

## PROJECT ABSTRACT

Master of Arts in Pastoral Theology

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

**TITLE: A STRATEGY FOR ENABLING WIDOWS IN NYAMIRA AND SOUTH KENYA  
CONFERENCES TO MARRY IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING**

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Date completed: October 2013.

The Abagusii widows should marry according to the New Testament marriage model, rather than marrying according to Abagusii traditional requirement of the marriage of widows that is based on the levirate marriage type.

In achieving this concept, a scrutiny would be exercised in the Abagusii ethnicity, to assess the perspectives of the proponents of the continuity of the people's tradition, and of those who advocate for the New Testament marriage model.

This concern would be reached by applying appropriate sources. Of these sources, the Scriptures would be foremost. Besides the Scriptures, the contribution of Ellen G. White relative to this concept, and the literature of the African writers of this subject, shall be applied. Furthermore, the sociological writers of this topic outside Africa, and the website resources pertaining to this topic would be consulted. Finally, a

survey shall be done to the widows, and the clergy of the Abagusii community, to have their input in regard to this notion. Additionally, an interview would be done to the widows that would focus on which method of marriage proposed would they best prefer.

The conclusion of this study was based on two grand observations. The first one is, the New Testament teaching regarding the marriage of the widows is based on God's original plan of marriage as it is depicted in the Old Testament book of Genesis. The second one, is the result of the survey done indicates that most widows of the Abagusii community besides the clergy are of the opinion that widows marry according to the New Testament teaching relative to their marriage. Thus, as it were, always God's bidding has to be given precedence over any other humankind view. Furthermore, the cry of those who feel the pinch should be foremost listened to.

From this standpoint, it is recommended that the Executive committees of Nyamira and of South Kenya Conferences adopt the recommendations given by this study, to let the widows in this region officially marry according to the New Testament teaching pertaining to their marriage.

Adventist University of Africa

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A project  
presented in partial fulfillment  
of the requirement for the degree  
Master of Arts in Pastoral Theology

by  
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Dedicated to all the widows in the Abagusii ethnicity and to all others who undergo the same experiences the Abagusii widows undergo.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am foremost indebted to our Almighty God who enabled me to achieve doing this work. Furthermore, my indebtedness goes to my wife Naomi and our children Cleopas, Nicodemus and his wife Naomi, Deborah, and Neema who have given me all the moral support and the encouragement in doing this work. Still, my indebtedness extends to my Conference and my Union administrators who gave me ample opportunity and support to do this study. Not only these I owe indebtedness, I still extend it to both AUA and the visiting lecturers who with Christian zeal for perceiving facts aright, and intellectual acumen, tried their best to inculcate pertinent facts to my mind. Besides these, I owe much thanks to my advisor Professor Nehemiah Nyaundi, and the second reader of my Thesis draft Dr Simon Bwambale, for trying their best in shaping this work accordingly. Finally, I owe much thanks to Dr Shawna Vyhemeister, the AUA Project Coordinator, for her tireless effort in seeing that this work is through successfully.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Background**

Widows of Abagusii ethnicity marry contrary to the New Testament teaching pertaining to the marriage of widows. This is so because, according to Abagusii (a Bantu ethnic group that lives in the southern part of the country of Kenya, one of the countries of East Africa, which church wise, is part of the composition of the membership of Nyamira and South Kenya Conferences) people's custom, married women belong to the families of their husbands whether their husbands are alive or dead. Thus, a widow is bound by this custom ever to be one of the family members of her late husband's family. In regards to this custom, widows are to be "inherited" by someone, an elderly and married man. A single, unmarried man, particularly one at the age of marriage and below, cannot be allowed to inherit a widow because, if he so does, he is regarded unmarried, for according to this custom, the woman he inherits still belongs to her late husband. Thus, the children he might bear with her would belong to the deceased husband of that widow. In actuality, this is one of the major factors a young, unmarried gentleman is prohibited to inherit a widow for the family members of this young man would not want his family lineage to vanish forever.

Inheritance is a must to all young widows in this region, especially if a widow did not bear a male child with her late husband to inherit the properties of her and to perpetuate her deceased husband's name in the family lineage. She has to be inherited by a certain man to bear this child. If she does not abide by that rule, she will always face severe reprimands and torture from the entire family members of her late husband, and the whole community at large. To avoid such adverse situations, she either succumbs to the demands of the family of her deceased spouse by being inherited, or befriends a certain man privately (because the practice of inheritance has become complicated of late), and bears the child or the children the family of her deceased husband wants.

### **The Problem of Inheritance**

Nevertheless, currently, the inheritance issue has brought about a lot of complications; hence, does not meet the spiritual, social, and marital desires of the widows in this region. Foremost of these complications is that Christian widows in this region seem not to have a solution pertaining to their marriage after the death of their husbands. The underlying factor is that the issue of inheritance is not in accordance with the New Testament teaching about marriage, as this type of marriage is based upon God's original plan of marriage. Thus, they find themselves bound by the demands of Abagusii Culture with regards to the state of widows' marriage. In this way, they are enslaved by this custom in the rest of their lives. In connection with this, the Abagusii culture regarding the state of the widows' marriage, does not give provision for the

widows to exercise Christianity in accordance with the teaching of the Scriptures, the New Testament in particular.

Furthermore, because of the social and the economical reasons, the issue of inheritance has become impractical currently. From the social grounds, the wives of the husbands who may want to inherit a widow do not want to share their husbands with any other woman. Thus, severe hatred and enmity erupt where such a relationship is practiced. For this reason, widows are never free to be inherited openly as it were in those olden days.

From economical grounds, widows who are able to bear children and are materially poor, fear to be inherited because most of the men who inherit them are only interested in having sexual intercourse with them but not supporting them economically. Furthermore, those men know themselves as mere “representatives” of the widows’ families, not real husbands to them; hence, they don’t fully commit themselves economically to support the widows they inherit. H. Odera Oruka attests this fact: “The one who ‘inherits’ operates only as a surrogate of the original husband.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, they never bring up with them the children they bear together. In contrast to this, some men who inherit widows spend much of their wealth with the inherited widows. That conduct makes their wives and their children ever disgruntled as they are deprived of the family’s economical privileges. That situation causes wrangles and fighting between these two parties (the wife of the gentleman inheriting, and the inherited

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<sup>1</sup> H.Odera Oruka, *Ethics: A Basic Course for Undergraduate Studies*, (Nairobi: University Press of Nairobi, 1990), 107.

widow), which at times ends up by one of the ladies killing the other lady, or the gentleman himself being killed. This issue worsens from day to day currently thus, besides other factors.<sup>2</sup>

It is not only the Abagusii customs that are complicating the widows' marriage in this region, but also the theories of nationalism, and the cultural relativism that have crept into the country of late. People with theories of nationalism are not after that which is authentic but are only mindful of that which belongs to them. Because nationalism is defined as: "loyalty and devotion to a nation; especially a sense of national consciousness exalting one nation above all others and placing primary emphasis on promotion of its culture and interests as opposed to those of other nations

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<sup>2</sup> The social and economic problems of the widows in this region extend to their children. Their children are affected economically in that most widows become widows when they are so down economically, hence, they find it hard to bring up their children well economically being single and poor. Socially, the children are affected for the children born after the death of a husband by a man known only to their mother undergo great psychological torture as they don't know who their father is. Furthermore, at times, there is a great rift among the children of the widows as those born after the death of the husbands by certain gentlemen, and even by surrogate husbands, not officially known as their fathers, are always despised and discriminated with the accompaniment of reprimands and reproaches by their half siblings who claim that they don't belong to their family duly. Such a rift ends up bringing about severe enmity among the children themselves. Still the widows' problem continues to intensify in this region by the fact that it causes immorality to be rampant in the church. This so happens because themselves being widows, they privately befriend certain men to meet their sexual drives. In most cases the men they befriend are their fellow church members, even church leaders at times. Not only these issues that increase the widow's problem in this region, another one is that widows are more victims of sexually transmitted diseases as most of them don't deal with one man pertaining to sexual relationship. In this regard, the men who are enticed to inherit widows, and the widows themselves, fear of the sexually transmitted diseases and other contagious diseases as both parties might be carriers of these diseases. What strengthens their fear is that currently most couples who are not faithful to their wives or to their husbands are the carriers of these diseases, particularly, the epidemic, HIV/.AIDS. Because of this moral problem, most widows die of the current epidemic H.I.V. Aids and leave their young children without parental care and nurture.

or supranational groups.”<sup>3</sup> Relativism is also defined as, (a) “a theory that knowledge is relative to the limited nature of the mind and the conditions of knowing” (b) “a view that ethical truths depend upon the individuals and groups holding them.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research is to suggest some recommendations that would enable widows of the Abagusii ethnic group to come out of this predicament (being bound by Abagusii traditional marriage of widows), and marry according to the New Testament teaching concerning their marriage. Unless they are thus emancipated from this difficulty, they will ever be in this problem.

### **Significance of the Study**

If widows would be allowed to marry in this region according to God’s plan as it is stipulated in the New Testament, we shall avoid much frustration that widows undergo here as a result of them being prohibited to marry thus. The issue of inheritance does not heal this frustration because it is not in accordance with the New Testament teaching about marriage, and, it is now so complicated, hence, does not meet the widows’ matrimonial needs squarely. At the same time, we shall minimize the sin of immorality which a majority commits privately because they have not been given a better option. Likewise, most men in the church would live a chaste life because the widows will abandon enticing some of these men to have immoral dealings with them.

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<sup>3</sup> *Webster’s Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*, (1967), s.v. “nationalism.”

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, s.v. “relativism.”

Besides this, the church membership will grow as the percentage of the widows who are dropped from church membership due to open immorality, and that of the men who indulge themselves in this issue with widows and are dropped from church membership, would lessen. Furthermore, the church leadership would have a firm biblical strategy on which to base its teaching in promoting the welfare of the widows in the church. The women ministries of the church, too, shall have a wide spectrum in trying to care for the widows in the church.

Not only these facts that would be beneficial to the church and the widows in this region, but also the demolition of the elements of Abagusii customs regarding the marriage of widows that have for many years suppressed the widows' welfare in this region. Thus, the widows will have and/or exercise that freedom the Lord has clearly put for them in the Scriptures.

Besides this, evangelism will be strengthened in the church for so many widows who are so potential in evangelizing and in nurturing the church members are hindered from doing so by the widows' problem in this area. Furthermore, the church would be well equipped for quality, spiritual ministry as most of her men, would avoid indulging themselves with widows immorally, and, instead, live a holy life, hence, be endowed with the spiritual gifts for service.

Furthermore, the children of the widows born after the death of the husbands would evade psychological torture they undergo as they would now know who their fathers are. Additionally, the widows' children would get adequate care and protection

as they would have fathers to support their mothers in bringing them up. Finally, this would stop the death of many widows who die untimely deaths because of getting infected with HIV/ AIDS due to the immorality they undergo because of being widows, and this leaves their children without parental care and protection. Hopefully, doing thus, their problem would be diminished.

### **Delimitation**

This research deals with widows only in the Abagusii region. The widows of South Kenya Conference in the Masai region are not included because they are of a different ethnic group with different customs from those of the Abagusii people. Furthermore, because of the age problem of the widows (some are too old), illiteracy, indifference due to giving themselves to worldly pleasure, and poor communication means, a small number of about 100 widows are expected to respond to the questionnaire.

