The writer is aware of the short comings of the methodology in question. The apparent weakness is that almost all exegeses and historians are potentially

vulnerable to the charge of forcing material into a cookie-cater molds more often than not and the end result is that a theory is made to count more than the variant shapes and sizes of the material to be interpreted. The strengths being that it helps uncover the concrete and theoretical connections between religion and all other aspects of the system in as far as they can be known.

1.6.2 COMPARATIVE APPROACH:

This is an approach that groups some things together under a common class and noticing how those examples vary in relation to each other to illustrate a common factor, but also showing how the examples differ in the relation to the factor. The differences then reveal the variability of the pattern in cultural contexts. The multiple variations will enrich understanding of the pattern, thereby leading to the differentiating of the pattern into subtypes. This methodology will be of paramount importance in comparing the biblical marriage traditions and the African cosmological understanding of the marriage. Similarities between the two will be contrasted with Western attitude such that a theological conclusion could be reached. The method allows for the study of all recurring traditions and form of religious phenomena with the aim to note commonalities and differences among religious traditions.

The method has its limitation in that the things contrasted and others may be quite incomparable in other respects and for other purposes (Poole, F.J. 1986: 414) Poole further argues that it does not deal with phenomena in the round, but only with an aspectual characteristic of them, neither phenomenological whole entities nor their local meaning are preserved in the comparison (Poole. F.J, 1986: 415).

It should be noted that religious phenomena are indelibly embedded in a context of social-cultural settings and if removed from those holes, plucked out and set alongside similar pieces from other cultures they will lose their original meaning, meanings that are always in tandem with the local and contextual behavior. This becomes the major weaknesses of the methodology among others.

1.6.3 HISTORICAL APPROACH:

This research method utilizes documents like books, archeological remains, archival documents to study events or ideas of the past including the philosophy of persons and groups at any remote time. This method is used to explore what happened in the past at a particular time and place or what the characteristics of a phenomenon were like at a particular time and place. The objective is to judge the validity of the historical data and piecing together the evidence to make sound conclusion about marriage. The method is important in analyzing diverse marriage phenomena, validating the data collected about marriage from different cultural traditions and assessing the causal processes and reactions of both Africans and missionaries to marriage.

1.7 SCOPE OF STUDY

The study seeks to arrive at a theological understanding and teaching of marriage in the Methodist church in Zimbabwe. The target group is the Methodist community of Zimbabwe especially those affected by the different Marriage Acts such as the unregistered and registered customary marriages, those denied full membership; worse off partaking of the Holy Communion in the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe.

1.8 LITERATURE REVIEW

Banana, C. S. (1991) A Century of Methodism in Zimbabwe (1891-1991)

Banana has it that the attitudes of the Methodist white missionaries was not very different from that of colonialists, their opinion was that Africans had no religion and culture, any religious practices they came across among the Africans were regarded as heathen practices which had to be eradicated, a good example was polygamy which they saw as exploitation of women (Banana, 1991: 63). In the same vein Manyoba, C.B in the same book as above submitted his opinion to say that the missionaries were not focusing on cultural developments, but rather ignored the existing culture in order to impart their culture.

Manyoba, C.B further cited the mentality of the RevShimmin a white missionary as follows “these poor degraded people had no God and no religion of any kind except that of fear, Africans are surrounded by heathen customs from which they need to be freed.”

It should be calculated that the missionaries had no intention to integrate the Christian faith with the African culture. The result was that marriage customs, rituals and rites had no place in white men's religion, but they only imposed their marriage set patterns to the Africans. Marriage as preferred by Banana is viewed as an important aspect in the life of an individual and society, thus the custom of African marriage was noticed by the missionaries and declared that those who marry by African customary marriage could not be accepted as full members in the church. This was a clear sign that the church could not tolerate African customary marriages. The submissions by Banana will help the author to analyze the mentality of the missionaries with regard to African marriage against what they termed Christian marriage. For Banana the church denounced African marriage completely without a theological understanding (Banana, 1991:73).

Hatendi, R.P. (1973) "Shona Marriage and the Christian Churches" in J.A.Dachs Christianity South of the Zambezi

Hatendi has it that marriage is a special and intimate personal union between man and woman as such, of which mating is an essential expression, in some sense sacred. Marriage further brings into existence the smallest comprehensive unit of society, of which procreation and child upbringing presuppose marriage (Dachs, 1973: 135). The Shona conceived marriage as a union or alliance of two family groups through their representatives, the bride and bridegrooms. These notion submitted by Hatendi will assist the researcher to come up with African theological propositions of marriage which will lead to a theological position. Ideas submitted by Hatendi will be useful in the analysis of African marriage customs and consequently the formulation of a theological discourse. The views by Hatendi are critical for they are seedbed from which to coin the African notion of marriage which includes the priority of procreation among others.

Zvobgo, C.J.M. (1996) A History of Christian missionaries in Zimbabwe 1890-1936

The missionaries had a negative attitude especially in the area of *lobola* and polygamy among the Africans. The missionaries conceded that *lobola* was simply buying a girl and had much in common with slave dealing since the girls' wishes and inclinations were very often not considered at all or sometimes the girl was forced into marriage

(Zvobgo,1996: 104). On the other hand polygamy was highly disregarded by the missionaries as they saw it as servitude and exploitation of women by men. Zvobgo has made vast contribution to the debate of *lobola*. Although there are abuses and commercialization of *lobola*, it was never a purchase price for woman. Instead *lobola* payments points to the essence of the transfer of the custody of children to their father. Lobola gives value to the woman in the eyes of all men. Zvobgo has it that the missionaries wrongly condemned the African customs without first teaching the good values in the Christian tradition. The submissions above are critical in dealing with the issues of *lobola* and assessing the attitudes of the whites, thereby finding a sound teaching with regards to *lobola* and the Christian faith.

Zvobgo, C.J.M. (1991) The Wesleyan Methodist Missions in Zimbabwe 1891-1945

Zvobgo tries to trace the historical development of the Methodist church in Zimbabwe from the Transvaal. He further points to the notions and mentality of those that carried the Christian gospel to the environs of Zimbabwe. Zvobgo has it that the missionaries saw Africans as full of deplorable ignorance of all true religion (Zvobgo, 1991: 24).

Shorter, A. (1998) African Culture: An Overview

Shorter traces the different African customs, rituals, rites and religious beliefs including marriage; giving value and significance to these African belief and systems. He further analyses the symbolism in the African culture and the ritual symbolism. Emphasis is also laid on the concept of marriage and family in Africa. The corpus of Shorter will be the key in the trace and analysis of the African conceptualization of marriage, rituals and symbolism around the marriage institution. Shorter has it that marriage takes many cultural forms, but remains an intimate union between men and women of which mating is an essential and sacred expression, an alliance between two family communities and not merely a contract between two individuals of opposite sex (Shorter, A.1998:89). In an African society, to be alive was to transmit life, to be reproductive, a pointer to procreation and one who is not given to procreation is as dead, the notion is that the ancestors are literally reincarnated in the descendant through procreation (Shorter, 1998:94).

Clive and Kileff. (1970) Shona Customs essays by African Writers

Clive and Peggy Kileff have taken upon themselves to closely study the Shona customs among which involves the custom of marriage. Clive and company have noted that there are a variety of marriage customs to include the concept of “(*Kukumbira*), a process by which someone or a go between is sent with a hoe or sum of money to ask for a hand in marriage, (*Kuzvarira*), child marriage, this is pledging a baby girl child in marriage (*Kugarira*), service marriage, a traditional form of marriage for men who had no ways of raising necessary marriage payments. Such men would arrange to work for their in-laws instead of paying bride price for the intended wife, (*kutizira*), elopement,” among others. In their submission they have traced the value of lobola “*roora*” in the Shona tradition. Shona marriage without *roora* is inconvincible, *roora* is of vital importance because it is an outward manifestation of a young man’s love for his fiancée and it is to safeguard against groundless divorce (Clive and Kileff, 1970:23). These submissions will help the researcher especially in the analysis of the Shona marriage customs, values and significance of their ritualistic ceremonies.

Magesa, L. (1997) African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life

Marriage is the acceptable social structure for transmitting life, the life that preserves the vital forces of humans, clans and families. All forms of marriage and its rituals therefore are intended to assure that procreation occurs according to the wishes of God and the ancestors. Marriage for Africans involves some of the followings, the centrality or procreation, the social and communitarian dimension, it is a dynamic process above all marriage is indissoluble (Magesa, L. 1997:119-125). Magesa has raised pertinent issues from the African perspective that inform and contribute vastly to the African Christian marriage debate. The contributions serve to shape the scope and content of the discussion on the theology of marriage with an African color.

CHAPTER TWO (2)

2.0 The Origins and Historical Developments of Marriage

2.1 The Origins of Marriage

The greatest challenge that has befallen the scholars is that of trying to predict the marriage institution. The challenge has also not spared even the church. Marriage therefore is a human relationship that predates the Christian faith, Christian history and Christian worship. It is as old as humanity and has progressed as well as changed with human society (Edwards, S. 1976:28). This suggests that marriage follows different traditions and customs though it remains a human relationship. The marriage institution therefore is interpreted differently by human societies. It thus should be argued that Christianity came into societies where marriages were already in existence. It is thus difficult to argue for anything distinctly Christian but only to surmise and also affirm that marriage is a reality secular in origins which has acquired a deeper meaning, a natural institution built from the union and love of husband and wife (Edwards, 1976:28). A Shorter thinks that marriages across cultures and through history were arranged for the purposes of policy, economics and pragmatism, deeply rooted and shaped by the structures of kingship and politics. A family affair arranged by parents, typically preceded by betrothal and celebrated in a domestic context presided by the head of the household, usually the grooms father (Shorter, 1968: 1-8). This seemingly was the pattern for both the Jewish and Roman cultural traditions and this influenced the subsequent development and consolidation of theological ideas about marriage in the Middle Age Shorter retorts (Shorter, 1968: 3-4). The submissions by R Hatendi wants to persuade the writer to think that Christian marriage was an invention created by the missionaries for Africa, as they tried to weed out everything African since they perceived everything African as heathen and devilish. Hatendi had this to say “for missionaries, conversion meant turning away from Shone culture and accepting the western way of life, (Dachs, 1973:146)”. R Hatendi made the remarks that there is no such thing as a Christian marriage in abstraction, but a reinterpretation of a given cultural norm and value (Dachs, 1973:147). The above argument points to the truth that marriage is neither African nor European but remains a human relationship that is prone to interpretation, as such what

could be called Christian marriage is a reinterpretation of certain cultural norms and values of a given society which should not be imposed to another culture. The story of marriage calls for critical examination of the biblical traditions, to find out what makes the origins of marriage and the latter development unit nowadays called Christian marriage. The underlying truth we have established in relation to the origins of marriage is indisputably that marriage is as old as humanity. It is typically a human relationship of union in intimacy for husband and wife, with motive of procreation, enhancing relationships and the upbringing of children. The notion of marrying for love is a modern construct as S. Edwards puts across the argument (Edwards, 1976: 28).