### **Methodology**

In this research, a Case Study model of a theological issue is used: The New Testament Perspective of the Marriage of the Widows. Thus, the study begins with the Introduction in Chapter 1, which is the proposal of this research. Then theoretical Foundation in Chapter 2, whereby an extensive review of literature by applying relevant Bible texts exegetically, besides Ellen G. White comments on this study, and the comments of SDA authors and those from other faiths relative to this issue. In chapter 3 deals with the description of the local setting. Furthermore, a survey which would focus

on the church widows, the active pastors, and the retired pastors of this region to find out from them whether they support the concept that Christian Abagusii widows marry according to the New Testament marriage model was carried out. Besides this the pastors were asked to provide statistical figures of the widows here. Furthermore, remarks given by most church elders interviewed all along are made. In this connection, study will unfold how the elements of the local setting are supported by the traditionists, and those who espouse the views of nationalism, and relativism. In Chapter 4, the study looks for a possible solution as to how this problem is to be countered. The study will apply the principle of contextualization in bringing about the possible solution to this issue – the marriage of the Christian Abagusii widows according to the New Testament marriage model, widows will be interviewed to ascertain which of the four suggested methods that do not collide with the Scriptures they would prefer most. Chapter 5, gives a summary, draws conclusions and makes recommendations.



## CHAPTER 2

### THE BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE MARRIAGE OF WIDOWS

The Scriptures, that are the standard of all the Christian doctrines, beliefs, and practices, support the marriage of the widows. However, later during the Old Testament times, the style of the marriage of the widows was changed from that of God's original plan of marriage to that of levirate marriage. "Levirate marriage is a type of marriage in which the brother of the deceased is obliged to marry his brother's widow, and the widow is obliged to marry her deceased husband's brother."<sup>1</sup>

#### **The Old Testament Marriage of Widows**

Concerning the understanding that levirate marriage was the kind of marriage that later was practiced in the Old Testament times, particularly during the Israelites' era, the Scriptures disclose thus:

If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the widow of the dead man shall not be married to a stranger outside the family; her husband's brother shall go in to her, take her as his wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. And it shall be that the first born son which she bears will succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel. But if the man does not want to take his brother's wife, then let his brother's wife go to the gate to the elders, and say, "My husband's brother refuses to raise up a name to his brother in Israel; he will not perform the duty of my husband's brother." Then the elders of his city shall call him and speak to him. But if he stands firm and says, "I do not want to take her, then his

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<sup>1</sup> "Levirate Marriage" in Wikimedia, the free encyclopedia, accessed 20 May 2013, <http://wikimedaia.org/Levirate Marriage>.

brother's wife shall come to him in the presence of the elders, remove his sandal from his foot, spit in his face, and answer and say, "So shall it be done to the man who will not build up his brother's house." And his name shall be called in Israel, "The house of him who had his sandal removed."(Deut 25: 5-10).

There are some points depicted in this type of marriage of widows that we need to take note of: It allowed the widows to be married. The widow was not to be married to a stranger, but to the closest kin, the deceased's real brother. The purpose of that marriage was to retain the deceased's name, the late husband of the widow, in the family lineage. The firstborn son that would be born out of that marriage, could take the name of the widow's deceased husband, thus, the deceased's name was maintained in the family lineage. If the deceased's brother would refuse to marry that widow, the wife of the deceased, could sue him to the council of the elders of that city for a confirmation that he had refused to marry her, him being the closest of kin to the deceased. The council of elders of that town could persuade that man to marry his deceased brother's wife. If he could be insistent in refusing to marry her, that widow could be told to insult him overtly, then she could be allowed to be married by a different person outside her deceased husband's family members, but at the same time, a relative of the deceased's family(Ruth 3:6- 4:13). This type of marriage practice is further elucidated that:

A levirate marriage (Hebrew: yibbum) is mandated by Deut 25:5 – 6 of the Hebrew Bible and obliges a brother to marry a widow of his childless deceased brother, with the firstborn child being treated as that of the deceased brother . . . which renders the child the heir of the deceased brother and not the genetic father. There is another provision known as halizah (Deut 25: 9 – 10) which explains that if a man refuses to carry out the "duty", the woman must spit in his presence, remove one of his shoes, and the others will refer to him as "the one without a shoe." While this provision implies that a brother may opt out of

levirate marriage, there is no provision in the Books of Moses for the widow to do so.<sup>2</sup>

There are some examples of such marriages in the Old Testament: That of Tamar, the wife of Er, Judah's firstborn son (Gen 38: 6- 11). That of Ruth, the Moabite lady, who was married to Mahlon, the son of Elimelech, the husband of Naomi (Ruth 2 – 4: 17). The Sadducees who asked Jesus about the levirate marriage (Matt 22: 23 – 28; Mark 12: 18 -23; Luke 20: 27 -33), based it on this Old Testament understanding of levirate marriage.

Certainly, there are some things about this type of marriage of the widows during the Old Testament times we are not clear on. The first one is: the Bible mentions nothing whether the next of kin to the deceased was already married or not. However, because polygamy was practiced during that time, we presume that his marrying the wife of his deceased brother could mean nothing whether he was married or not. The second thing is: what of the other children born after the firstborn son child; to whom could they be - the deceased's or the real man who bore them? The third one is: what if the deceased man had already borne a male child before his death to preserve his name in the family genealogy? Could his wife be married to his closest kin or she could remain unmarried? The fourth one is, could this kind of marriage proceed after this couple bore a son to inherit the deceased's name in the family lineage or not?

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<sup>2</sup> Creative Commons Attributions – Share Alike. Wikimedia Foundations, Inc. [http://wikimedia.org/levirate marriage](http://wikimedia.org/levirate%20marriage), May 20, 2013.

As we have observed from the passage of this text, the crux of that marriage was to retain the deceased man's name in the family genealogy as the Israelites were very good in retaining genealogies (Matt 1:1\_\_\_ 16; Luke 3: 23\_\_\_ 38 ). Besides retaining the name of the deceased man in the family line, other reasons for that kind of marriage during that time were to take care of the deceased man's properties, hence establishing economic stability for the widows and seeing to it that they were adequately protected. Nolan B. Harmon observes pertaining to this notion:

The legal schema served two purposes. To the deceased it made available progeny who were legally his own and could therefore perform the deceased's behalf the duties of the descendants. . . . Less intentional but more direct was the effect on the widow herself. Her husband's death need not make her outcast from normal life of the community. . . . The only immortality the Hebrew hoped for was to grow old and, after his death, to live on in the life of his descendants. . . . The individual Israelite, believing thus, felt that he was an integral part in the ongoing life of Israel. In that life he continued to live. Therefore he must of course have children in order to preserve his own name.<sup>3</sup>

Frank E. Gaebelein complements this notion by saying that:

It was rather an alternate arrangement under specific bounds to make possible the retention of landed property throughout the families of Israel. It had a subsidiary result of protecting widows without children. . . . The social structure based on family and tribal divisions and relationships and the ownership of property by tribes and families were of prime importance in the Mosaic economy. Consequently, levirate marriage, an ancient custom in the Near East . . . was of considerable importance relative to the continuity of the family and the distribution of landed property.<sup>4</sup>

Regarding the levirate marriage, a noteworthy point is that it was not practiced by the Jews only but by several other peoples in most of the world's continents. In the

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<sup>3</sup> Nolan B. Harmon, *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1953), 479, 48.

<sup>4</sup> Frank E. Gaebelein, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1992), 150,151.

continent of Asia, the Xiongnu, from Central Asia, practiced it. Likewise here, until the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE, the northeastern Caucasus Huns practiced it. The Kirghiz, the Karo from Indonesia, and some other people from the rural India practiced it and are still practicing it in some parts like Punjab, and Haryana. Not only these ethnic groups in Asia that practiced/practice levirate marriage, people from the rural areas of Bangladesh, especially those of the lower, and middle income practice it to date.<sup>5</sup>

In Africa levirate marriage is also practiced by several ethnic groups. In Somalia the entire country practices it under Somalia customary law or Xeer. In Cameroon it is practiced among the Mambila of Northern Cameroon. In Nigeria, the Igbo people of the southeastern part, the Yoruba, the Hausa, and the Fulani practice it. In South Africa, it is known as “ukungenwa.” It is practiced by the Zulu and other ethnic groups even though here, it is declining due to women’s rights. In Zimbabwe it is practiced by Shona people and it is known as “Kugara nhaka.” In South Sudan, nilotic groups, commonly Dinka, and Nuer, practice it. In Kenya, besides the Abagusii ethnic group, the Maragoli of Western Kenya, the Nandi, and the Luo, practice it.<sup>6</sup>

Levirate marriage was also practiced in Europe to safeguard the dynastic status. For instance, in England, English history indicates that it has been practiced “to preserve marriage alliances and protect the social status of the royal spouses and fiancées. [Thus], upon the death of Arthur, Prince of Wales, his widow Catherine of Aragon was married to his younger brother, the future Henry V111. Upon the death of Prince Albert

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

Victor, Duke of Clarence and Avondale, his fiancée Mary of Teck married his younger brother, the future George V.<sup>7</sup>”

Levirate marriage is also practiced in Islamic countries; however, it is a little bit different in nature from the rest of other countries in that the women are given freedom to decide whether they are to be married or not, since “the Islamic law (Sharia) clearly lays down rules for marriage, including who can marry whom, and the Qur’an prohibits a wife to be ‘inherited’ unless she agrees.”<sup>8</sup>

There are some similarities in the style of practicing levirate marriage between certain countries and the Abagusii ethnic group. Foremost of these tribes are the Kirghiz of the continent of Asia, and the Shona of Zimbabwe. Their similarities come about in that it is the younger brother to marry the widow of the deceased elder brother. The elder brother is prohibited to marry the widow of the deceased younger brother, for according to Abagusii ethnic group, the elder brother is given the status of the father in the family when the father has passed away. Thus, for him to marry the widow of his deceased younger brother is like the father marrying his daughter-in-law.

When a scrutiny is done of the Scriptures and the sources that provide us with the information about levirate marriage, it is ascertained that the intent and the import of all the ethnic groups that have been practicing it and those who are still practicing it is the same:

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

Levirate marriage can, at its most positive, serve as protection for the widow and her children, ensuring that they have a male provider responsible for them. This can be a positive in a society where women are not allowed self-sufficiency and must rely on man to provide, especially in societies where women are seen as under authority, dependent on, servitude, and/or possession of their husbands. Thus, the practice of levirate marriage was strongly associated with patriarchal societies. The practice was extremely important in ancient societies . . . , and remains so today in some parts of the world. Having children enabled the inheritance of land, which offered security and status. A levirate marriage might only occur if a man died childless, in order to continue his family line.<sup>9</sup>

From this standpoint, we can observe that the levirate marriage had a lot of significance to the widows during that time. However, it was not established on God's original plan of marriage which is a monogamous marriage, that is, one husband, one wife, one wife, one husband. As we have observed relative to the practice of this type of marriage in all the ethnic groups that had practiced it or are still practicing it, almost all of them practice it in a polygamous style, which as Ellen G. White puts it, was not God's plan in establishing marriage. On this notion she states:

In the beginning God gave to Adam one wife, thus showing His order. He never designed that man should have a plurality of wives. Lamech was the first who departed in this respect from God's wise arrangement . . . . This was one of the great sins of the inhabitants of the old world, which brought the wrath of God upon them. God has not sanctioned polygamy in a single instance. It is contrary to His will.<sup>10</sup>

That is why the marriage of widows according to the New Testament teaching is based on God's original order of marriage. For this reason, we need to know how God's

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1947), 76.

original plan of marriage is disclosed in the Scriptures if we are to perceive the authentic biblical marriage of widows.

### **The New Testament Marriage of Widows**

Our understanding of the nature of the New Testament marriage, would enable us perceive the New Testament widows' marriage. The cardinal point we need always to know about the New Testament marriage is that it is established on God's original plan in instituting the rite of marriage as it is depicted in the book of Genesis. In this respect, the original plan of God in establishing marriage is thus put by the Scriptures:

And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone, I will make him a helper comparable to him". . . . And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh .Gen 2:18, 21 - 24

Because the New Testament marriage is established on this premise, and it is the type of marriage endorsed for the marriage of widows, there are some points about it we need to take note of: First, it is to be between two individuals of the opposite sex – man and woman (husband and wife), hence it is monogamous. Second, it is to meet the social wants of those individuals. That is why God saw that man should not be alone (verse 18). Paul further elaborates this notion that "The first man didn't come from woman, but the first woman came out of man. And Adam, the first man, was not for Eve's benefit, but Eve was made for Adam. But remember that in God's plan man and



woman need each other.” (1Cor 11: 8, 9, 11, The New Living Bible). Third, it was for procreation (Gen1: 26 – 28) so that the first couple’s descendants could inhabit and fill the earth that God had created for this purpose.

In this regard, Jesus elucidates for us that the nature of the New Testament marriage is a restoration of God’s original plan of marriage. Thus, He puts it: “He answered and said unto them, ‘Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? *So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.*” (Matt 19: 4 – 7, Emphasis supplied). Larry Christianson, remarking on God’s original plan of marriage, thus says, “God’s order for mates is nowhere more clearly and simply stated than in the Bible’s very commentary upon the man – woman relationship.”<sup>11</sup>

In the preceding text, Jesus tells us five things about this marriage. First, He asserts that marriage is a plan of God Himself which He established from the beginning (v. 4). Second, He reiterates God’s original plan of marriage that one man is for one woman (wife), one woman, is for one man (husband), (v. 4 ). Third, He tells us about the permanency of this marriage relationship; both parties are to leave their parents and be united permanently by being one body (vs. 5 – 7b). Fourth, He admonishes that God’s original plan of marriage should not be tampered with (v. 7b). Fifth, He tells us about the sanctity of marriage. That is, marriage should be free of immorality. Because when

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<sup>11</sup> Larry Christianson, *The Christian Family*, (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship), 19.

we examine the immediate context of this text, we ascertain that the Pharisees wanted to affirm that there is nothing wrong with divorce. Jesus gainsaid their view in reaction by reminding them of God's original plan of marriage. When they insisted that their view was right by further asking Jesus questions to justify their perspective, He plainly told them: "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery" (verse 9). As we have observed, Jesus tells us here that no one is allowed, according to God's original plan of marriage, to marry a second wife or a second husband if his or her incumbent spouse is alive, except for sexual immorality. Whoever does so is regarded by God's law (the moral law of the Decalogue) as an adulterer/adulteress. This is a rule which the practice of levirate marriage breaks, for it accepts polygamy.

As such, the New Testament marriage being a restoration of God's original plan of marriage, the widows have been asked to adapt it in their marriage as it fulfills one's purpose of marriage according to God's plan, that of fulfillment in all aspects of one's life (Gen 2: 2ob – 24 ; 1:26 – 28). In this regard, Gilbert James observes that it is the form God instituted of this marriage that is to be adhered to: "Marriage is ordained of God to give the divine honor to the sexual union between a man and a woman. As long as there is need for such unions among mankind on earth, the form of marriage instituted by

God cannot become obsolete: it remains the only legitimate institution for establishing a family and propagating the human race.”<sup>12</sup>

The question that might be in our minds right now is, Why is it that according to God’s original plan of marriage, the model the New Testament adapts, and which is recommended for widows to practice, it is a rule that a man should marry only one woman (wife), and a woman should marry only one man (husband)? We need to have in-depth solution of this question for as we have already observed, almost all the ethnic groups besides the Abagusii ethnic group that encourage the marriage of widows promote for them levirate marriage which is polygamous in nature; also if we are to conceive a profound reason for discouraging levirate marriage for our widows and encouraging the New Testament marriage model. Paul gives us a reason as to why this is so, in this regard:

Husbands, love your wives just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He sanctify and cleanse her with washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Eph 5: 22- 32

Paul is telling us here that marriage is symbolic to that which Christ has done for His church – all the redeemed people. Thus, the church is Christ’s wife and Christ is

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<sup>12</sup> Gilbert James, *Submission and Headship in the Christian Marriage and Life* (Canada: Sharon Children’s Home and Schools North Battleford, 1998), 6, 7.

husband to the church. The church does not have many Saviors but only one. Likewise, Christ is the only Savior to the church. Most certainly, marriage being symbolic of Christ's salvation act to the church, there should be only one husband for one woman and one woman for one husband.

This truth has been proclaimed since the inception of the gospel to humankind. That is, immediately sin entered into the world. The Old Testament is permeated of it. That is why the prophets had always this kind of message to God's backsliding children: "Return, O backsliding children,' says the LORD; 'for I am married to you. I will take you one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion.'" (Jer 3: 14). The prophet Hosea also heralded the similar message. Thus, he said, "I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in loving-kindness and mercy; I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the LORD." (Hos 2: 19, 20). As we have observed, the message of the Old Testament prophets in this regard, is established on God's original plan of marriage.

The same concept is depicted in the New Testament. Here, Paul puts it thus: "For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Cor 11:2).

In this regard, when the Israelites were being entreated to return from their backslidings, they could be addressed thus: "Surely, as a wife treacherously departs from her husband, so have you dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel," says the LORD. (Jer 3: 20).

Because a transition in marriage from levirate marriage practiced during the time of Israel economy, to God's original plan of marriage was being made, Paul had to take time, effort, and courage to explain his audience, and the subsequent believers, of the authentic marriage rite. Thus, he states: "Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband." (1Cor 7: 2). As you have observed, his cardinal concern is to inculcate in the minds of his audience and the subsequent believers, God's original plan of marriage; of one man for one wife, one woman for one husband.

William G. Blum elucidates this concept of one man for one wife, one wife for one man, when he says that:

We have already seen that the Creation account and the reference to "one flesh" found in the Old Testament give strong support for monogamy. Indications of indissolubility and unity of marriage were already present in Old Testament teaching, . . . Paul goes beyond this point, as Grelot (Hauben, *Marriage African*, p.155) explains: The aspects of marriage unveiled by Paul, was not the call for indissolubility and unity. The new element appears, in his conception of the mystery of matrimonial union: for Paul and Christ, this union is a gift of God, which unites spiritually and corporally two equal persons - a man and a woman. . . . It is, precisely, the new entity, created through marriage, the unity in one flesh that is most difficult to reconcile with a polygamous concept of marriage . . . . The image of polygamous marriage does not exemplify the image of the union of Christ and His church.<sup>13</sup>

Roger and Peggy Dudley complement on this notion and portray the purpose of marriage from the beginning and how it has been obliterated; hence appeal that it should be restored:

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<sup>13</sup> William G. Blum, *Form of Marriage – Monogamy Reconsidered* (Nairobi: Graphics Ltd, 1989), 249, 251, 252.

In Ephesians 5, the great Marriage Chapter, Paul carries us back to God's plan in Eden and shows clearly the parallel between the husband and wife and Christ and the church. . . . The intimate, companionship in marriage was a gift from God at the beginning of human history. But through the centuries this truth was obscured. The traditional marriage no longer represents the relationship that God wished to have with His people. And today the church is called upon to rescue this lost blessing, refurbish it, and set it forth like a gem to shine brightly."<sup>14</sup>

Mrs. White further continues to elaborate this concept when she says,

Polygamy had been early introduced, contrary to the divine arrangement at the beginning. The Lord gave to Adam one wife, showing His order in that respect. (She specifies when this "early age was."). It was one of the sins that brought the wrath of God upon the antediluvian world. Yet after the Flood it again became widespread. It was Satan's studied effort to pervert the marriage institution, to weaken its obligations and lessen its sacredness; for in no surer way could he deface the image of God in man and open the door to misery and vice.<sup>15</sup>

Pertaining to the issue of Abraham and Hagar, she depicts that it was not God's arrangement that Abraham marry Hagar. She does say: "If God had sanctioned polygamy; He would not have thus directed Abraham to send away Hagar and her son. He would teach all a lesson in this that the rights and happiness of the marriage relation are to be ever respected and guarded, even at a great sacrifice." She continues to explain her concept that "Sarah was the first and only true wife of Abraham. She was entitled to rights as wife and mother, which no other could have in the family."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Roger and Peggy Dudley, *Married and Glad of It*, (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1990), 34, 35.

<sup>15</sup> White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 91, 92, 338.

<sup>16</sup> White, *The Story of Redemption*, 80.

Ultimately, Mrs. White portrays this idea that monogamy in marriage is God's ideal in relation to His plan of salvation to humankind:

In the Bible the sacred and enduring character of relation that exists between Christ and His church is represented by the union of marriage. The Lord has joined His people to Himself by a solemn covenant, He promising to be their God, and they pledging themselves to be His and His alone. He declares: "I will betroth thee unto Me forever: yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies. Hosea 2:19. And again: "I am married unto you." Jeremiah 3: 14. And Paul employs the same figure in the New Testament when he says: "I have espoused you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." 1Cor11:2<sup>17</sup>

Most certainly, that question which bothers most people might also be troubling you. The question is: Why did God tolerate polygamy to be practiced if He did not sanction it from the original? In actuality, as it were, in every generation, secularism influences God's people to the extent of perverting God's truth almost completely. This problem also occurred to the Israelites. As they were living among the heathen, they were greatly influenced by their evil ways, more especially those that are attractive like polygamy. Ellen White discloses this point that: "Polygamy so common at that time was directly opposed to the law of Jehovah. But this evil was tolerated in Palestine and the Israel of God mingled in marriage with Phoenicia, Egypt, Edom, Moab, and Ammon, nations that bowed at idolatrous shrines, practicing licentious and cruel rites, greatly dishonoring God."<sup>18</sup> As it were, God out of His gracious mercy, "Truly, these times of

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<sup>17</sup> White, *The Great Controversy* , 381.

<sup>18</sup> Ellen G. White, "Mingling Truth with Error, " *Review and Herald volume 6* (March 10, 1910), 21.

ignorance . . . overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent,” (Acts 17: 30).

I hope that you have not sidetracked from our point of focus – wanting to know what God’s original paradigm for marriage is, since that is the model the New Testament adapts for the Christian church to practice, and it is the one recommended for the marriage of widows in this dispensation. Understanding this concept hence, is significant for it will enable us conceive why the Scriptures shift from the levirate marriage of widows to the New Testament model. It is my hope that this overview of the original plan of marriage, on which the New Testament widows’ marriage is established, has become beneficial to us, as it has enabled us to grasp the roots of the New Testament widows’ marriage.

### **New Testament Texts Supporting Marriage of Widows**

There are texts in the New Testament that explicitly support the marriage of widows. We need to know about them and scrutinize how they apply God’s original plan of marriage in this regard.

**1Corinthians 7:8, 9, 39.** This text is one of the New Testament texts that portray the widows’ marriage. It puts it thus: “But I say to the unmarried and widows: . . . if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion. A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.”



An analysis of this text brings out the following reasons as to why widows should marry: There is a possibility of them failing to exercise self-control. For this reason, comparatively, marriage is more preferable than being overcome with passion. Moreover, the law permits a widow to marry if her husband dies. However, those who opt to marry are to marry in the Lord.