2.2 The Biblical Traditions of Marriage

The origins of Christian marriage cannot be understood historically without a trace of the biblical traditions which cover both the Old and the New Testament. It should be noted that the bible is the standard and normative source of theology. Therefore it becomes very pertinent to try and examine the traditions as laid in the bible. It also gives us an insight into where Christians derive their teaching of marriage, this will also help us to evaluate whether the biblical traditions do support or dismiss the African Shona marriage customs as evil.

2.2.1 The Old Testament view on Marriage

The book of Genesis has been used by many scholars as the genesis of the marriage tradition especially citing the traditions of Adam and Eve. The union of Adam and Eve undoubtedly could be used to mark the origins of the monogamous and heterosexual marriages designed as lifelong by God. John Morris opines that the creation stories, however, when faithfully read, are not instruction in defining the limits of the institution of marriage, but seek to point to the relationships between God and human kind one to another (Morris, 2007: 12).

All being equal the creation stories are a reflection of God's love to humanity and the obligation of deep relationship of humanity to each other penetrated by love. As such it could be calculated that the purpose of the traditions of Adam and Eve mirrors that companionship which is the core and very purpose of human beings, but have been

interpreted to teach critical foundations of the marriage traditions of monogamous and heterosexual traditions that characterized and influenced the Christian teachings and position to date. There is every grain of truth that deriving a static, eternal definition of the limitations of marriage as a monogamous, heterosexual union only, with males and females having pre-ordained roles in the partnership from the creation stories is myopic and misinterpretation and misuse of the sacred text and its purpose (Morris, 2007:13). This is so because the book of Genesis provides a series of marriage traditions and marital practices, over and above all, the bible is profuse with marriage customs that characterizes the Jewish traditions. The Patriarchal traditions cannot be ignored in the cause to understand and explore the marriage tradition. These show the developments around the marriage institution. We discover levirate (Deuteronomy 25: 1-10) marriages in which a surviving brother was expected to marry and bear an heir for the deceased man by his widow, this was an honorable and expected practice meant to preserve the family name, identify and assure the proper passage of riches to the next generation (Cohen,Shaye J. D , 2001).

The language of the bible especially on the patriarchal traditions is so profuse with androcentrism, the society was patriarchal, patrimonial and patriarchal culture was the norm of the day. These norms and values influenced human behavior in all spheres of life not sparing marriage. It should be noted that marriage was a family matter and a religious event where the father of the family held all the power for legal decisions arranged for the marriage of their daughters, who were their property by asking for bride price or dowry (Martos, 2001: 135).

The patriarchs had absolute power and authority in ancient culture over their children and daughters. They controlled, entered into marriage contracts by their own choosing, regardless of the daughter's age willingness and consent. It suggests that women had no right in the marital arrangement, neither would they accept nor reject a marriage proposal brokered by the patron nor could they divorce once married (Shaye Cohen, 2001). The tradition of Abraham and Sarah including Hagar gives a new twist into the marriage issue with regards to barrenness. The tradition persuades us to believe that female slaves could

be romped into a sexual relationship to bear a child for the barrenness mother as in the case of Sarah, thereby protecting themselves from dishonor and potential destination. Divorce was not verily acceptable and pronounced and measures were put in place to avoid divorce.

The traditions of Ruth and Naomi represent another paradigm shift in the course of human history with regard to marriage. The traditions indicate intermarriages where the Israelites are hooked with the Moabites (Ruth 1:16-17). The traditions are punctuated by unconditional love between Ruth and Naomi which poses difficulties in trying to understand the marriage episodes of Israel as a nation. To all intent and purposes, the marriage traditions in the bible are a reflection on the need for ordering of societal and personal relationships between humanity and God.

A close look at the biblical tradition though reflects that marriage started as monogamous unifying relationships between Adam and Eve given to Cain who also had a single unnamed wife, to Enoch and down in generations. Polygamy is traced back to Lamech who took two wives Adah and Zillah, (Genesis 4:19). No reason is given for the shift, thus the bible presents two models of marriage monogamy and polygamy (Roberts, 1983: 11). It should be calculated that the churches have thus over stated the importance of monogamous marriages at the expense of the polygamous marriage without giving considerable respect to the ills and advantages of the polygamous marriage. In the Hebrew scripture it is difficult to defend the notion of a lifelong union of man and woman (Dormor, 2004:24). The lifelong of marriage refers to sustenance of the marriage until the parties to the marriage are separated by death which is calculated to be a divine instrument to end human life on earth. The creation stories and citations of marriage unions between couples is an act of translation and interpretation of anthropological phenomenon, otherwise the Adam and Eve traditions cannot be the norm to explain and determine how marriage should be understood.

2.2.2 The New Testament view on Marriage

2.2.2.1 Marriage in the Gospels

The New Testament presents also a new understanding of marriage. The Gospels are not elaborate on issues of marriage, save for the comments made by Christ with regard to marriage. There are no parables that teach and clarify the issues of marriage but present marriage bonds as reference to the eternal things such as John 2:1-11, Mathew 22:1-14; 25:1-13. Christ uses the wedding feasts to explain issues of eternity and not marriage as it were. Christ upholds the sanctity of marriage according to comments made about fidelity in Mathew 5:27-28. Parties in marriage should observe fidelity as a virtue as compared to adultery. The other instances where Christ comments about marriage is on questions regarding divorce are asked by superlative Jews (Mathew 19:3-6). Christ comments that marriage once consummated by God cannot be dissolved by any person. As a matter of fact what God has conjoined together, no man can put asunder. This could be indicative of the fact that marriage is a gendered relationship that originated with God in creation. It is a unique relationship that unites two opposite sexes. Marriage tales have been used to describe the relationship of Christ with the church, in some cases the text like Mark 12:25; Mathew 22:30; 24:38 have been used to teach about what will happen in end times or in the eschaton. It clear then that the Gospels do not attempt to give a clear cut teaching on marriage and how it shall be administered. It has been noted that more often than not where women are mentioned in the Gospels they either stand alone as in the case of the Samaritan woman, the parable of the foolish maidens among others (Mathew 25:1-23; Luke 14:8).

2.2.2.2 Marriage in the letters of Paul

What we have are family relations and laid down code of ethics to govern the relations as in the letter of Ephesians 5:25. The behavioral and household code of marriage should be understood in the light of instructions on how humanity can work to live out the Gospel imperative in the light and context of their own cultural norms and in the light of their personal identities. In some instances where a marriage bond is being referred to, it stands to teach about Christ's intimate relationship to his church. Paul's teachings on

marriage are also a response from questions raised from churches (1 Corinthians 7:1). It should be noted that both Jesus and Paul are somehow eschatological in mind when they comment on marriage, for Paul the preferred state would be single, marriage is fundamentally to enable sexual control (1 Corinthians 7:7). The preferred state for Christians is that of celibacy for he looks forward to the imminent return of Christ. Marriage becomes a source of distress and anxiety for the married persons who will become overwhelmed with worldly affairs but the unmarried will be anxious about the affairs of the Lord (1Corinthian 7:24-26). He recognizes and acknowledges the sanctity of marriage but for procreation instead as means of firing down the heat of sexual desires.

Paul says it is better to marry than to burn from sexual passion (1Corinthians 7:8-11) and his mind is obsessed with the imminent return of Christ. In the same token Paul warns people about divorce, married people should not deny each other conjugal rights but they should observe the time of prayer (1Corinthians 7:3-4). In some instances Paul does not condemn polygamy but proposes that those who wish and aspire for leadership position be married to one partner, as if polygamy is permissible to everybody excluding leaders (I Timothy 3:1-13). The letters does not attempt to prescribe a set standard to follow with regard to marriage but scatters thoughts and codes of ethics to regulate behavior in family households as people await the imminent return of Christ. A general run down of the biblical traditions does not provide a unique culture from those practiced by Africans. The bible indicates that arranged marriages, betrothal and dowry were in practice by Hebrew community. Levirate marriages and polygamy are also profuse in the bible as found in other cultures. To give a concise position that the bible presents categorically a homogeneous account of Christian marriage remains an issue of interpretation.

2.3 The Experience and Teaching of the Early Church

The marriage issue in the early church finds its origins in a multiplicity of places and cultural customs and traditions across the ancient world. The early church had difficult and challenging times to come to terms with marriage. It was faced with a dichotomous

view of marriage pushed by both the pagans and Christians whose mindset and beliefs were shaped by apocalyptic and eschatological thoughts. The Greco Roman philosophy of marriage deserves close attention in this regard and the teachings of the early church fathers cannot be underestimated. The teachings of Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria and Augustine of Hippo among others became the founding principles of marriage during the formative period of the Christianity (Brown, P. 2008:122).

It is generally agreed that Christianity did not originate and operate in a vacuum but in a cultural and geographical context which then shaped, influenced and informed some of its traditions. The early Christian traditions of marriage were deeply rooted in the Greco Roman traditions and customs and the early church fathers heavily drank from the Greco Roman philosophies of the times. The Greco Roman world view is believed to have shaped the legal frame-work of marriage. Romans believed that marriage was only made when parties give their consent to it. However throughout the first millennium betrothal was an essential part of the process of getting married for Christians (Stevenson, K. 1992:129). For the Romans, marriage was something that required legislation by the state and it was highly exclusive as well as restricted to certain social classes. Those intending to marry had to meet certain laid down conditions of consensus and coenobium as such they were not members of the proscribed group (Dormor, D. 2004:45).