The Lord who fully knows all about human beings – how their bodies function, for He created them (Gen 1: 26, 27); and who knows how morally weak they are, knows that the widows are subject to failure in exercising self-control. Because, being single as they are, and being in a normal condition physically, with their bodies operating normally in relation to all that pertains to sexual drive, the possibility of failing to exercise self-control is possible (Rom 7: 14 – 18). Furthermore, owing to the fact that they once lived with their late husbands and experienced the pleasure couples experience in their sexual intercourse, they are vulnerable in this aspect. Leander E. Keck observes over this concept:

As is his pattern throughout, however, Paul offers a concession that if self-control is a problem, they should remarry (7: 9). Celibacy is the best for widows . . . but remarriage is preferred over either a loss of self-control or a burning with sexual desire (7: 9). Several connections of 7: 8, 9 with the preceding verses emerge: Paul expects believers to discern and do the best they can. When self-control is a problem, concessions lead to an accommodating level of performance that, although clearly understood as something less than the best, is still reckoned to be acceptable behavior.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Leander E. Keck, *The New Interpreters Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volume 10*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 874.

Because this issue is crucial since the Scriptures address it directly as it is; and that the need for the marriage of the widows is realized, many commentators have as such expressed their concern over it. Besides Keck, Gaebelin, being one of them, in this regard complements: "Paul gives advice to the single, whom he now classifies as the unmarried and the widows. If the situation is that these persons cannot control their sexual desires, they should marry. The explanation Paul gives is that it is better to get married than to be inflamed with sexual desire, which is hard to control outside of marriage."<sup>20</sup>

Another noteworthy point in this text is that Paul removes all the obstacles that barricade the marriage of widows by legalizing it. For he puts it that a woman is only considered immoral if she has an affair with a certain man when her husband is alive. However, when the husband is dead, and she is married officially in the Lord by a certain man to avoid illicit sexual intercourse, she has not committed any offense. Thus, the Scriptures put it that if she cannot exercise self-control, it is better for her to marry anybody of her choice to avoid immorality of any kind. Keck hence elaborates this concept that "Reaffirming his earlier embrace of the Lord's teaching (7: 10) as the ideal, Paul says that as long as the husband lives, the wife is bound to him, but what happens when the husband dies? Paul's concession: 'she is free to marry whomever she wishes to marry but only in the Lord.' (7: 9)."<sup>21</sup> Gaebelin also adds his view to this notion that

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<sup>20</sup> Gaebelin, 229.

<sup>21</sup> Keck, 891.

“But when he (husband) dies, she is free to marry anyone she chooses, so long as he is a Christian.”<sup>22</sup>

It is intelligible that what this text discloses pertaining to the marriage of the widows is good news to them. Our merciful Lord has directed that they should marry if possible, majorly for two reasons. First, as already noted, so that the widows can experience social satisfaction. Because the man and the woman, each needs one another, to live a satisfactory, complete life socially (1Cor 11: 8, 9, 11). Thus, because the woman was created for the sake of the man, without the company of the man, the woman’s life is incomplete socially; as, no single, sane lady attains full social satisfaction without the company of a man. The second reason is salvific. Because it is axiomatic that God wants all people to be saved (1Tim 2: 4), and, whereas, no, immoral person would be saved into God’s kingdom (Cor 6: 9, 10), He wants widows to escape this problem by marrying so that they would be saved.

The only caution He gives to the widows wanting to marry is: their marriage must be in the Lord. That is, it should be in harmony with the marriage model as stipulated in the New Testament Scriptures, which is according to God’s original plan of marriage. Failure to abiding to this requirement for marriage, that marriage before the Lord is null and void. It always brings about blessings when one resolves to do God’s will. Let these blessings also replete the widows who wish to marry.

**1Timothy 5: 11\_\_\_16.** This is another New Testament text that authorizes the marriage of widows. This is what it says relative to this issue:

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<sup>22</sup> Gaebelein, 237.

But refuse the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith. And besides they learn to be idle, wandering from house to house, and not only idle, but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not. Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully. For some have turned aside after Satan. If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows.

This text, like other texts handling this issue, the marriage of widows, has reasons on which it bases its arguments that widows should marry. The following are such arguments: They grow wanton against Christ and desire to marry. Thus for the sake of marriage, they cast off their faith and are condemned. To want to succeed in this endeavor, they concentrate on it and become idle. They wander from house to house with gossip, and busy to blackmail others hoping to sell themselves successfully in this way. For this reason, their misconduct gives the adversary an opportunity to speak reproachfully (against God and His church). But if they marry, their marriage would relieve the church from being overburdened, thus this situation gives the church an opportunity to take care of those who are really needy widows.

As observed, this text gives some reasons as to why widows should marry. The first one depicted here concerns their probability in deserting Christ due to wantonness. The Collins Concise English Dictionary has several meanings for this word, "wanton". Among them is, "dissolute licentious, or immoral." Furthermore, "wanton," as applied here, is a very strong verb that is related to the sentiments of licentiousness. Licentious, one of the adjectives that describe the word "wanton," according to Collins Concise

English Dictionary, means, “sexually unrestrained or promiscuous.” Thus, chances of marriageable widows being faithful in the Lord are minimal. That is why the Scripture uses such strong words to describe their situation relative to being morally sound as widows.

Probability attests that this problem befalls the widows. Since, as already observed, their bodies function sexually normal. Too, one time they lived with their late husbands and experienced married life. Furthermore, they are always exposed to provocative factors that incite them sexually – a happy successful couple that live next to them; media marriage advertisement programs and displays of that kind; marriage seminars, and daily talks of that kind, etc. All these factors reminisce them of the marriage pleasure they experienced with their deceased husbands which cause them sleepless nights. Thus they experience the burning which Paul refers to in 1Corinthians 7: 8, 9.<sup>23</sup> Nolan B. Harmon explains what this burning is when he says: “To burn does not refer to hell fire (Tertullian) but, as in RSV, to be aflame with passion.”<sup>24</sup>

As it were, when such happen to them and they retreat to licentiousness, they are condemned as sinners by God’s law (Gal 3: 10 – 14). This condemnation, as we have already observed, bothers their Creator as He does not want any to be lost (1Tim 2:4) but all receive eternal life (John 3:16). Thus, He has sanctioned that they marry to

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<sup>23</sup> Joyce Nyaata, A widow from Matutu Adventist District, Nyamira Conference, interview by James c. Otores, Adventist University of Africa, August 17, 2006.

<sup>24</sup> Harmon, 78.

whomever they choose, so long as that gentleman is a Christian and that marriage is done in the Lord.

The other reasons given as to why they should marry, pertains to their misconduct. As it were, once one has deserted the Lord, he/she is now controlled by the devil's powers of sin (Rom 6: 16, 19). Thus the widows, who do away with the Lord because of wanton, become subject to the control of the devil, hence, become subject to licentiousness, busybody, gossip, idleness, besides moving here and there, recklessly, mindful only of attracting men to their attention. And most likely, such practices, are common among some widows, particularly, those who are after popularity so that they may gain more attraction to men. Furthermore, they talk maliciously of other ladies so that they may excel in the eyes of men.<sup>25</sup> As such, that which the Scripture says, "That they wander from house to house" (here and there) 1Tim 5:13, looking for a wider market for their business comes to be true. In this way, the devil takes that advantage to discredit God and His church – for his business is always to accuse God and His church. That is why the Scriptures put it: "the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night" (Rev 12:10). And, "Then he showed me Joshua being the high priest standing before the Angel of the LORD and Satan standing at his right hand to oppose him" (Zech 3: 1). Joshua being the high priest, and the work of the high priest is to represent God's people before the Lord, thus, Joshua here represents all God's people whom always the devil accuses before the Lord. Paul for this reason admonishes the church, "Give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully" (1Tim 5: 14).

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<sup>25</sup> Nyaata, August 17, 2006.

Something noteworthy displayed here is that this has already happened, not that it will happen. “For some have already turned aside after Satan,” (verse 15). Indeed, some widows, after undergoing severe burning sexually, come to such a conclusion that “If it is getting lost, let it be so; for even the Lord knows very well of my condition. Moreover, if the Lord wanted me to be saved, why did He let my husband die?”<sup>26</sup> For this reason, to avoid such to happen to the widows, the Lord authorizes that the widows marry. Gaebelein supports this notion that “Paul gives advice to the single whom he now classifies as the unmarried and the widows. If the situation is such that these persons cannot control their sexual desires, they should marry. The explanation Paul gives is that it is better to get married than to be aflame with sexual desire, which is hard to control outside marriage.”<sup>27</sup>

Because of the uncomfortable situation the widows undergo, and, whereas the Lord has sanctioned that they be relieved from it, the Lord now through Paul authorizes that “If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them,” (verse 16a). When he uses the word “believing” (v. 16a), he means those who are Christians indeed, whom he often addresses as “saints” (Rom 8: 27; 1Cor 6: 2; Eph 1: 18; 1Thes 3: 13). A person is a Christian indeed, when he/she has fully committed himself/herself to Jesus because of His matchless love for humankind (Galatians 5:20; Philippians 3: 7, 8). Such a believer has migrated his/her mind from any gain of this world, if somewhat, it conflicts with his/her doing God’s will or making him/her lose the heavenly mansion Jesus went

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<sup>26</sup> Nyaata.

<sup>27</sup> Gaebelein, 229.

to prepare for us. In his/her mind, such a Christian considers himself/herself a stranger and/or a pilgrim in this world. Paul, in the Scriptures puts it thus: "These all confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on earth. For those who say such things declare that they seek a homeland. But now they seek a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them." Hebrews 11: 13, 14, 16. People who have so determined are the ones Paul addresses as "believing" men and women. For he knows that those who prioritize of this world's name in the family genealogy, or some kind of material benefits of this world, or any worldly gain they might get from their widows than doing God's will, would find it hard to submit to God's bidding in relieving widows marry. Mrs. White makes such a remark when she says, "No man (person) can be a follower of Christ and yet place his affections upon the things of the world."<sup>28</sup>

Another bothering factor that makes Paul recommend the marriage of young widows is the burden they give to church members in taking care of them. Because there are old widows who cannot adequately support themselves materially, he advises that if young widows marry, together with the help of their new husbands, they will support themselves materially, thus relieve the church to concentrate in taking care of those widows who are in need indeed. William D. Mounce, gives his views concerning

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<sup>28</sup> Ellen. White, *Testimonies*, 3: 477.



this concept that: “Part of the urgency of this passage results from Paul’s concern for the pressing needs of the widows requiring support.”<sup>29</sup>

From this perspective, it is incumbent that the church must always see to it that it does not misappropriate the potentiality of the young widows. It has to enable them utilize and materialize their potentiality.

**Romans 7: 1\_\_4.** Further biblical evidence in the New Testament that supports the marriage of widows is in this text, (Romans 7: 1 – 4). Here, Paul does not say directly as he has done in other preceding texts that widows marry; but he has done so analogously. As we all know, an analogy is drawn between two things that have some similarity so that a kind of truth can be learned in the process of likening them. MacMillan English Dictionary defines it that: “comparison between two situations, processes, etc that is intended to show that the two are similar.” The following analogy is drawn therefore in the New Testament to authorize the marriage of widows. It goes on thus:

Or, do you know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress, but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another, even to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.

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<sup>29</sup> William D. Mounce, *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 46*, (Thomas Nelson, 2000), 276.

Paul, wanting his audience to grasp a profound truth that concerns how a person who was once a sinner, thus, subject to eternal condemnation because of lack of the righteousness that is acceptable by the law is to escape this predicament, draws this illustration (analogy) of a widow's marriage. His main objective is to bring this point home. As we have observed, before he drew this analogy, he knew his fellow Jews were well versed with the details of the law. Likewise, Christians of every era are always knowledgeable with the details of the law. Having thus established his thoughts, he continues to disclose his concept that the woman, who has a husband, if she marries or has illicit affairs with another man, is regarded by the law as an adulteress. But if her husband is dead, that woman is no longer bound to marry another husband. She is absolutely free to marry whomsoever she wishes to marry and she is no longer regarded an adulteress. Gaebelein elaborates this concept that:

Already in this initial statement we have a clue for determining the thought that Paul is about to develop. The law has authority over a person only for his lifetime. Since it has been established the believer died with Christ, one can anticipate the conclusion – that whatever authority the law continues to exercise over others, for the believer that power has been abrogated. Only for him who in faith appropriates the righteousness of God in Christ is the law abolished. . . . To illustrate the binding character of the law, Paul presents the case of a woman who is married to a husband and remains bound by the law in this relationship as long as the husband is living. During this time she is not free to seek another attachment. This may be done only in the event that the husband dies. By design, the status of the wife as subject to the husband is presented by the term “hypandros,” a rather rare word meaning literally “under a husband”. . . . [I]n Jewish life this was the actual legal status of the wife, for she could not divorce her husband; divorce was a privilege granted only to the man. If the husband died, she was then released from the law of marriage (literally, “the law of the husband”).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Gaebelein, 76.

As can now be observed, the New Testament, like the Old Testament, authorizes the marriage of the widows. This is indeed, good news for all widows and for those who are concerned for the welfare of the widows positively. Because the Scriptures put it that “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (Romans 12: 15). Thus, Francis D. Nichol suggests that the church should not do anything that obstructs the marriage of the widows. In this regard, he says,

Such counsel as Paul here gives would avoid the dangers he has just mentioned, as well as the pitfalls of asceticism. . . . God implanted the desire for marriage in man and woman, and it would be wrong to advise against this normal desire. When a young woman (that is, a young widow) desires to marry and has a suitable husband in prospect, there should be no arbitrary church regulations to shackle her.”<sup>31</sup>

The New Testament has suggested some reasons as to why widows should marry. The summary of these reasons is as follow:-

There is a possibility of them failing to exercising self-control and grow wanton against Christ and desire to marry. Thus comparatively, marriage is more preferable than being overcome with passion. Because once they have been overcome with passion, they cast off their faith, and retreat to misconduct by becoming idle, wandering from house to house, permeating gossip and busybody and are condemned for eternal destruction. As it were, their misconduct gives the devil an advantage to speak reproachfully against God and His church. In addition to this, if they marry, the church would have an opportunity to take care of those widows who are desperately in need of

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<sup>31</sup> Francis D. Nichol, ed. *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, Rev. ed.* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1957, 1980), 7: 312.

material support, rather than getting concerned of their economical welfare.

Furthermore, if they marry, with the support of their newly married husbands, they will support themselves materially, and be able to bring up children. Moreover, the law (that is, God's law pertaining to marriage as it is stipulated in the Scriptures) does not prohibit them to marry; instead, it gives them full freedom to do so. In this respect, they are cautioned to marry in the Lord; that is, to marry according to God's instructions pertaining to His original plan of marriage as stipulated in Gen 2: 24, which is the New Testament pattern of marriage, and that doesn't conflict with God's laws.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE CHALLENGES OF THE NEW TESTAMENT MODEL

#### **The Depiction of the Local Situation**

Having observed how the Scriptures put the issue of the marriage of the widows, our big concern now is: can the New Testament marriage model be adapted to the marriage of the Abagusii widows; since this ethnic group is deeply engrained with the traditional style of the marriage of the widows? For, as it has been disclosed in the background of the Introduction of this work, once a certain gentleman pays dowry and marries a certain Omogusii lady, she remains his wife and a member of his family whether that gentleman is alive or dead. If she marries someone after the death of her husband, it is regarded according to Abagusii custom that this man is married to someone else's wife. For this reason, the child/children they will bear shall be regarded belonging to the widow's deceased husband. Thus, no single man would dare marry a widow who was traditionally married by a certain gentleman by paying dowry. Indeed, according to Abagusii culture, that is a taboo and a perversion of Abagusii customs. Likewise, the widows who are married by such single men know that they are not their proper wives, hence, can decide to break that marriage and move from there at their own pleasure, to reside with the families of their former, deceased husbands.

Thus the easiest way widows marry here is by “inheritance.” Oruka attests this fact when he says, “One significant aspect of traditions in Kenya is that in most communities (this region being one of them), when the husband dies, a wife is ‘inherited’ by a relative of the deceased.”<sup>1</sup>

“Inheritance,” here signifies that, one whom that widow marries is just a mere representative as husband to her. That is, he only comes and stays with that widow at her home (where she was staying with her deceased husband, for widows here, being part of the family members of their late husbands, never move to any new residence whatsoever, after their second marriage by inheritance) at certain times purposely for sexual intercourse as this man’s major objective here is to meet his and the widow’s sexual drive need, besides bearing children that would inherit the properties and possessions of the widow’s deceased husband if there is such a need to that widow and to her late husband’s family. Oruka discloses this concept that: “The one who ‘inherits’ operates only as a surrogate of the original husband.”<sup>2</sup> For that reason, he spends much of his time staying at his permanent home where he stays with his real wife and his real children. Because, as it has been observed, according to Abagusii customs, the children he bears with this widow belong to the widow and her late husband. Being that way, they take the name of the widow’s deceased husband, and officially, are regarded by the family of the deceased husband, and the community at large, as belonging to the widow’s deceased husband. In actuality, this man acts at the home of the widow who

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<sup>1</sup> Oruka, 107.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

marries him as “a part time worker” of a certain place. He is not fully committed to do the role of a husband at this home a hundred percent as husbands do at their homes; he is a mere representative here at the widow’s home.<sup>3</sup> He slightly, or not at all, supports that widow and her children (even those she bears with him), materially.

To this end, a noteworthy point we need to perceive is that the Abagusii marriage of the widows is totally contrary to the New Testament marriage model which states that a man should have only one wife and a woman should have only one husband (Matt 19: 3\_\_6, 9; 1Cor 7: 2). In actuality, it is tantamount to levirate marriage. And, as we have already observed, levirate marriage does not match with the New Testament marriage model because it allows polygamy. Thus, Christian widows do not marry applying it. As it were, they are ever stranded pertaining to their marriage because of the dissimilarity of these marriage models – the New Testament marriage model and the Abagusii marriage model for the widows. For this reason, they either pretend to live a single chaste life but privately committing adultery with certain men, or opt to marry according to the traditional marriage and are dropped from church membership.

Now, when the marriage situation for about 6000 Christian widows in Abagusii community is thus (according to the pastors of this region statistical report) we need to ascertain whether it would be possible for them to marry according to the New Testament marriage model or not. For this reason, I did a survey that focused on the

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<sup>3</sup> Nyamekendo Onchwari, surrogate husband, interview by James C. Otores, Adventist University of Africa, Nairobi, Oct 10, 2012.

Seventh-day Adventist widows in this region (for they are the ones and some others from other denominations who feel the pinch), and the Adventist clergy, both active and retired as they are the ones that give spiritual directions to the people. The questionnaire to them touched four areas, viz, strongly agree; strongly disagree; would agree if appropriate methods are devised; and being in dilemma. The response according to the questionnaires I sent to these respective groups is shown in Table 1 below.

*Table 1. Opinions about the marriage of widows*

		Active pastors	Retired pastors	Widows	Total/ Average %
Agree	Number	50	6	51	107
	%	85.0%	75%	54.4%	71.5
Disagree	Number	4	1	21	26
	%	8.3%	12.5%	25%	15.3
Would agree if appropriate methods are devised	Number	1	—	15	16
	%	.45%	0%	16.1%	20.34%
In dilemma	Number	3	1	1	5
	%	6.2%,	12.5%	4.4%	7.7
Totals		58	8	88	154



As can be observed, in Table 1, the percentage (number) that agrees that Abagusii widows marry according to the New Testament marriage model is greater in all groups. It is higher in the active pastors because being younger than the retired pastors, they are more influenced by the current convectional wisdom, in contrast with the retired pastors who are instead more influenced by the traditional wisdom as most of them grew up when tradition dominated in almost every concept that was reached in implementing any communal activity. In actuality, it is surprising that there are some pastors both active and retired who have an opinion that widows should marry according to the traditional marriage of widows which is not biblical. They so suggest because they have been influenced by that custom, living in such a milieu at the expense of disregarding what God's word says about the widows' marriage . Nevertheless, there is a higher sense from both active and retired pastors that Abagusii widows marry according to the New Testament marriage model when comparing those who agree with those who disagree. Moreover, the number of those who feel that if an appropriate method is devised and get convinced of it they would agree that Abagusii widows marry according to the New Testament marriage model increases the pastors' opinion that widows marry according to the New Testament model. It is hard to tell what those in dilemma have in mind; either they don't understand this concept at all, or they understand it very well but they have failed to resolve which way to follow.

Considering the widows' decision, it is observed that the number of the widows that agrees that they marry according to the New Testament marriage model is higher than of those who disagree. What is more interesting here is that the number of widows who disagree is higher than those of pastors. If we recall what has already been discussed, we can deduce that this is so because their marriage is entwined with the traditional view of marriage until several of them now feel that separating from that custom in their marriage is impossibility. Regardless of this syndrome, there are those who feel the need that widows of Abagusii ethnicity, marry according to the New Testament marriage model. This concept is reinforced by the fact that there are widows who are of the opinion that if appropriate means are devised, they would accept it. The number of widows in this category is quite larger than that of pastors comparatively; which means that they sense the need except they have not been told how to come out of that problem. As can further be observed, the percentage of the widows in dilemma is the smallest of the three groups. That is, the majority has opted to marry according to the New Testament marriage model in contrast with those who disagree.

From this standpoint, it is appropriate to infer that Abagusii widows should marry according to the New Testament marriage model; since according to the data as depicted in Table 1, all the groups that the survey targeted more agreed than denied that they so marry. Indeed, as it has been observed from this data, the majority of the widows are of the idea that they should marry according to the New Testament

marriage model. This widows' desire should be given paramount consideration, for, always the cry of the majority must be listened to.

Moreover, their cry is supported by the majority of the church elders in this region I interviewed. For, almost 99% of the elders I interviewed supported the concept that widows marry according to the New Testament marriage. For instance, the first one I interviewed when this idea arose in my mind almost twenty years ago, and who is almost one of the senior most church elders in this region, Jephthah Matwere Ogwankwa remarked thus in response, "pastor, that idea is so good, hence, the church administration should be informed about it so that it is implemented officially."<sup>4</sup> David Ondieki Onyantha, likewise, made almost the same remark as that one of Matwere that "that concept is very good if the church administration supports it and we are told officially to implement it."<sup>5</sup> Charles Makori in consternation remarked that "pastor, where is this good idea been hibernating? Indeed, if it would be implemented, it would take many of our widows from the bondage of Abagusii tradition they are right now undergoing in their marriage."<sup>6</sup> The late Enoch Sagana, out of much rapture, remarked that "that notion is very good, introduce it to church administration for official

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<sup>4</sup> Jephthah Matwere Ogwankwa, first church elder, Kiabonyoru Adventist church, Nyamira Conference, interview by James C. Otores, Adventist University of Africa, Nairobi, 1989.