In the second century, Christians began to advocate for the renunciation of marriage, sexual activities and family in favor of absolute continence or asceticism (Brown, P. 2008:88). The mentality grew from strong tendencies of asceticism developed from the New Testament teachings that were negating this world and affirming the other world. The exponent of the gnostic teachings was Marcion. He argued that baptized Christians should fully abstain from sexual activities. Furthermore they believed that Christ came to save humanity from the evil world as such followers of Christ should reject marriage as part of their efforts to escape from this visible corrupt world. The group of gnostic teachers further hinted that it was impossible for one to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit if one engages in sexual activities, Christians should abandon marriage intercourse which caused Adam and Eve to stumble and the most decisive obstacle to the indwelling of the

Holy Spirit (Brown, P. 2008:92). Engagement with and in activities of marriage was more or less contributing directly to the cycle of mortality as compared to escaping it. Marriage was absolutely irrelevant and sexual activity was something to be transcended or discarded (Hunter, D. 1992:12-13).

Another school of thought arose to defend the goodness of marriage better known as the church fathers. The school of Tertullian and company spoke in defense of marriage. They revealed the social nature of marriage and its commitment to another worldly faith. Tertullian taught that Christian marriage should be tolerated and modified to reflect the original union of Adam and Eve as such only monogamous marriages should be upheld. Marriage and sex were instituted by God at the creation of humanity for the purposes of procreation (Hunter, D. 1992:13). He further opines that marriage should be limited to single monogamous marriage, divorce and remarriage are never tolerated. Christ had no room for divorce because what God has conjoined, man cannot put asunder. Marriage can only occur when God joins the two into one flesh and it becomes permanent and indissoluble. It could be surmised that the early church insisted on strict monogamy as argued by Tertullian. The very origin of the human race supports the law of a single marriage as in the case of Adam and Eve which became a rule for all people.

A brief exploration of Clement's teaching is also critical at this juncture. Clement of Alexandria saw marriage as the conjunction of man and woman for the procreation of legitimate children and nature points to the evidence that humans should marry because their body structures which are both male and female testifies (Wood, P.S 1954). Marriage becomes active participation in God's work of creation by humanity and it should remain monogamous allowing for both procreation and proper domestic affairs. He was of the mind that marriage was only meant to increase and replenish the earth as in (Genes 1:28). Marriage and family life promotes relationship and protects against lust and burning passions, hence marriage does not out rightly distract from God. Clement describes marriage as sacred and must be kept pure from anything that defiles it. The sacredness comes in its ability to fire down passions of flesh and the act of procreation.

A critical survey shows that the early church borrowed the notion of procreation and fidelity of husband and wife from the church fathers.

In a nutshell, the teachings of the early Church Fathers became foundational to the understanding of Christian marriage. The early church insisted on strict monogamy as taught by the church fathers. It further believed in the sacredness and indissolubility of marriage, upholding highly the essence of procreation and fidelity between the husband and wife. The early church believed that Christ ruled out not only multiple marriages at the same time but also serial marriages to contemporaneous spouses. On the other hand the medieval church laid down a challenging principle informed by the Roman traditions that a valid marriage required public expressed consent of both parties. Where there was no consent marriage had not taken place. It should be noted that marriage remained largely a transaction between the families of the two spouses, but regulated by the Roman civil law.

2.4 The Civil and Religiousness of Marriage

Christianity was born and also influenced by the Greco-Roman civilization which had invented laws, customs and practices that govern marriage, deeply rooted in and shaped by the structures of Kinship and politics (Dormor, 2004: 45). The Romans had an established legislation of the state by which to govern marriages. It is established that when the Roman Empire reached the Mediterranean it changed the ancient culture and legal systems to include marriage practices but marriage was not legalized or made civil issue until the fourth century BCE. Marriage came to the sphere of civil law only when contested cases of divorce were sent to the Magistrate. Bishops were agents of the state acting as magistrates, though without power to decide on marriage cases in the time of Constantine the Emperor. In the period in question the church had little to no involvement in marriage and there was no uniform ecclesiastical regulations regarding marriage (Martos, J. 2001: 45). During the third century, it has been established that marriage was a private family matter, the church had little to no involvement with issues of marriage, no ecclesiastical regulations and liturgy governing marriage were invented. Hunter thinks that the rise of clandestine marriages, a practice that allowed people to

enter into marriage unions they could later renounce on little to no reason and ground at all led to the legitimization of marriage and the subsequent involvement of the church as it sought to protect the vulnerable women and children born out of the clandestine marriages (Hunter, D. 1992: 7). The continuous collapse of marriages and clandestine arrangements were in the eyes of church a threat to the sacrality of marriage. By the eleventh century the church had taken over the control of marriages and declaring that the marriage was only legal and valid after a blessing by the priest (Martos, J. 2001: 45).

The shift and involvement of the Church with marriages should be understood in light of the influence of St Augustine of Hippo's contributions to the institution of marriage. It is perceived that Augustine held and taught that marriage was basically meant for procreation, the only reason for sexual relations, for him marriage was sacred and a sacrament (Martos, 2001: 361-366). He is believed to have used Ephesian 5 to describe marriage as rooted in mystery. It is the mysterious component that points to its sacramentality which becomes the ground on which to argue the indissolubility of marriage.

The notions by Augustine became the building blocks from which the church made headway to justify its increased involvement in the establishment of marriage bonds. Priest and bishops began to take more active roles in the marriage and by the end of the twelfth century the church had developed a wedding liturgy. The church began to bless the civil unions, then latter developing marriage liturgies to be used in churches (Martos, 2001: 363-364). The Romans also saw procreation as a civil duty that all citizens of marriageable age were expected to contribute and the value of children as a guarantee that the family name and blood line would continue and parents would be taken care of in their old age (Treggiari, S. 1991). The Greco-Roman ideals of marriage became the basis that informed the Christian marriage. Early Christians throughout the Roman Empire were inclined to follow local marriage customs (Hunter, D. 2003: 63). It is clear from the above inclinations that Christianity was influenced heavily by the Greek-Roman customs and cultural traits. Marriage by means of consent which the medieval church buttressed

was heavily grounded in the ancient Roman law. The medieval church ruled that valid marriage required the public expressed consent of both parties involved in marriage.

The Council of Trent in 1563 saw the Roman Catholic Church declaring that a marriage was only legitimate in the eyes of the church if it took place before a priest in a wedding ceremony as a way of putting an end to the practice of clandestine marriages (John, 1980). The legislation of marriages mattered only when marriages were heading toward divorce which was an increasingly relevant issue at the time due to the popular practice of clandestine marriages, a practice that enabled people to enter unions they could later renounce on the grounds or no grounds at all, this was the greatest threat to the sacredness of marriage (Martos, 2001: 382). The intention and zeal was to protect the vulnerable children of these clandestine marriages. To fight the cause of the deserted spouse, the Roman Catholic Church issued a pastorally motivated declaration that marriages were only legal and valid if blessed by the priest (Martos, 2001: 371). The declaration made by the Roman Catholic Church was to be understood as effectively putting all marriages under the juridical power of the church and owing to the Augustinian teaching of the sacramentality of marriage. The marriage bond was indissoluble and divorce was not an option, argues (Martos, 2001: 377). The above notions could be surmised as the understanding and theological position of the Catholic Church that marriage is a sacrament par excellent. It could also be calculated that the Roman Catholic Church is the brain and mind behind the civil, legalized marriages as it worked to save the continued failing marriages clandestinely instituted, otherwise there was not much of a Christian marriage but the Christianization of Greco-Roman legal framework that governed the marriage institution.

The Reformation era championed by Martin Luther challenged the sacramentality of the marriage but not the legalization of marriage. Luther thought marriage to be a natural and social institution which fell under natural and civil law, but not church law (Martos, 2001: 379). The above notions got enough backing with the rise of the French Revolution which brought the end to ecclesiastical control of marriage in Europe by the end of the sixteenth century. Marriage was made solely a civil union. Luther`s theology of

sacraments should be understood as the basis of his rejection and disputing of the sacramentality of marriage. Unlike sacraments, marriage does not nourish and strengthen faith or prepare for eternal life. Luther further argues that there is nowhere in the Bible we read about a promise of salvation that is linked to marriage. Christ never instituted marriage as a sacrament neither is it a sign of something else (Buitenday, J. 2007). It has been established that in every sacrament there is a word of divine promise to be believed by the adherents who receive the sign, and that the sign alone cannot be a sacrament. He conceived sacrament as a word of divine promise to be believed by all who receive the sign. For him true sacraments have both the aspect of the word and the sign, where the sign acts as a seal of God's word which is basically and fundamentally a promise of forgiveness of sins for all who partake of the sacrament (Buitenday, 2007). Luther opines that there are only two sacraments instituted by Christ which are baptism and the eucharist outside these there is none. He asserts the view that marriage is both divine and worldly. The source of marriage is God thus making it divine but remains worldly in its sphere. It lies in the earthly order in that people can prove love even though they may fail without the help of the word and sacraments. Additionally, Luther saw the role of religious ministers in two aspects, that of blessing the marriage ceremony through witnessing the vows and pronouncing the marriage in the name of secular authorities, reading of the Word of God over the couple before the alter and giving sound advice amid difficulties of marriage especially in cases of marital infidelity or abandonment (Schultz, R. 1972:37). The Anglicans took this position, that while the marriage rite is sacramental, marriage is not a sacrament (Martos, 2001: 381). The Methodists' position is highly rooted and related to that of the Anglican's understanding of marriage. The Methodist believes that marriage is not a sacrament. Methodists like the reformers hold on to the notion of only two sacraments instituted by Christ in scripture as baptism and Eucharist. It is argued that the civil marriage was instituted in Britain around 1836 and enforced to all churches excluding the Catholic. The church became indebted to the state and served as an extended arm in marriage of the State (Hemi, 1719: 137).

A close look into the institution of marriage shows that it has developed and changed overtime. Notions about Christian marriage did not originate in a vacuum but its birth

has been in a largely agro based society, ruled by semi-divine emperor, maintained by a brutal military regime (Martos, 2001). The ideas of marriage customs have had to adapt to the changing environments and resultantly it is highly fluid and porous to talk of Christian marriage.

Consequently, it should be surmised that the Catholic Church initiated the conflation of the Church and State with regard to marriage. This relationship has continued to affect the church to execute its pastoral duties with regard to marriages. J. Brent thinks that when the Church and State get mixed up as in the case of marriages, one of the two things happens, consciences are violated initially and persecution results ultimately, state controlled religion even in the hands of benevolent government waters down religion and strips it of its vitality (Brent, 2008: 82).