<sup>5</sup> David Ondieki Onyantha, first church elder, Sironga Adventist church, Nyamira Conference, interview by James C. Otores, Adventist University of Africa, Nairobi, 1996.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Makori, first church elder, Nyankanda Adventist church, Nyamira Conference, interview by James C. Otores, Adventist University of Africa, Nairobi, 2004.

implementation.”<sup>7</sup> Another one of the senior most church elders, Francis Mandere, remarked that “that idea is so good if it is cautiously administered.”<sup>8</sup> Stephen Asande, joyfully responded that “Pastor, God be thanked that He has revealed and given you courage to disclose such a proposal that would do our widows a lot of good.”<sup>9</sup> Space won’t allow to display the sentiments of all the church elders I interviewed. As I have put it earlier, almost all gave such views.

Nevertheless Table 1 displays the majority of the support of this notion that the widows marry in accordance with the New Testament marriage model, and the majority of the church elders give such a positive gesture in support of it, it has not been heeded for implementation, irrespective the Seventh- day Adventist church, and the other denominations, have existed in this region over one hundred years; Christian widows are still bound by the traditional marriage of widows.

In actuality, what makes this issue more complicated is that it has proponents who strongly argue that the customs pertaining to the marriage of the widows in this region should ever be practiced. They counter the views of those who feel that the traditional marriage of widows in this region should be discarded and the widows here marry according to the New Testament marriage model. Thus, there is need to know

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<sup>7</sup> Enoch Sagana, church elder, Riondong’a Adventist church, South Kenya Conference, interview by James C. Otores, Adventist University of Africa, Nairobi, 1999.

<sup>8</sup> Francis Mandere, first church elder, Sengera Adventist church, South Kenya Conference, interview by James C. Otores, Adventist University of Africa, Nairobi, 1990.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen Asande, church elder, Nyachogochogo Adventist, Nyamira Conference, interview by James C. Otores, Adventist University of Africa, Nairobi, 2007.

more about these two views, the New Testament marriage model, and the traditional marriage model for the widows that counter one another in the Abagusii community, and decide which one to apply for the marriage of widows in the Abagusii ethnicity.

### **The Proponents of the Continuity of Tradition**

The traditionalists see nothing wrong with the tradition binding widows in the Abagusii region to marry according to the traditional way of the Abagusii marriage of widows. Since to them, all types of traditions, whether Christian or native, are valuable so long as that group of people who practices them, accepts them. Furthermore, the proponents of this view do not give any preeminence to any type of practice, culture, or truth. To them, being influenced with the theory of relativism, whatever is called truth, or any moral behavior, is relative. For this reason, they have come up with the view of sociocultural adequacy which is defined: Sociocultural adequacy is an anthropological statement of the Golden Rule.<sup>10</sup> Charles H. Kraft discloses the intent of this view when he says,

That is, sociocultural adequacy holds that we should value other people's culture just as we value ours, treating the people of other societies as we would like them to treat us. It recommends that, rather than moralizing about the good or bad in a given culture (or given individual), one should accept the adequacy and the validity of that culture (or individual), whether or not one's own set of values predisposes one to approve of the behavior of that people group (or individual).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Charles H. Kraft, Southern Nazarene University, [home.snu.edu/~hculbert/ethics-htm](http://home.snu.edu/~hculbert/ethics-htm)

<sup>11</sup> Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (New York: Orbis Books, 2005), 41.

The proponents of this notion have so much espoused and internalized this view that to them, any change of tradition is regarded destructive. Thus, they have become so rigid in their way of thinking over this issue, that to them, there is no any room for flexibility. In actuality, they do not welcome any reasoning that is not in harmony with their views. What they are only mindful of is to safeguard their view from any outside attack. In this regard, to reinforce and to protect their view, they have come up with the concept of the myth of traditional harmony. Bruce Bradshaw elucidates this view that “The myth of traditional harmony . . . assumes that change is basically destructive to a culture and that traditional people will accept change only when it is imposed on them. It also depicts missionaries and other agents of cultural change as ‘not only illegitimate but morally offensive.’”<sup>12</sup> Indeed, you have observed how they apply very strong words here, viz, destructive, impose, and illegitimate. Actually, they do this because to them, their views are impeccable, that anything contrary to them is nothing but destruction. As can be observed, it is hard to penetrate through to reach and convict the proposers of these views, the socialcultural adequacy, and the myth of traditional harmony as the latter builds on the former and concludes that anything contrary to their views is imposing something on their justifiable and perfect views. For this reason, it might be right to infer that it is a very rigid defense since it does not give any room for any new light from somewhere else. And, to them, the agents of cultural change are not only destructive, but their suggestions are illegitimate.

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<sup>12</sup> Bruce Bradshaw, *Change across Culture* (New York: Baker Academy, 2002), 80.

Their views are established on the premise that if there was anything wrong with any people's behavior, they could have felt and experienced it themselves, thus abandoned it voluntarily. But so long as they like and practice it, there is nothing wrong with it. Simply because it is the people who practice it who should call their practice bad, not any other people from outside, for to them truth is relative. As such, to them, any teaching that is contrary to their view causes great interference to their practice and it is destructive teaching to it. Bradshaw exactly elaborates this concept when he says:

The myth of traditional harmony is belief that people who live in traditional culture have harmonious lives because their values, beliefs, and customs and behaviors foster their individual welfare and ensure their corporate survival. The essence of beliefs is the assumption that people do not engage in behavior that jeopardizes their individual or communal welfare; it also implies that people will change any particular behavior if they learn that this behavior is hazardous to their welfare. The myth of traditional harmony is the source of the belief that truth is relative; it implies that beliefs are true and behavior is good if the people in a particular culture believe them to be so.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, the proponents of this notion have come up with a view that extends the sentiments of the myth of traditional harmony that gives freedom to all entities (whereby religion is inclusive), to do as it pleases them, hence, avoid any change that is suggested from outside, which they term, 'foreign.' This freedom is based on the concept that any kind of practice of any people is good; there is no need for them to change it. They so suggest, for according to them, whenever a change of any kind of behavior, belief, practice, or culture is done, the import of that entity is obliterated, and that is what they do not want to happen. They call this view, the myth of value – free

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<sup>13</sup> Bradshaw, 80.

development. Bradshaw defines it that: “The myth of value – free development, an offspring of the myth of traditional harmony, implies that religious beliefs, cultural traditions, and community values should not be changed, particularly, by innovations foreign to culture.”<sup>14</sup> This hypothesis has nothing to do with choice. According to them, when one either chooses to abandon his /her practice of some kind or continues to practice it, he/she has not been fair with this hypothesis. The rule according to the proponents of this view is, one has to stick to his or her practice of anything as it is. Bradshaw explains this concept that “The people with a culture will either accept the knowledge or change their traditions or they will reject the knowledge and continue with their values. In either situation, the innovations are not value –free, their effectiveness depends on their ability to produce cultural change.”<sup>15</sup>

As you have observed, the value –free proponents stress on rigidity to one’s cultural values rather than flexibility. They want one to remain with his/her cultural practice without anything they call “foreign interference” creeping in. Because, to them, all cultures are good so long as those who practice them like and enjoy them.

As can be observed, the exponents of the continuity of peoples’ cultures do not have any room for the Abagusii widows to practice their marriage freedom as depicted in Table 1. For, to them any change is immaterial for there is no culture that is above the other and truth is relative. Any change brought about to any existing culture is foreign,

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 82.

<sup>15</sup> Bradshaw, 82.



hence brings about disturbance to that culture. Whether this observation is practical or not, is a great challenge that needs an in-depth scrutiny; for, if this observation is valid, there is no need to talk of improvement of people's behavior.

### **The Proponents of This View from Nationalism Perspective**

There are those who reject the desire of the widows' marriage as depicted in Table 1 because they have espoused the sentiments of nationalism. As it were, they always advocate for the goodness and the existence of the values of their culture, religion, country, etc, since they are saturated with elements of nationalism. Furthermore, according to nationalism perspective, all practices of people's beliefs are now termed as their religion not pagan. Since to them truth is relative, so long as those who practice such beliefs note some validity in them, they should always espouse and internalize them. For this reason, the exponents of this notion regard Christian religion stipulated in the Bible as any other religion in intent and import. Thus, the Bible teaching does not have any superiority to other religions at all, African religion inclusive (the native worship through animal sacrifices and magical practices). Because, to them, it is imported religion to their people from other people. For this reason, they seem to project sentiments of dislike to Christian religion because they see it underrating other people's religions as irrelevant and pagan. In actuality, according to them, anything from the Scriptures relative to worship and practice does not so much matter. Mary N. Getui, displays such views when she says, "Today African religion is neglected by . . . imported religions like Christianity and Islam. . . . Christianity on the one hand, has condemned

African values as irrelevant and pagan. Indeed it is believed that to follow African religion is to be backwards. This is wrong attitude which should be reversed since not everything African is wrong and not everything Western is good.”<sup>16</sup> As you have observed, Christianity is regarded as a religion of the Western people because the missionaries who brought it to Africa came from the Western countries. Thus they do not see any importance of the New Testament marriage model, the model, the majority of Christian Abagusii widows have opted to apply in marrying, as it is depicted in Table 1. In actuality, like other exponents of this view, those with the nationalistic mentality from Africa want the African way of worship and traditional practices to be accepted and internalized tantamount to Christian religion because to them, all religions are equal in significance and intent. Thus, no religion should be given more superiority above the others. Since to them, the degree and the achievement of the consequences of worship is immaterial, for worship is worship and the end result of any worship does not go beyond the benefits achieved here and now. Mugambi depicts such sentiments when he states that “If acceptance of Christianity is morally praiseworthy, then African religiosity which facilitates such positive responses ought to be appreciated rather than ridiculed.”<sup>17</sup> As you have noted, he has compared Christianity with African religion on the basis that both religions teach on morality aspect. He does not consider the salvation aspect that promises eternal life that Christianity teaches and which Abagusii

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<sup>16</sup>Mary N. Getui, ed., *Responsible Leadership in Marriage and Family* (Nairobi: Action Publishers, Kenya, 2008), 21.

<sup>17</sup>J.N. K. Mugambi, A. Nasimiyu-Wasike, eds., *Morals and Ethical Issues in African Christianity: A Challenge for African Christianity* (Nairobi: Action Publishers, Kenya, 2003), 2.

widows so much need, but which is not taught by African religion. Thus, if the Abagusii widows can't marry as the majority of the widows have depicted in Table 1, there would be no salvation for them.

A noteworthy point we need to observe at this point is that if Abagusii widows adhere to the perspectives of the exponents of the continuity of peoples' cultures from nationalism perspective, they would be misled to miss achieving eternal life that is disclosed in the Scriptures. Because the proponent of nationalism perspective, misconstrue Christianity in such a manner that its significance vanishes almost totally. Oruka, discussing about "inheritance "and how women in Kenya react to it, depicts that sentiment. He thus states, "Women in Kenya who refuse to follow the traditional inheritance by a relative of the husband seem to be supported by the Euro – Christian conception of marriage; marriage ceases at death. However, if a remembrance of their dead husbands is anything such women wish to value, they should adopt the traditional African conception of marriage." <sup>18</sup> When Bible students assess this concept, they ascertain that what Oruka says here is a misconception of the Bible teaching. It is the Scriptures that declare that marriage ceases at death (Romans 7:1 – 4), not a Euro - Christian conception as Oruka puts it. When discussing how some Christian widows are dwindling from their people's tradition to Christian teaching regarding widows' marriage according to the New Testament teaching, Oruka further displays his sentiments pertaining to this idea that: "The decline is due to the Western influence. There is however a difference in the conception of marriage and death between the Euro –

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<sup>18</sup> Oruka, 107.