The desire to explore the biblical traditions of marriage has proved that the idea that marriage has always been a church centered, life long, monogamous, indissoluble bond between one man and one woman is a fallacy of ambiguity, simply not borne out of scripture or history. Marriage has moved from contractual property exchange between patriarchs to consensual agreements of commitment or covenant (Rogers, F. 1999: 29). Marriage has evolved from the Jewish culture as a private family affair, into a civil issue, but did not involve a priest until centuries later when the church stepped into the new territory and imposed its authority (Rogers, 1999: 26).

The practices of marriage derived from the stories in the scriptures simply do not give us a homogeneous account of the marriage we can define as Christian marriage, but seed thoughts on marriage. The Old Testament does not provide for monogamous marriage only, but polygamous marriage are so profuse and are not condemned. On the other hand the New Testament argues for the sacredness, indissolubility of marriage and priority of procreation. These are central and common in all testaments. The accounts provided by Paul in the letters immensely give household codes of ethics on how to regulate behaviors in the family set up of the father, mother, children and servants. He neither condemns polygamy nor prefer monogamy serve for those desiring leadership positions. This

chapter has equally discovered that the early church taught that marriage should be strictly monogamous between a man and a woman. Marriage should result in procreation and the upbringing of children. It should be characterized by fidelity between the husband and wife. The Greco Roman Empire saw procreation as key in marriage and consent as making marriage without which marriage has not taken place. The truth is that the legal and civil aspect of marriage originated in the Roman Empire and was adopted as well as Christianized by the Christians. The early church also believed in the sacrality and indissolubility of marriage as grounded in scriptures. The researcher have also noted the diverging views between the Catholics and the Protestants, where Catholics believes in sacredness and sacramentality of marriage, contrastingly the Protestant reformers believe marriage as only sacred but not a sacrament.

CHAPTER THREE (3)

3.1 THE AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE ON MARRIAGE:

The theology of marriage in the Methodist church in Zimbabwe will be a futile undertaking if the African worldview, thought patterns, cultures and customs that relates to marriage are not explored. It becomes apparently fundamental to explore the African philosophy and cosmology as it relates to marriage customs and traditions. For the purposes of this research work and the dissertation, major and critical pillars of African marriage will be explored. These include among other the priority of (*lobola*) bride wealth in the African cosmology, the brief rundown of various kinds of African marriages and major cardinal pillars of the marriage that involve, the centrality of procreation, the indissolubility of marriage, the dynamic process of marriage to the social and communitarian dimension of marriage.

A general exploration of the African understanding of marriage customs will be done but eventually narrowing down to the Shona culture which is one of the dominant tribes and dialects in Zimbabwe. The exploration of the African traditions should be calculated not as an easy task but a mammoth undertaking that seeks a general overview. This submission comes in the backdrop and debate that relates to the term African traditions which poses serious academic challenge since we have a plethora of traditions, ethnical tribes, and languages in Africa. Africa is a continent of diverse cultural and traditional customs that are sometimes interpreted to mean different things at a given time, tribe and community, as such marriage customs may not give us a homogenous account of tradition and understanding. Be that as it may, the idea is to search for the common thread line of marriage Africans share in common across boundaries. Shorter has it that Africans are a representative of multiple adaption to different and similar environment, a creation of filtering dynastic groups and these ethnic groups, categories, interactions of languages, dialects, customs and values that shades and influence one another. Therefore, Africans share ideas and practices over a wide range to include marriage (Shorter, 1998: 18). Africans generally hold the belief that marriage cannot be predated, it has always existed, as such marriage and family are intertwined and are related institutions. Marriage has

been conceived to mean an intimate union between man and woman, of which mating is an essential and sacred expression, establishing enforceable rights between them, making a change of status for them and their parents, giving the children of the union a higher status than extramarital ones, generating relationship of consanguinity and affinity, implying that other forms of mating or intimacy are deviant (Shorter, 1998: 83). Shorter wants to persuade us to believe the notion that marriage is meant to build relationships between clans represented by the two different parties in the union of marriage and that marriage union should be life long and indissoluble, over and above these, it should result in procreation. Marriage is thus not merely a contract between two individuals, but it is rather an alliance between two family communities or descent groups. The alliances are then sealed by exchange of labor for wives, bride services, goods exchanged for wives, bride wealth, leading to the complex kinship and affinal systems (Shorter, 1998: 89).

In Africa, marriage is an institution which has a variety of forms with respect both to the rites and customs by which the union is achieved and to the nature of the union itself (Bourdillon, 1987:36). Processes of marriage vary between the traditional long and elaborate series of negotiations between two families, to the affair between a young man and his girl, over which their respective families may have little control. Bourdillon opines that marriage especially for the Shona remains essentially a contract between two families (Bourdillon, 1987:36). The spouses were respected in as far as their choices were concerned but sometimes arranged marriages would take place. It should be noted that the negotiations towards marriage normally required the participation of senior representatives of each family. Marriage unions take various forms ranging from (*Kukumbira*), *kutizira* / elopement which is normally done when a man has slept with a girl before paying the *lobola*, then he must take the young lady to his house without her parents' knowledge or may result from other extenuating circumstances that may cause marriage (Clive and Kileff, 1970: 36). In elopement, the couple pre-empt some of the lengthy formalities of the normal marriage and eliminate control by their respective family heads, although this goes against the acknowledged ideal of normal marriage system. The other form of marriage is "*Kuzvarira*", child marriage, though legally prohibited. In the ancient times it was possible for a man to favor a friend or an associate

with the promise of a young daughter in marriage. This was done under difficult cases such as bad harvest. A family without enough to live on may relieve the situation by marrying off a small girl (Bourdillon, 1987: 44). The poor man or woman in the Shona society would also marry through “*kuganha*”, *kutema ugariri*). The poor man would work for his in-laws instead of paying *lobola* and was likely to become something of a slave to the in-law’s family for the rest of his life. These other marriage unions were only preferred due to circumstances, otherwise the way of (*Kukumbira*) was the best for Shona people (Bourdillon, 1987: 47). The fact remains that marriage has changed and varies with societies. Marriages take various forms depending with circumstances that punctuate it such as hunger and famine, elopement as means to avert long and elaborate procedures, servitude or servant hood due to poverty or “*kuganha*” due to age advancement for girls, all these were eventually recognized as marriages by the Shona people.

Bride wealth is a key phenomenon in the African community. It is a custom of handing over livestock or valuable goods like money to the bride’s family on the occasion of a marriage. Bride wealth is an indemnity to the bride’s family for their expense in bringing her up, compensation for losing a productive and reproductive family member. It is not buying and selling of wives as some are in a culture of abusing it (Shorter, 1998: 91). It signifies that marriage has taken place and the husband has conjugal rights as well as legitimacy to the children of the marriage union. It establishes the marriage institution since it brings into the fold many individuals of the two families into active participation and contribution. The bride wealth which Shorter highlighted and noted in the African society validates marriages and serves to keep the longevity of marriages. To a certain extent works to retain fidelity in the marriage institutions and total commitment to each other, but this does not rule out possibility of abuse in some quarters.

(*Roora*) bride wealth for the Shona is vital and of paramount importance because it is an outward manifestation of a young man’s love for his fiancée and it safeguards against divorce. The gratitude expressed by the son in law to his parents in law for the good care and upbringing of the one who is his wife (Clive and Kileff, 1970:28).

The payment of the bride wealth was understood as establishing the right of exclusive sexual access to the woman by the husband and for the power to bequeath status and property to the children of union as to the descendants of the husband's group (Magesa, 1997: 131). Once the bride wealth is paid consequently accepted by the in-laws, then marriage is deemed to have taken place between the two families. The bride wealth is what the Shona people define and describe as *rutsambo.Lobola* therefore was a vital force of the clan to determine the status between relatives and affine, that is a woman's status and that of children against their brothers and their wives and children depended on the ideal of the bride price paid (Bourdillon, 1987: 42).

As a matter of fact it has since been established that the positives of *lobola* has been turned to negatives by the society. *Lobola* has been understood as an economic transaction than a social, ritual and religious symbol. Although a large bride price gives status to the wife and to the marriage, in the more developed areas bride price payment has been inflated to a degree that disturbs many. In other words bride price has become a source of income, a project of fund raising and a means by which individual families get rich at the expense of building lasting relationships. In most cases women given to such marriages are sometimes treated as commodities bought of exorbitant prices by their husbands and their in-laws or they are often ridiculed.

Marriage according to Hatendi brings into existence the smallest comprehensive unity of society. Procreation and child upbringing presupposes marriage. It is a union of two family groups through their representatives, the bride and groom (Dachs, 1973: 135). Marriages are ideally permanent lifelong unions. In Shona society marriage is not a one man show, but kin referees play an important part in the marriage union. P. Hatendi alludes to fact that marriages are meant to be permanent and lifelong, issues of affinity relations are critical for the survival of these marriages. Celibacy, failure to have children were regarded as the negatives of marriage, unmarried persons in the society were regarded as ungrateful to the parents and family or class that would have brought them up. It is an obligation in the Shona society to continue the family lineage (Dachs, 1973: 137).

All being equal the submissions by Hatendi calls for a critical exploration of the cardinal points that are foundational to the African Marriage. First among the list is the centrality of procreation and child upbringing. In Africa the relationship of husband and wife, the bond between the two families or clans are very fragile, only sealed and strengthened by the arrival of the first child. Marriage is not consummated and complete until a child has been born (Magesa, 1997:127). Procreation is the flower of marriages for the parents are survived by their children left behind. Childlessness is a serious curse, contends Dachs (1973:136). These submissions point to the fact that the main purpose of the marriage contract or union is the continuation of the family group. Marriages where conditions of infertility and sterility obtains are simply recognized as an attempt to marriage that eventually did not come into existence since the true essence and purpose of marriage lies in the transmission and preservation of life (Shorter,1994:183). Magesa, L contends that marriage is essentially a source of life, where fertility testifies to the true marriage (Magesa, 1997:131). It is clear that fertility becomes the virtue in marriage where sterility and infertility are vices, these project into the future. Where cases of sterility rear ugly face, Africans would employ the concept and notion of *kupindira*: this is a system of mitigating a problem of childlessness used by the close relatives. Close relatives especially the aunts (*tetes*) organize and create an environment conducive of mutual consent between the wives concerned with the young brothers to the husband in question to father children on their stead. In Africa marriage and procreations are two sides of the same coin, for without procreation marriage becomes a futile attempt (Mbiti, 1969:133). Africans put value to parenthood. The concept of father and mother are crucial titles for the Africans as compared to the husband and wife, though liked. The husband and wife relationship is chronologically prior and qualitatively secondary than that of father and mother which is very primary (Mbiti, 1969:133). The primacy of procreation or parenthood has been given more value by Bourdillon. He argues that the significances of parenthood also appear in the religious and ritual fields. The ceremony of bringing home the spirit of the departed and installing it amongst the spirit elders of the community only takes place if the deceased had children (Bourdillon, 1987:47).

Second among the list is the social and communitarian dimension of the African Marriage. In Shona societies, marriage is not a one man show, but keen referees play important part in the marriage union (Dach, 1973:143). The traditional view of marriage is that of joining together of extended families and clans. The bride and the groom are only representatives of their families in the process. The aim is to create and seal relationship between two independent families thereby creating new links and ensure stability of the new family. Marriage involves not only interpersonal relations but also inter community relations (Magesa, 1997:115). The communities involved will share their existence, in essence and reality they become one people and one thing. It follows to suggest that through the union of the bride and the groom, their families and clans becomes also united. What affects one of their members affects them all. In fact the clans and families become united and tied to a seamless gown of mutuality and oneness. Responsibilities are never limited to the two involved but cast wider to encompass the clans and families, identification also extends. Marriage becomes the fundamental element and basic sphere of action for relations (Magesa, 1997:119). The social and communitarian character of marriage means that the two communities are bound so closely together in marriage trying to diffuse enmity and interpersonal differences that may cause disenchantment and nullifications of marriages.

African marriages are ideally permanent and lifelong. This becomes the third dimension of marriage. It focuses on the indispensability and indissolubility of the marriage. Magesa advances the arguments that African marriage is anchored in God, the main sustainer of life and the principal preserver and transmitter of the vital force of life (Magesa, 1997:122). For this reason much of what takes place in marriage has overtly religious characteristics and significance. For all intent and purposes, proper order is to be followed. Proper behavior and procedures are required of the living, taboos must be observed, knowing pretty well that the ancestors, guardians of the vital power of their descendants have a special stake in the life of the couple (Magesa, 1997:121). It becomes clear that every ritualistic element of the marriage ceremony is done in the sight of the ancestors and in a sense dedicated to them. The belief is that the ancestral spirits guard life on behalf of God wherein lies its origin and for whom the ancestors are only

intermediaries (Magesa, 1997:121). Mulago validates the submissions by Magesa as such, African marriage is in the realm of the sacred and religion (Mulago, G.C. 1985:42). The religious dimension rotates around the notion of the ancestors who are believed to be particularly concerned with progeny. The ancestors are the custodians and guardians to the fertility of their descendants as such they become involved in the marriage arrangement, which is epitomized by the exchange of the bride wealth. Despite all the arguments sponsored to try and serve marriages, divorces have been witnessed.

Marriage for Africans is not an event but a long drawn out process that does not take place at one single moment of time. Marriage is a dynamic process, a culmination of a series of instructions, meetings, negotiations and ceremonies (Hastings, A. 1973:30). Shona marriages are a drawn out process, there is no clear point at which the couple can say that they are now married or they were not married before (Bourdillon, 1987:40). The rationale behind the submission rests on the understanding that the process starts off with courtship, moves, into engagement. Marriage follows steps and processes. It becomes a means to an end and not an end in itself. It is only consummated with the final arrival of the first child. There are numerous ceremonies, rituals, stages and processes through which marriage goes which are valued differently. The process is said to be a dynamic whole, whose purpose is to create an alliance, a gradual growing together of partners, clans and families (Magesa, 1997:125).

The African holds two notions of marriage, it is either monogamous or polygamous but most reasonably polygamy which relates to the union of a man with two or more wives (Dachs, 1973: 138). It should be noted that monogamous marriages were mostly preferred, but polygamy was a solution to social problems such as to look after the widowed mother and children, to beget children in the name of the brother or sister who died childless or has failed to bear children, a symbol of social status of riches, for cheap labor and satisfaction of lust, as such polygamy could yield good results or bad (Dachs, 1973: 138). The cultures of levirate marriages, monogamous, polygamous marriages do obtain in the African continent as people respond to the social challenges of the society (Shorter, 1998: 92). A close exploration of the African marriage tradition points to a

close affinity with those of the biblical marriage traditions. Polygamous marriages were arranged as a reaction and solution to social challenges as in the biblical times. The other aspect that characterizes the African marriage other than building relations and families and communities was divorce and not only preferred but totally not welcome. Where divorce obtains, the community would have tried all possible ways to avert this vice. Divorce is not the norm or value but a vice obtaining in marriage institution which broods ripple effects that should be avoided at all costs. Divorce could cause unbearable suffering to the children whose mother is sent packing. It further causes emotional stress and suffering to the wife sent away. The marriage is a protracted drama, not written but acted, full of symbolism and rituals which links the living with their departed relatives (Dachs, 1973: 146). The Shona religion is communal and hierarchical, a person is inextricably and indissolubly one with their past, present and future. The family unit includes the living dead who we revere because they are believed to be nearer the source of life, but they are never deified. These ancestors play the role of the intermediate between the living and royal protocol (Dach, 1973: 146). In other words the ancestors are understood as representatives of God in their different clans as such they are deeply rooted and involved in the affairs of their families as intermediaries between the clans and God.

A critical and close analysis of the issues that build the notion of marriage include among others, that African marriages are social and communitarian. African marriage seeks to build societies and communities. The aim is creating bonds between families represented by the bride and groom in union since these are not independent to their families but rather tied up in the inescapable network of mutuality and African oneness, epitomized and popularized by the J.S. Mbiti's Ubuntu philosophy "I am because we are". The matrimonial covenant transcends individual levels to join in even the different lineages to create peace and security beyond their respective borderlines. This means that by getting married, the partners establish relationship with their ancestors and each-others' ancestors. It means deities have to be consulted to give consent and to ascertain that the ancestor of both parties agrees to the alliance (Van Velsen, J. 1964: 79). The involvement and participation of the relatives in the marriage bond, rituals and active contribution

makes it more communitarian. It thus strengthens the social fabric of both the couple and the families or clan involved in the marriage union. The society is also built up through the networking of these personal relationships. In a related development, marriages of this nature increase and improve support networks and support systems in that a wider reference zone is established both for the couples and for the children (Erny, P 1981: 69). All things being equal it has been established that marriage for Africans is meant for procreation. This aspect is crucial and important for the Africans. It ensures the continuity of the family line. Husband and wife are not fully and truly married if there are no siblings who project into the future of their predecessors and prolong their own life through their descendants (Mulago, 1985: 58). It is the birth of the first child which really makes the marriage commitment definitive, procreation for Africans becomes the most important purpose of and meaning of marriage (Mbiti, 1973: 42). It should be noted that procreation confers status and prestige among the Shona. A childless marriage is almost always a bitter disappointment (Gelfand, 1982: 175). The African values marriage as sacred, but the sacrality of marriage is difficult to explain. We only surmise that it involves the beliefs that once a union is made, it also relates with the transcendental order of realities, as such the behavior in the marriage union should meet expected standards of the highest order and authorities. One is tempted to think that marriage in the African world view carries with it a lot of symbolism and ritualistic elements which are understood religiously. The above mentioned sacredness of marriage points to the fact that marriage is indissoluble and yet most cultures of the world are prepared to dissolve it when necessity arises. Marriage is not a human invention but exists as a social institution and as such is shaped and regulated by cultural factors and religious factors. In Africa, there is no separation of the religious from the profane, Africans are notoriously religious and there is nothing in which the presence and action of transcendental powers cannot be perceived (Mpongo, 1972: 31).

In a nutshell, there are strong pillars that validate and support the African marriages which include its social and communitarian dimension, its sacredness and tendency of indissolubility, the priority of procreation as the basis and backbone to the marriage institution. It is a dynamic process that is consummated with birth of the first child. The

priority of bride wealth is crucial in the African worldview for it gives the lifelong character and nature of marriage and a pledge of total commitment of the partners into the marriage union among others. These are the principles and pillars of marriage that we need to consider and inculturate in a bid to formulate an African theological position of marriage which puts into perspective the African Christian worldview and understanding.

CHAPTER FOUR (4)

4.0 The Methodist church tradition in Zimbabwe

A clear profound appreciation and understanding of the Methodist church's approach and view of marriage can only be bearable by giving a brief background of the church in question. This will be followed by the critical analysis of the missionaries approach and teaching of marriage. The aim of this chapter is to try and get clear comparable lessons drawn from the missionaries which could be of value if blended with the African notions of marriage.

4.1 A brief historical background of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe

The year 1891 is generally believed to be the period under which the Methodist church was planted in Zimbabwe then Northern Rhodesia. Founded by John and Charles Wesley, it became one of the missionary seeded churches pioneered by Rev Isaac Shimmin and Rev Owen Watkins (Banana, 1991:7). In Zimbabwe, the Methodist Church spread to areas such as Epworth, Nenguwo, Kwenda, Pakame and Hartleyton among others.

The first three decades were extremely difficult for the missionaries, and proving unfruitful. The work of evangelizing Africa was then made possible but the aid of African Evangelists and teachers from the Transvaal and Cape colony in South Africa in the year 1892 (Zvobgo, 1991:1). Banana has it that Rev Shimmin welcomed the evangelists because he believed that the evangelization of Africa could best be done by the Africans witnessing to fellow Africans (Banana, 1991:8). He had the notion that Africa could only be saved by Africans themselves. The Methodist also spread and established new mission stations across and around Zimbabwe.

In 1894, the Methodists had planted other new stations in Bulawayo and a mission school respectively. It further started to establish schools as a means and way of evangelizing through education, as such mission schools such as Thekwane, Marshal Hartly, Sandringham, Waddilove and Kwenda to mention a few were built (Banana, 1991:10). It has been established that the church through the efforts of Rev White then embarked on the translation of scriptures into the vernaculars in the period 1897-1908. Additionally the

church established medical centers in the year 1913-1964 all aimed at evangelization and conversion of the African (Zvobgo, 1991).