Christian and tradition Africa. In the former couples are married until death does part them. In the latter, marriage between the two persons continues even after death.”<sup>19</sup> The result of such a distortion of the Scriptures such as this Oruka depicts here is that the source of the Scriptures is lost sight of. Because as you can observe here, Oruka calls it Euro – Christian tradition. That is, the Scriptures are of human devise, they don’t have anything superior to any other type of belief or traditional practice. Those with such views at times or always come up with a conclusion that let that which is Western remain Western and have the Western import for the Western people. Likewise, let that which is African remain African and have African import for the African people. Since, according to the proponents of this view, each culture is meaningful to its own people only, not to any other people, for to them, truth is relative.

When Christianity is brought down to that level, and regarded tantamount to any other traditional beliefs, its import in permeating the information it should impart people vanishes. Thus, as you can observe, those who have espoused and internalized the support of the continuity of peoples’ cultures, have nothing to do with the Scriptures, hence absolutely discourage the marriage of widows in Abagusii community according to the New Testament model, as it has been depicted by the majority of the widows in Table 1.

The question that now arises is, should we espouse and internalize these views and let the widows in the Abagusii region continue to marry according to the traditional method of inheritance, or, we have to scrutinize the Abagusii traditional marriage of

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

widows to detect its weaknesses, abandon it, and let the widows in this region marry according to the New Testament teaching regarding to the marriage of widows as the majority of the widows have expressed in Table 1? Most certainly, the views of the proponents of the peoples' traditional marriage of the widows in the Abagusii ethnicity need to be scrutinized squarely to ascertain whether what they profess for can be applicable in the Abagusii ethnicity or not. In this regard, we must listen to the views of those who support that widows of Abagusii ethnicity marry according to the New Testament marriage model as it is depicted in Table 1.

### **The Supporters of Change of Tradition**

Despite that there is a big wave of the supporters of the continuity of peoples' tradition, practice, or religion that counters the views of the majority as disclosed in Table 1 that widows marry according to the New Testament marriage model, there are the exponents of those who advocate for the change of this custom that widows marry according to the Abagusii traditional marriage of widows. They base their views on the premise that there is no one moral behavior that is impeccable. If each ethnic group is left to continue with its behaviors, practices, and religion, and all what it calls her recommendable values, most people would remain in gross ignorance. Douglas Birsch discloses this concept that:

If ethical guidelines ought to vary from society to society, then no single set of guidelines is correct for all societies. If ethical guidelines ought to vary from society to society and there is no single legitimate set of them, then each society ought to consider its existing set of ethical guidelines to be legitimate. This argument is of course, incorrect. First, even if ethical guidelines ought to vary, it

does not follow that the existing are appropriate ones. This would only legitimate their being different, not that the actual ones were somehow the best ones to have. More important, however, is the idea that just because things are a certain way does not allow us to conclude that they ought to be that way. . . . Cultural relativism does not provide adequate support for ethical relativism.<sup>20</sup>

Besides this, there are those who argue that there is no culture that is static in its nature but all cultures are progressive. And this progress is demanded primarily to eliminate error and falsehood and bring about knowledge which is appropriate to humankind needs owing to humankind frailties, weaknesses, and shortcomings. Mayer N. Zald expresses this concern when he says that “The sciences (Human sciences) are thought to be progressive, systematically eliminating error or falsehood and cumulating knowledge.”<sup>21</sup> In this regard, the English adage: “The widest room is the room for improvement.” Now the exponents for change in people’s culture ask, “If culture and everything is progressive, not static, why wanting to make some aspects of culture static?”

William A. Dyrness and Veli – Matti Karkkainen in their observation about this notion, suggest that because of the weaknesses that are in human cultures, they should be abandoned and preference be given to doing God’s will as this is precious and beneficial to those who opt to abide by His bidding. Thus, those cultures that are not in harmony in bringing about that behavior which the Lord has recommended for His people should be discarded so that humankind may attain that standard of behavior and

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<sup>20</sup>Douglas Birsch, *Ethical Insights: A Brief Introduction*, (New York: McGraw – Hill, 2002), 36.

<sup>21</sup> Mayer N. Zald, “*Progress and Cumulating in the Human Sciences After the Fall*,” University of Michigan, *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 10, No.3 (September, 1995), 455.

conduct most accepted. Furthermore, they have to have a realization that the preaching of the gospel that is to be preached to all nations, and people of all races, involves scrutinizing their cultures also whether they are congruent with God's will, not merely the preaching of it to people, their cultures exclusive. Thus, beliefs, practices, and customs that are incongruent with that which God has recommended for His people, have to be discarded; since failure to do so means that what is done is substandard, and inappropriate. Thus they observe:

[T]here is vulnerability to human culture, something that is always askew and off- centre even at its best. . . . Because all cultures are off- kilter, there is need to discern and critique their peculiar idolatries: who or what are the powers that rival loyalty to God? This critique is included in "making of disciples of all nations." The great commission does not refer merely to converting individuals but making entire nations and cultures turn to God. The powers in these societies need to be dethroned, subjected to the sovereign will of and purpose of God for human life.<sup>22</sup>

When humankind has an awareness of his/her human imperfection, he/she develops a desire to acquire that which is best and of high quality. Thus, the reason the majority in Table 1 has seen to it that widows marry according to the New Testament marriage model.

### **Social Transformation Is Inevitable**

The views of Table 1 that widows marry according to the New Testament marriage model is supported by the fact that there is no one humankind culture that is impeccable to be a model for all humankind behaviors, and practices. Besides that no

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<sup>22</sup> William A. Dyrness and Veli- Matti Karkainen eds, *Global Dictionary of Theology*, (Downers Grove, IL: Inter varsity Press), 49.

culture is static in nature but progressive; and whereas there is a call from the Scriptures that all people's cultures should be subject to change that the preaching of the gospel might be meaningful to all peoples. Thus, in order that the salvation of the Abagusii widows might be meaningful, the exponents of change in people's cultures appeal for change of the marriage of the widows in Abagusii region from the traditional marriage of widows to the New Testament marriage model to support the desire of the widows in Abagusii region as disclosed in Table 1. They continue to establish their views that that was the theme of the prophets' message. Because, according to the prophet's message, God's desire is that a change from the human perspective of doing things to doing things according to His perspective should be effected in His people. Since true worship must bring about social transformation that does not confront with God's will. Mugambi explains this fact that "The prophets articulated unequivocally God's desire and will for social transformation. This transformation is on two related areas of human activity - in matters of worship and in social relationship. In fact, the prophets depict worship that is devoid of social concern as empty. True worship is identified as that which is based on social awareness and moral concern."<sup>23</sup>

Another cardinal point the exponents for change of people's traditions, customs, values, and religions that conflict with God's will for humankind give is that the best should always be sought after. According to these people, since no humankind culture is impeccable to be a role model for all humankind behaviors, and practices, there must be an embodiment of this kind if humankind is to attain that which is holistic in all aspects.

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<sup>23</sup> Mugambi, 38.



They regard this kind of attainment paramount, for the quest for the better is always compelling in humankind's minds. Mugambi expresses this notion when he states:

Objectively understood, however, social change implies that the existing conditions are not desirable and hence change is for the better. Social change therefore is purpose change; the goal is the creation of a more humane, egalitarian and just society in which human beings can find their true selves. The aim of social change and transformation is to build a world where every human being can live a fully human life free from any form of servitude imposed by others or even by nature.<sup>24</sup>

Mugambi mentions another point relative to this concept that if the church won't achieve such social transformation, then the preaching of the gospel becomes meaningless. For, whoever accepts the teaching of the gospel must at the same time bring about social transformation in his/her life. Thus he says, "The logic of evangelization breaks down if the gospel fails to enable the prospective converts to have life, and have it abundantly."<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, the exponents for change in people's culture put it that since the tenets of Christianity entail all ethnic groups, the inevitable requirements that any authentic Christian has to undergo social change include the African Christians. Thus, they have, like other non-African Christian communities, always to put this notion into account. Because the rule that no one would profess that he/she is a genuine Christian without changing his/her previous lifestyle that is not in harmony with Christian teaching, is uniform to all ethnic groups. Nevertheless, that change has not been effected among the Abagusii Christian widows, as well as other African community

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<sup>24</sup> Mugambi, 38.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 9.

Christians; hence, the reason for the cry of the majority of the widows as depicted in Table 1 that they marry according to the New Testament marriage model. Regarding how it affects other African communities, Samuel Waje Kunhiyop attests that: “Values are underlying, fundamental beliefs and assumptions often remain unchanged, even after there has been a religious conversion. Thus many African societies may have converted to Christianity but they still cling to traditional beliefs and assumptions that determine how they act morally.”<sup>26</sup>

As a result of the syndrome that the cry of the Abagusii Christian widows as depicted in Table 1 that they marry according to the New Testament marriage model has not been heeded, instead they are bound to marry according to the traditional marriage of widows in this region, the proponents for change in people’s cultures, practices, and beliefs that are not in harmony with the teachings of Christianity appeal that their cry be listened to. They base their argument on the premise that there shouldn’t be neutrality between Christianity and people’s traditions. Since, there is nothing like that with God. God either wants one to totally adhere to His ways or to stick to his/her traditions (Joshua 24: 15). As such, God always demands His people to bring about social transformation as it is not His pleasure that His people worship Him and at the same time, espouse the requirements of their traditions. That is why the Scriptures disclose this concept that God desires His people, with no exclusion of any ethnic group, to implement social transformation in all aspects. Mugambi elaborates this concept that: “God therefore desires the transformation of social situations which frustrate the

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<sup>26</sup> Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics* ( New York:Zondervan Publishers, 2008), 5.

emergence of such a society (the Christian society that practices syncretism).The Bible therefore depicts God as prescribing transformation in certain social circumstances.”<sup>27</sup>

As it were, if the Abagusii widows cannot marry according to the New Testament marriage model as the views of the majority are expressed in Table 1, but are bound to marry according to the traditional marriage of widows, the worship of the Christian widows in this region would bring about syncretism in the widows worship in this region.