The greatest challenge that missionaries faced was on the area of marriage and other related African Cultures. Banana postulates that when missionaries came to Africa, they felt that Africans had no religion and culture and theirs was to civilize the Africans (Banana, 1991:63). It is this view that the researcher intend to explore as missionaries engaged and confronted Africans who had married the customary way. It is calculated that any religious practices which missionaries came across among the Africans were regarded as heathen practices which had to be eradicated. White posits that African minds have no power to conceive of what is pure and of good report but they were subdued with darkness (Banana, 1991:63). The missionaries` perception of the African was heavily negative, they never tried to explore worse off seek a deeper or general appreciation of the African worldview. As a matter of fact they regarded Africans as uncivilized and they were the agents of civilization to Africans, consequently everything African was evil and this could not spare the marriage customs in question.

4.2 Missionaries' perspectives and attitudes toward African marriage

When the missionaries came to Africa they had preconceived ideas and an inbuilt tradition about what constitutes a marriage. They came to Africa to present a superior religion and customs as compared to that of Africans. Banana thinks that missionaries were not focusing on cultural development, but they ignored the existing culture in order to impart their culture by annihilating the African customs (Banana, 1991: 58).The missionaries objected to the Shona traditional approach to marriage and they fought to present their form of marriage as the 'Christian marriage' unique and even opposed to the traditional forms of marriage. All forms of marriage even those registered by the Native Commissioner were not even allowed. The Synod of 1953 ruled that those people who are married in the Customary Law could not become church leaders as a way of discouraging customary marriages. All marriages in customary law were not proper but rather relegated to that of a sinful union and status (Banana, 1991:71). Zvobgo has it that

rules and regulations governing church membership were laid down for the Africans desiring to be members of the Methodist Church. One of the conditions was the solemnization of marriage according to Christian rites serve for those wives whose husband persistently refused to be married by Christian rites (Zvobgo, 1996: 323). In addition, all polygamists were to fulfill the obligation of monogamous marriage, by way of sending away the other wife, through making satisfactory provisions of the other wives and their children. No person could be a member of the Methodist Church who did not accept the Christian view of marriage. In severe cases, those who practice elopement marriage were actually expelled from the church (Banana, 1971:71). The qualification of the Christian marriage became the standard procedure and criteria for those called into the office of local preaching and those desiring to serve the church as ministers. It should be noted that missionaries saw all other Marriage Acts as open to polygamy save only the Civil Marriage Act that had provisions for one wife and one husband. They further thought themselves as presenting a superior religion to the Africans.

As a way of adding insult to an injury, all male members and Christian workers were forced to enter into Christian marriage before cohabitation and all existing non-Christian marriage of members and workers were required to be ratified by Christian marriage within reasonable time. No Christian marriage was to be performed between Christians and non-Christians partners until its meaning and implications had been explained to and acceptable by both parties (Zvobgo, 1991:112). The missionaries realized that the threat to salvation for Africans was polygamy. Missionaries intended to explain to the members that only monogamous marriages were tolerated and acceptable by the church. This view by the Methodist Missionaries translates verily to the views of Hatendi who argued that the European churches upgraded the Shona Customary marriage to suit their Christian marriage (Dachs, 1973: 147). The multi-million dollar question is why Africans would continue to marry the African way, what then constitutes and define the Christian marriage and how many times should the African be married? It should be surmised that the failure by the Methodist church to make connections with the existing understanding of marriage undermines the foundation upon which the new Christian understanding was supposed to be built on. The persisting move by Africans to marry the African way points

to the failure of the Christian understanding of marriage to meet the inner and deeper needs of the African. It is also critical to explore the teaching of missionaries on marriage at this juncture.

The system of upgrading African customary marriage has been the tradition of the Christian Church up to the year 2013. There has not been a clear defining position and teaching on marriage from the Methodist Church. Church full membership would also take into account issues of Christian marriage otherwise without a Christian marriage one would not qualify especially for customary married men and polygamists. The Civil marriage Act 5.11 which was then Chapter 37 became the Christian marriage. It should be understood that the Protestant view regarded marriage as wholly secular and civil, in actual fact, Luther the brains behind the reformation considered marriage not to be a church issue but rather a worldly matter for the secular authorities. Luther therefore gave the practices of marriage to the secular leaders (Martos, 2001:380). The Protestants held the view that marriage was good for procreation, child upbringing and faithfulness. However the Protestants rejected the sacramental view of the marriage bond, emphasizing the civil rather than the ecclesiastical aspects of matrimony. For Luther marriage was a worldly matter and a secular issue, the Anglicans also believed that while the marriage rite was sacramental, marriage was never a sacrament as defined by Jesus Christ in scriptures, it was not as necessary for everyone as baptism and the Eucharist (Martos, 2001:66). One is then tempted to think that the Methodists were heavily influenced by the Protestant thinking since its founding fathers drank heavily from the protestant teachings and the Anglican tradition. The Methodist Church upon its arrival into the Zimbabwe never bothered to explain and have a sound teaching of marriage but serve to follow its historical Western liturgy of marriage.

4.3 The Missionaries' view of marriage

The missionaries' view of marriage was shaped by their historical backgrounds. Otherwise the European missionaries understood marriage as a contract between the two, the bride and the groom, consummated when they gave each other consent (Lumbala, F. 1998:70). The elements that characterize the Christian marriage nowadays came from the

customs of the people and sometimes assumed the ancient practices and sometimes eliminated or altered elements or symbols (Lumbala, 1998: 69).

The elements include the followings, the wedding ring, this should be understood in the light of ancient Egyptian culture to symbolize the eternity of the pledge of fidelity by the couple. The rationale being that marriage should be a lifelong bond or eternal. This culture of exchanging rings is found around the world. The other element is the wedding veil, the tradition of the bride standing to the left of the groom, the tradition of a groom having a best man dates back to the ancient Goths, a first century culture living near the Baltic sea as presented in the following article, “The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony”. The blessing of the wedding rings as a symbol of the unity is also a re-intervention of ancient cultures to benefit the Christian circles. Christians made certain changes in these rituals. They abandoned practices that were contrary to their faith but valued certain signs, rituals and symbols that pointed to something each culture holds as deeply important about marriage and married life. They also carried cultural expectations and assumptions about married life from generations (Lumbala, 1998: 70). It could be calculated that the marriage liturgy followed by a lot of churches adopted other traditions and customs from other ancient Greco-Roman culture otherwise there is not a tradition that is uniquely Christian. The tradition of the father giving his daughter in marriage hails back to the days when marriage was conceived as an exchange of property while that of blessing of ring and cake becomes a reinterpretation of ancient cultures that were originally not Christiana argued in the article titled, “Enduring Wedding Traditions, Customs and their Origins, and Language of Flowers”. What we have as Christian marriage is a conglomeration of ancient cultures and traditions. Hatendi summarizes the above notion by arguing that, there seems to be no such thing as a Christian marriage in abstraction (Dachs, 1973:147).

The Methodist Missionaries should be understood in the light of the above submissions. They adopted the marriage tradition with a format of Vatican II but only removed the sacramental element as the Anglicans. They never bothered to find a sound teaching of marriage until the 2013 Conference, after the State declared that all marriages were valid

and equal in Zimbabwe. Christian marriages were now celebrated in the church following a liturgy, with white bridal dress, wedding rings and cakes. The element of kissing in front of people during the wedding was not only new but also foreign and abominable within Africans. It brought with it embarrassment, humiliation coupled with lack of respect to the elders and the audience watching in African context. The liturgy did not explain what marriage is though a practice in the church, instead it represented the western mindset which was divorced from the African worldview. The evolution of marriage ceremony from the ancient Greco-Roman world saw the Christians inviting ministers of the church to participate in the marriage celebrations. The presence of the ministers brought the practices of prayers and blessings (Lumbala, 1998:69).

A close analysis of the White Christian marriage points to a series of ancient cultures that have gone through refining and redefining. Otherwise what the missionaries presented to the Africans as Christian marriage superior to that of Africans was a conglomeration of ancient Egyptian, Greco-Roman civilization and tradition that has been Christianized. All being equal, there is evidence that Africans can also reinvent and adopt the African view of marriage that suits and defines the African understanding. Equally important the Methodist Church has for centuries presented the marriage liturgy that is not supported with sound teaching on marriage. It should be noted that the Standing Orders do not define what marriage is but only give a statement of belief that explains the purpose of marriage. Otherwise what the Standing Orders provide is divorced from the lived realities of the African Methodist with regards to marriage. It emphasizes the lifelong character of marriage, the divine ordination of marriage and that marriage remains solely a human decision and commitment (Standing Orders 930). This is only a Constitutional practice and discipline of the church, a policy that was adopted by the conference in the year 1997. This is only what the church believes, but a theological account of marriage is not given and the belief statement is less satisfactory when it is thrown against the modern development that affects the marriage institution and other cultural trends emerging. Furthermore, the attributes of lifelong union in body and mind of one man and woman are not the essentially necessary characteristics of marriage. All being equal there is need to marry the purpose of marriage as laid in the Standing Orders to the definition of

Methodist Conference 2013 that goes “Marriage is a monogamous union of husband and wife having been blessed by the parents through acceptance of the bride price,” which also deserves a closer look. If the Methodist Church is to adopt this position, then it has to be qualified against the backdrop of the African perception of marriage and also blended with Christian values.

It should be noted that the definition does not indicate whether the union is a contract or a covenant between individuals or families. The concept of father and mother are more preferred for the African community because marriage is only validated with birth of the first child, husband and wife are terms only usable. Equally important, there are marriages that have been valued even if bride wealth was not given. The Shona proverb “*Murombo munhu or Kuroora hakufumirwi*” one does not need to get rich first in-order to marry, wants us to believe the above proffered notion. The question would be what then qualifies a marriage. The definition has seemingly forgotten the role of the Church Minister. It has given the aspect of marriage blessings to the parents of the concerned parties. The notion that African marriages are religious and sacred points to the involvement of the deities, and if one is to consider this notion, then representatives of the deities have to participate in the marriage ritual and these could be the priests. We are also not sure whether the bride and the groom have their consent or else the consent belongs to the parents. Be that as it may, the definition is only a basis and springboard for further engagements to try and formulate a theological position that defines the African Christian marriage

A closer analysis has shown that there is almost nothing like a unique Christian marriage but a hybrid of ancient cultures that have been reinterpreted by the European Christian community, which later became the basis of everything that relates and define marriage. The desire to explore the biblical traditions of marriage has proved that the idea that marriage has always been church centered, lifelong, monogamous, indissoluble bond between a man and a woman is a fallacy of ambiguity, simply not borne out of scripture or history. Marriage has moved from contractual property of exchange between patriarchs to consensual agreements of commitment or covenant (Rogers, F.1999:29). Marriage has

actually evolved from the Jewish culture of private affair, into a civil union that did not involve priest until centuries later when the church stepped in and exerted its authority. We have also learnt that the engagements missionaries had with the Africans was full of hostility as they worked to destroy everything African without giving tolerance and appreciation to what Africans valued. For all intent and purposes the working definition proffered by the Methodist Conference of 2013, which is the highest policy making board of the church falls short of capturing the essence and nature of marriage that will take into account the Christian values blended with African worldviews. The Methodist church should be mindful of the fact that the legal floor keeps on shifting creating a potentially difficult situation for faithful pastoring. It should keep on checking the horizons for the dawn of new phenomena of marriages. Above all, it has become apparently clear that what the Methodist church holds as Christians marriage is actually a hybrid of ancient cultures that gives value to marriage which were heavily reinterpreted by Christians, as such there should be a vigorous attempt to study the African values of marriage and reinterpret or blend them with Christian values, which could be conceived as inculturation.

CHAPTER FIVE (5)

5.0 THE FUTURE TRAJECTORY OF MARRIAGE DEBATE IN THE METHODIST CHURCH IN ZIMBABWE

The purpose of this chapter borders around the issue and concept of inculturation. It seeks to arrive at creative assimilation to avoid irrelevance and superficial Christian marriage, which fails to address the deeper needs of the African person or a marriage union that leaves and creates a void in both the heart and mind of the African person. For all intent and purposes, this chapter seeks to piece up the three worlds of marriage that have caused distortions and confusion to the African Christian with regard to marriage. These worlds include the civil, the traditional and the European Christian world. The million dollar question often asked is how many times should the African marry? In this respect African values of marriage such as the social dimension, procreation, dynamic process and indissolubility of marriage among others will be analyzed to see if they cannot shed light and also inform the African Christian marriage or else to discover whether Christian biblical traditions cannot be informed by these African values.

5.1 The social dimension of African Christian marriage

African marriage is essentially a systematization of relationships as enshrined in the Bible. Marriage creates a bond not only between the two partners and also between the two families and clans, but also the subsidiary members of the community, which is often called the extended families. However the advent of industrialization, urbanization and globalization has changed marriage relations drastically to follow the nuclear trends. It is no more the chain of relations that is often valued but the immediate members of the family which involve the father, mother and children. The partners in marriage act as representatives, they do not act on their own in all they do, their families or clans are directly and indirectly involved and committed to the same cause. The relation of affinity or this oneness does not come automatically, it has to come into being, it has to be worked out and expressed in the celebration of marriage. The involvement and participation of the

family in one way or another is therefore essential to the marriage. It is this aspect of oneness in families that promotes the actualization of the common Bantu philosophy “I am because we are”. It is this communitarian dimension of African marriage that we should try to establish in the Christian tradition. Does the Christian God promote individualism and shun social relationships? Shall we not consider Christian marriages as the basis from which to build and unify societies and communities, thereby spreading the love of God? The Christian God is a unifying God who is thrilled when families dwell together in peace and oneness (Psalms 133).

A closer look at some biblical texts sheds light on the social dimension of marriage in the biblical times. In most cases Genesis 2:24 is interpreted differently as the origins of marriage. It emphasizes that a man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife and the two become one flesh. A number of people have interpreted and labored much on the conjugal relationship over descent affiliation. They have stressed relationship between a woman and her husband, in order to place the union of the spouses above the bonds resulting from descendants. In such cases marriage provokes or breaks and at least loosens the family bonds. This way of interpreting the text turns to overshadow and ignore indebtedness of the couple to their kinsman or folk. To take the biblical verses as presenting absolute truth about the marriage would be a betrayal of the truth presented in the text. In Genesis 2:24, the story says that a man leaves his father and mother, while in the traditions of Israel it was the woman who leaves her parents and cling to her husband as in the case Rebekah joining Isaac Genesis 24:59, Jacob takes Leah and Rachel Genesis 31:15. This should be understood in the light that marriage is creating new relationship which supplants the descent affiliation for a woman.

The reason behind King Solomon marrying women from foreign nations was to establish relationships that would serve to guard and protect his kingdom from wars and foreign political onslaught. The marriage alliance would remind these other nations of their indebtedness and obligation to King Solomon due to the

established marriage relationships. The bible is not in any way describing institutions for which social and economic elements are decisive but experiences of man in different environments as they relate to each other and their God. The biblical texts do not call for any particular family structure to be imposed, but use existing models as a starting point for a lesson concerning God's involvement in human affairs. The family structures that existed in Israel and presented in the bible were not established in answer to God's directives, but should rather be seen as a direct consequence of the conditions of existence in the area and the time. What we seem to have in the gospel is the indissolubility of the marriage more than the structural relationships. We cannot argue that Jesus' teaching is that relationships with kith and kin is to be regarded soluble neither shall we argue that the texts are authoritative in declaring conjugal bonds to prevail upon descent affiliation. Conjugal bond could be indissoluble but nothing at all is stated normatively about the solubility of descent affiliation.

A close analysis of the Bible indicates that it does not support nor reject the social dimension of marriage, but it continues fostering the relationship with God. The Old Testament and Gospels validates the importance of conjugal bonds. This becomes a Christian duty to develop the alliance between families, so that bonds of friendship may be multiplied (Forde, D. 1973:53). This being the case there is no conflict between descent affiliation and conjugality, these dimensions can be reconciled theologically in a Christian perspective. Conjugal bonds are not in opposition to descent affiliation, but both are at the service of God's plan for creation to widen and strengthen relationships of love between all people in different ages and times.

The analysis made wants to persuade the researcher to think that the social dimension in the African marriage finds its equivalence in the bible, as such it should be integrated in the life of African Christianity. It brings with it something special that can complement the biblical traditions of marriage thereby fulfilling the Bantu notion of "I am because we are". For Africans it is conceived that identity is

largely determined by a person's position in a network of relationships, first by descent affiliation, and additionally by marriage alliances. The genealogical stories want to identify Christ in a network of relationships built from both descent affiliation and marriage alliances. African Christianity should use the social dimension of marriage as a foundation on which to build strong families, communities and societies characterized by love and care. It is part of the value system which is not entirely dependent on material conditions but foundational.

5.2 Marriage is for procreation

Africans across the globe consider procreation as an essential element of marriage and so does the biblical marriage traditions. This dimension of marriage is also implicit in the social dimension of marriage where the writer referred to conjugal bonds. Procreation is the reason a family opens itself to another, it is so because procreation is seen as necessary to ensure continuity of family line. J.S Mbiti describes procreation as the most important purpose and meaning of marriage. It is fertility that makes the couple truly married (Mbiti, 1973: 42). In Africa the birth of the first child completes the marriage process giving the couple satisfaction that they have received a sign of divine blessing. It is insurance against personal obliteration, insurance against the obliteration of the lineage, personal status, personal joy and total support in old age (Bansikiza, R. 1991:20).

The bible is profuse with citation of stories where procreation becomes vital. The promise of God to Abraham that his descendants shall be like the stars could be a pointer to procreation Genesis 15:5. In some instances people would transgress even the very basic rules for procreation such as in the case of Lot's daughters who conceived from their father Genesis 19:30-38. Even though the story is so negative, the whole essence is that laws were broken only for one to beget a child. Procreation finds pertinent value in the African culture as it is of paramount importance in the biblical traditions. The closeness of these two cultures indicates that these two worlds can be blended together. In Genesis 38:12-30, Tamar the widow of

Judah's son conceived from her father in law only for a child who is even mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus.

Like the African thinking, women who failed to conceive would find a substitute to provide children for her as in the case of Abraham and Hagar (Genesis 16:2). The purpose of procreation is described differently, it is to be fruitful and multiplication (Genesis 1:28). In some cases those who object to the purpose of procreation or multiplication and fruitfulness were punished as in Genesis 38:8, where Onan refuses to give his deceased brother a descendant such that he would keep the inheritance of the father to himself. The stories of the patriarchs are an indicative of the role of God in issues of procreation. The bible indeed testifies to the truth that children are a blessing from God for indeed sons and daughters are a blessing from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward (Psalm 127:3, Duet 28:4).

In the Gospels, issues of procreation are not very explicit save in (Luke 11:27-28), where reference is made to a woman as here outlined “[-----] blessed is the womb that bore you and the breast that nursed you [-----].” This text could be understood as indicative of something more spiritual than physical. The only text that refers to procreation is 1Timothy 2:15, which indicates that women will be saved through child bearing. However the interpretation of the text remains controversial. It has various interpretations.

The issue of procreation should be integrated to the conjugal bond, it unites as well as capacitates for generation. The conjugal bond in other words is uniting which is the immediate act and the procreation becomes secondary and is thus kept in abeyance. The Church should be teaching the connection between the unitive bond and procreative meaning of sexual relations. Child bearing cannot be appreciated as an isolated action but it should be seen in the larger context of Christian vocation. Procreation should be regarded as a mission to transmit human life and to educate the children, a means of cooperating with the love of God the Creator in both the Bible and the African traditions.

5.3 Marriage as a Christian dynamic process

African Christians should understand marriage as a process which is opposed to marriage as an event. Marriage is only established after a series of ceremonies that foster a new network of relationships between two families. The process involves complex rules which could be elaborate prescribing how the various members of the families relate with one another in a way that will not endanger the alliance of the two clans. Rules and parameters are set between those very near to the partners to make sure that no disagreements will introduce tension between the two spouses. Relationships are established and developed progressively to make sure that adoption and adaptation is achieved. Marriage is not established in one single moment of ceremony, but progressively, through a number of rituals, each with specific religious function, and thus contributes only in part to the completion of marriage. Marriage becomes a state reached only after passing through a number of rituals, extending over a protracted period of time (Forde, 1975:54). The complexity of the process certainly contributes greatly to making marriage a highly significant event.

The marriage process in African setting contrasts with the Christian setting which is a punctual event celebrated in Church while on the other side it is a lengthy process required by tradition. It should be calculated that the emphasis put by the Christian tradition on the punctual event celebration of marriage is not a fair emphasis. Christian marriage should be seen as not standing alone, but constitutes the final completion of a process which involves courting, introducing of partners to the other families, some lengthy engagement periods, and the preparation of a marriage contract. It should be noted that these elements are not overstated as constitutive of marriage but only preliminaries, which could also translate to some of the stages in the African traditions of marriage celebrations. A synthetic analysis of marriage as a dynamic process points to the fact that a revalidation of the processes of marriage stages is highly desirable. This is done to determine the stages when the Church should be present and the role the church should play. It further outlines what constitutes a marriage ceremony for the church to avoid depreciation of all other ceremonies. In other words the Church should not keep absolute control over the celebration of marriage. But it has to safeguard the full

significance of marriage within an African Christian perspective. It follows to suggest that the Church should participate in other stages of the process to show its recognition of the importance and meaningfulness of marriage as a blessing from God.

5.4 Marriage as sacred and indissoluble

In traditional African teaching, marriage is not absolutely indissoluble (Lumbala, 1998:71). Shipwrecks are a possibility in the course of human life, bad treatment by one of the partners, the unkindness or malevolence of one family, sterility, death and all that is opposed to life may culminate in the dissolution of a marriage. These eventualities of divorce that obtains in the African cosmology also finds meaning in the biblical traditions, cases of divorce have also been witnessed. However Africans would always try all humanly possible means to avert and save marriages from collapsing. It is the reason why the process leading to marriage is so elaborate, communitarian and social above all sacred. The sacredness of marriage is both confirmed by the Africans and Christians. The sacredness could refer to real change in the transcendental order of things or that the obligation of marriage needs to be taken seriously. A more understanding to the sacredness of marriage should be sought. It could be regarded as people's beliefs that in marriage human behavior is submitted to a higher authority which imposes superior guidance to the partners. The term sacred is very ambiguous, it can be applied to marriage to mean different things by different people in different cultural traditions. The sacredness of marriage should be argued in the light of the meaning attached to the religious ceremony. This ceremony determines the status of the partners in the eyes of God. It helps people to be aware of God's presence in their lives. Marriage has to be understood in the context of God's presence and concern for life continuity.

It should be understood that the sacrality points to the involvement of God in the marriage ceremony. It then suggests that marriage has to be conformed to what God expects of it. God's intention of marriage should manifest, otherwise the dimension of sacredness loses its essence. The sacredness of marriage opens room for the involvement of the Church. The religious aspect of the marriage points to the fact that the Church should be involved. However, the Church should not impose itself as the only means and channel through which God can visit humanity. God has from time immemorial been

participative in human affairs through channels the church does not have total control over. The Church however has the pastoral responsibility though to guard the marriage institution either by counseling and teaching the partners of the importance of marriage in the eyes of God. But God can enter in the lives of people in many different ways.

Marriage has been authored by God and was from the very beginning a kind of foreshadowing of the incarnation of his son, and therefore there abides in it something Holy and religious innate and not derived from men but implanted by nature. Marriage is holy by its own power, in its own nature and of itself. Marriage is a natural reality it comes from God who created it. Therefore marriage is holy. The holiness of marriage comes from a higher transcendental order and it is supernatural. Resultantly the sacredness of marriage relates to the observance of God's basic precepts concerning marriage. Once these are destroyed or disregarded then the sacredness of marriage is compromised. The sacrality of marriage can be pointing to marriage as God's plan for creation. There is enough room from which to understand the African view of marriage even though there are differences from the Christian traditions. In the African world view a radical separation of the religious and circular dimensions does not exist, there is nothing in which the presence and action of transcendental powers cannot be perceived (Mpongo, 1972:31). Even if the full holiness of marriage does not manifest itself, Africans believe in the naturalness and origins of marriage in the transcendental order, over and above all the ancestral spirits guard these marriages on behalf of God. This becomes the basis from which to theologize and teach about the sacrality and indissolubility of marriage bonds.

The African notions becomes the foundational teachings for the importance of marriage in that the gift of a dowry is a powerful symbol of marriage. It is a symbol of a strong alliance given to the family that receives the female to the family that allows one of its members to leave. The bride wealth has a religious significance for the Africans. It establishes the right to exclusive sexual relations to the woman by the husband, and further legitimates the children within the father's lineage (Magesa, 1997:131). Marriage solemnized by bride wealth or dowry is

regarded as profoundly sacred. The clan makes sacrifices and offers blessings upon such marriages, as such dissolution of the marriage union becomes extremely difficult and rare especially when it has resulted in children. In the process of receiving the bride wealth, ancestors are called upon or implored to take care of their daughter and also to bless her with children. The ancestors are not an end in themselves but means to the Almighty God, hence they act as intermediaries to the creator. It is this founding principle that Africans hold which becomes the basis of our theological teaching and understanding with regards to African Christian marriage. God remains central in the marriage story of the Africans, and they realize that blessing of children in a marriage comes from God through the ancestors who are regarded as guardians of fertility of their descendants.

5.5 Conclusion and way forward

5.5.1 Theological Reflection

There is gross evidence and agreement that marriage is both a natural and divine institution that has for centuries remained a human undertaking. Marriage is as old as humanity and it originated from God. Marriage has been and continues to be shaped by the cultural views of a given society and a given people. In fact marriage has changed drastically over time, as it has also been celebrated differently in different epochs of time in history.

We have also established that from time immemorial Christians have married just like everyone else. In fact the Churches did not invent the rite of the celebration of marriage, but actually took the local elements of the celebration from the customs of the people and sometimes assumed the ancient practices and sometimes eliminated or altered elements or symbols (Lumbala, 1998:69).

The Greco Roman marriage rite had the following elements, a veil for the bride, reading of the contract in the presence of witnesses, mutual exchanging of consent between parties, joining of hands, marriage feast, the procession, rings among

others. It should be noted that Christians made certain changes in the above ritual. They then invited the ministers to practice prayers of blessings and requesting for the fruitfulness and growth of the couple. Liturgical songs, psalms and reading of sacred scriptures was adopted (Lumbala, 1998:69). There is clear indisputable evidence of the none existence of a purely Christian marriage. There is also diversity of rites and practices that existed even among the Churches which were shaped and influenced by the environment, context and culture under which marriage was celebrated, and further informed by the values of marriage placed by the people in question. It has been established that over centuries attempts were made to try and standardize the marriage rites. Understanding of the theological meaning has also varied between churches as they are influenced by historical developments between the Catholic`s view of the sacramentality of marriage to the Reformation theology that denigrates the sacramentality of marriage. Churches celebrated the marriage ceremony differently. Catholics believed that marriage should be placed in the jurisdiction of the Church while the Reformers objected and believed that although it remains a sacred divine institution, its regulation should remain absolutely secular and civil posing serious challenges in coming up with sound pastoral theology.

The aforementioned changes that have rocked the marriage institution clearly point and testify to the fact that there is every reason to understand as well as pick critical pillars that build African Christian values to come up with sound African Christian theology of marriage. If marriage has been celebrated and has gone through series of changes coupled with the incorporation of other elements, other cultural traditions, there should be room for a theology of marriage with an African colour.

Marriage in Africa is a bond that through the union and consent of two representatives the bride and the groom seals an alliance between two families and clans to which the partners belong (Lumbala, 1998:71). There are a number of factors that can be of value to teach about the theology of marriage with an

African colour. The social and communitarian dimension of marriage and the centrality of procreation become very pertinent because it is in the marriage union where life blossoms and grows, the whole of the society attend to it in a special way. These teachings could be argued to be in harmony with the Christian teachings. Africans believe that marriage is a dynamic process, something that happens not in a single moment. It is something that begins with the promises of marriage at engagement and sealed with the birth of the first child. The gift of the bride wealth is equally important in safeguarding the lifelong of marriage. Although these factors may not be as elaborate in Christian scriptures they are critical to give value to the African theology of marriage.

Equally important is the aspect of the indissolubility and sacrality of marriage. Everything in African is perceived religiously. African marriages are so profuse with rituals and symbols that point to a deeper relationship with the transcendental order. Some of the symbolism includes among others the bride price(*rutsambo*), a cow for motherhood given to the mother in-law as token of appreciation and is consecrated to the bride`s deceased matrilineal ancestors(*mombeyehumai*). Equally important, a bull is given as part of the bride wealth, which may eventually be dedicated to the paternal ancestors of the bride.*Masungiro*: this is the African ritual done and observed where by the wife return to her parental home for the birth of her first child and further ritual payments are made. The ritual demands that a sacrificial beast or goat be given with which the bride`s family can propitiate her maternal spirits who are responsible for her fertility. The ancestral spirits have to be honored and thanked for the birth of children to ensure the well-being of the woman`s family and her continued fertility. African marriages ascribe value to the ancestors who are guardians of the fertility of their descendants. Ancestors are not means in their own but only means to the creator. It suggests that Africans reminiscent and values the centrality of God in the marriage bond and union. Even though the Methodist may not talk of the sacramentality of marriage, its theology of marriage should realize the sacredness of marriage.

All being equal the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe should have a theology of marriage which is informed by African values that include among others, the family and communitarian dimension, the centrality of procreation, and the indissolubility of marriage, to the sacredness and the dynamic process of marriage, not forgetting the essence of bride wealth.

As a matter of fact the church should reconcile the three worlds of marriage causing dilemma to its followers and these are the world of the traditional culture to which most African Christians belong, the world of the civil or legal system and the European Christian culture that is predominantly prevailing in the church. The amalgamation of the three worldviews will give birth to the African Christian marriage, which will avert duplication of marriages. The African Christian marriage will value marriage as consent for both couples in marriage and the families represented by the bride and the groom. Additionally it should take seriously the centrality and importance of divine blessings by involving the church minister or priest in the village context where most marriages are contracted. The move to have an African Christian marriage will mitigate the discipline of the African couples who consummate their marriage the customary way before the church wedding. In the contemporary system of the European oriented Christian marriage practices, many Africans suffer unnecessary humiliating public discipline for having consummated their marriage the customary way before the church wedding. The understanding of marriage as a covenant will seek to involve the church minister or priest from the initial stages of the relationship, *lobola* negotiations right into the wedding celebrations. It will place less economic pressure on the couples who have to put up with expensive and elaborate weddings. The African Christian marriage will lessen the social pressure for expensive marriage ceremonies and celebrations since everything will be done under one roof with all parties and relatives in attendance including the whole congregation.

The Methodist church should value marriage as a union of consent of both the bride and groom sealed by the alliance of the families they represent, which ultimately find total blessings from God through the ministers or priests.

The above notion points to the fact that marriage becomes consent for both the couples and the families represented. A covenant that involves God through his representatives as they implore for God's blessings and protection upon the marriage union.

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