### **Avoiding Syncretism**

From this standpoint, syncretism in the worship of widows in the Abagusii region should not be promoted. As such, as the widows and the clergy have depicted in Table 1, the marriage of the Christian Abagusii widows must be according to the New Testament marriage model for this avoids syncretism when their marriage is implemented. That is why the proponents of change in people’s culture argue that because Christianity does not have any room for any practice, behavior, or belief that is not in harmony with the Bible teaching in matters of belief and morality, there is need for social change. For, failure to reach this undertaking, Christian worship culminates in syncretism. Thus, all sincere Christians should take this issue into account with seriousness which is to be depicted in aligning their practices, behaviors, beliefs and all their related values, with the principles of the teaching of the Scriptures because any

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<sup>27</sup>Mugambi, 41.

worship that is syncretistic, is no worship at all before the Lord (Joshua 24: 15; 2Corinthians 6: 14 – 17). Hiebert discloses this concept when he states that:

Conversion to Christ must encompass all three levels of culture: behavior and rituals, beliefs, and worldview. Christians should live differently because they are Christians. However, if their behavior is based primarily on culture, it becomes dead tradition. Conversion must involve a transformation of beliefs, but if it is only a change of beliefs, it is false faith (James 2). Although conversion must include a change in behavior and beliefs, if the worldview is not transformed, in the long run the gospel is subverted and becomes captive to the local culture. . . . The result is syncretistic Christo-paganism, which has the form but not the essence of Christianity. Christianity becomes a new magic and a new, more subtle form of idolatry.<sup>28</sup>

The advocates for change of people's cultures strongly attest that unless this issue is cautiously attended, syncretism can be experienced in the Abagusii Christian widows' worship who do not marry as their majority wish is as depicted in Table 1, as it happened when the missionaries brought Christianity to new lands (in Africa, and in other continents), and did not extensively tackle people's beliefs, customs, and practices. This problem occurred because the new believers did not expressly disclose to the missionaries where Christianity had some confrontations with their beliefs, practices, and customs. For this reason, the missionaries did not tackle fully the issue of syncretism to enable their new believers run away from it. As such, they became believers in Christianity, and at the same time, continued to keep their customs, practices, and beliefs. Hiebert, discloses this notion when he observes that:

Old beliefs and customs did not die out. Because they were not consciously dealt with, they went underground. Young converts knew they dare not tell the

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<sup>28</sup> Hiebert, 315.

missionaries about their old ways least they incur his/her anger. . . . In the long run, this uneasy coexistence of public Christianity and private “paganism” has led to syncretism. Non-Christian beliefs and practices infiltrated the church from below.<sup>29</sup>

As it is always the case, if the demand of the Abagusii widows as it is depicted in Table 1 cannot be listened to, syncretism would result as Hiebert discloses it has been happening previously. For this reason, the exponents for change in people’s culture suggest that to avoid syncretism in the worship of Christian widows in the Abagusii community, and elsewhere, the Scriptures should not be abandoned as the source to provide solutions for spiritual matters, and different sources, if not people’s opinions, are sought for, to provide spiritual solutions. Hiebert explains this issue when he states that:

Reducing Christianity to emotions, values, private opinions, or supernatural truth secularizes large areas of our lives. If we preach Christ but turn to secular sciences for answers to our everyday problems we lose sight of him. Although we are busy planning and working, there is little of God in what we do. Scripture is clear: God created both the heavens and the earth, including humans and he continues to be constantly involved in both.<sup>30</sup>

God’s people must always safeguard themselves from any error by putting into account seriously what His word says.

Besides this, the exponents of the notion that Abagusii widows marry as their wish is in Table 1, hold that societies must have a law that is universal to govern them all. And that law must not suit an individual or a certain society. For, a law is more

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<sup>29</sup> Hiebert, 315.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 74.

acceptable when it suits many people. That law should be an epitome of all moral living. If it is done so, Abagusii widows would not have a problem in being bound to marry according to the traditional requirement of the marriage of widows in this region, but according to the New Testament marriage model as Table 1 indicates. Norman L. Geisler, complimenting Kant's argument pertaining to this view, talks on this universal law that:

“He (Kant) argues that it is absolutely necessary to posit moral duties as categorical and universal in order to live moral lives. Society cannot function without law. If it does not apply to everyone, then it is not law. Hence universal moral law, not what is simply socially or personally desirable, is rationally necessary to posit for life.”<sup>31</sup>

The question that now arises is, how would this universal law achieved? The answer: it must emanate from God Him being infallible. As such, when anything is done according to His perspective, nobody suffers. On the contrary, much of the time when things are done according to humankind perspective, many a people suffer. That is why the Abagusii traditional marriage of the widows has imposed rules and regulations on the marriage of the widows in the Abagusii region that treat the widows like objects of the families of their deceased husbands. For, it is an ultimatum, they belong to these families whether their husbands are alive or dead; and they marry according to Abagusii traditional marriage of the widows if they wish to marry.

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<sup>31</sup> Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Ethics: Options and Issues* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academy, Grand Rapids, 1989), 83.

In this regard, we need to look for possible solutions that would enable the Christian widows in the Abagusii region to marry in accordance with what is depicted in Table 1, the New Testament marriage model (God's Perspective).

## CHAPTER 4

### PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT, IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

#### **POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO MEET THE NEW TESTAMENT MARRIAGE MODEL**

Since, as we have observed, there are two views – the supporters of the Christian Abagusii widows to marry according to the New Testament marriage model, and the supporters of the continuity of the peoples' culture, which counter one another, we need to look for a possible solution as to which perspective is more appropriate. The researcher's perspective pertaining to the better possible solution would be based on that which is in harmony with God's will.

#### **Nothing Is Comparable to Eternal Life**

When thorough assessment is done regarding whether Christian Abagusii widows should marry according to the New Testament marriage model as Table 1 indicates, or according to the Abagusii tradition relative to widows marriage, it is considered that it is better to do God's will than to preserve peoples' culture. This conclusion is based on the premise that that which the Lord has done for humankind, is sufficient to cause this change. As such, those Christians who have an awareness of His saving grace and how those who neglect it would be condemned to eternal destruction, always prefer doing God's will as it is stipulated in the Scriptures than sticking to their



traditions regardless those traditions are incongruent to God's will. Alfred McClure, elaborates this idea when he says:

If we value this lost, unchurched, judgment-bound generation as Jesus valued the lost generation of His day, then it is imperative that we will be willing to devise new wineskins to serve as vehicles for the water of life. *Otherwise we cannot defend ourselves from the criticism that we hold our traditions more important than Christ's mission* (emphasis is mine). The mature church must be willing to put aside its own cultural and individual preferences in order to reach the lost.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, Bradshaw observes regarding this concept that:

The realization that traditional practices do not necessarily foster the welfare of a community has created the need for cross-cultural ethicists to define the basis of managing cultural change. . . .Redemption . . . (is) the basis for ethics. . . . [It] is a broad concept that has two factors to make it a valid ethic for managing cultural change. It is universally valid and culturally specific. It rests on the authority of a universal religious tradition and can be applied to particular cultures to affirm positive values and transform negative values. . . . Redemption is the central value of any event where Christ is proclaimed; it gives meaning to acts whose meaning might not be self-evident.<sup>2</sup>

In actuality, this is a paramount concept those who gainsay the suggestion that widows marry as displayed in Table 1 should consider keenly. For, those who have given precedence to doing God's will, would benefit with the gift of eternal life God would give them (Matt 7: 21\_\_24).

Nevertheless the view that calls for a change in people's culture is established on this paramount premise of Christian perspective, it has caused much pain to those who have internalized and espoused it. This is so because those who are against the

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred McClure, "Planting and Harvesting," Review and Herald, Vol.173, No.49, (December 5, 1996), 17 -19.

<sup>2</sup> Bradshaw, 85, 90.

redemption that the Lord Jesus Christ has wrought for humankind dislike that change. To them, keeping people's traditions is more important than living in accordance with the teachings of the gospel of Jesus Christ. For, as it were, if one has not had an encounter with the Lord and that which He has accomplished for humankind's redemption, doing God's will by rejecting people's traditions is immaterial. Thus, they severely molest those who have espoused and internalized the teachings of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and have done away with the cultures that counter God's will. Arthur George Buttrick discloses this idea that: "The most dismal and bloody chapters of history have come from the repeal of God's commandments in favor of man's tradition. The persecutions and slaughtering in the name of religion, the cruelties, the barbed-wire fences of exclusion, and obscene wrangles over trifles, all are part of the story."<sup>3</sup>

In this connection, it is requisite to encourage the widows who have made up their minds to marry according to the New Testament marriage model as depicted in Table 1, rather than discourage them give up due to the persecutions and torture they encounter as a result of the decision they have made in this direction. For, they would garner a great reward from the Lord due to their decision thus.

### **Prioritizing God's Bidding**

Another factor that has brought about the suggestion that widows marry in accordance with the New Testament marriage model as the majority of the widows and of the pastors have expressed in Table 1, and do away with people's traditions,

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<sup>3</sup> Arthur George Buttrick, et al., *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York: Abingdon, 1957), 750.

practices, and beliefs is that God's bidding should always be prioritized. This is so because God being infallible, whatever He does is impeccable. In making his contribution relative to this notion, Birsch thus observes: "Whatever God commands is good simply because God commanded it. Therefore, the only reason something is good is that God commanded it. No other reason or factor is relevant to good and evil. There can be no evaluation of the reason for guidelines or the guidelines themselves, only blind obedience."<sup>4</sup> He further continues to explain this idea that even if people regard what God has commanded as bad, it never becomes so, so long as God has not so declared it. He thus says, "If God commands a person to do something, then that thing is good even if ordinary beings might be inclined to regard it as bad."<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, the relationship between God and humankind contributes to the reason as to why what God has commanded should be given precedence. God is the Creator, and humankind is the creature created by God. Thus, there shouldn't be any elements indicating that people are to make a choice whether to abide by what God says or what humankind says. God is far superior to humankind, thus if what God commands is not obeyed, it is regarded as a rebellion against Him. Birsch rightly elucidates this concept that:

What are the strengths of divine command theory? The main justification relates to a belief in God and God's authority. God is creator and ruler of the universe. Human beings are part of his creation. God's authority extends over all people because he is the creator of the universe and human beings are part of his

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<sup>4</sup> Birsch, 22.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 18.

creation. If he chooses to make commandments related to human behavior they should be obeyed because to disobey would be to rebel against our creator. People who believe in God may feel justified in endorsing this “ethical” standard because they accept God’s authority. Thus, one strength of the theory is that people who believe in God will be inclined to accept a theory that acknowledges God’s authority.<sup>6</sup>

From this standpoint, Stephen Satris observes that sound moral behavior comes from the Lord. Thus, what God commands pertaining to moral behavior far supersede humankind’s. In regard to this concept he says, “So it seems to me that moral life makes sense from a theistic perspective than from a secular perspective.”<sup>7</sup>

Besides this, it is proposed that because Jesus gave God’s bidding precedence to humankind traditions, and Him being our Lord, Savior, and the embodiment of all human being behaviors, practices, and beliefs, we should always emulate Him. Buttrick elaborates this issue when he says,

The immediate meaning of Jesus’ words here (Matthew 15: 2 – 9; Mark 7: 5 – 13) was that the traditions of ceremonial compulsions had no authority in the sacred Scriptures, the law of the prophets. But the principle which he announced, the priority of God’s commandments over man’s regulations, reaches into every realm. It applies not only to the minutiae of church ritual. It applies to all choices of life.<sup>8</sup>

It is further suggested that any person who regards and extols, and/or equates his/her culture above God’s bidding, has committed an offence before Him. Buttrick

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<sup>6</sup> Birsch, 19, 20.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Satris, *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Moral Issues* (Iowa 52001, McGraw-Hill Companies Inc., 2006), 45.

<sup>8</sup> Buttrick, 750.

elucidates this concept that: “The person who exalts and even sanctifies what is known as ‘the American way of life’ – ‘British’ or any other such adjective, would serve as well – to the extent of being unable to tolerate a Christian criticism of its material and spiritual effects on people, has ‘repealed ‘the commandments of God in favor of tradition.’<sup>9</sup> As a matter of fact, those who support the continuity of Abagusii traditional marriage of the widows are inclusive to this admonition. In this regard, they should support that which the majority of the widows and of the pastors has suggested relative to the marriage of the widows in Table 1.

Ellen G. White, complimenting on this concept, tells us that Jesus ever gave precedence God’s commandments to human being traditions. She does put it:

As the condition of the people began to open to His mind, He saw that the requirements of society and the requirements of God were in constant collision. Men were departing from the word of God, and exalting theories of their own invention. They were observing traditional rites that possessed no virtue. . . . Jesus had come to teach the meaning of worship of God, and He could not sanction the mingling of human requirements with the divine precepts. . . . As before, the ground of complaint was His disregard of the traditional precepts that encumbered the law of God. . . . When they came in collision with the commandments from Sinai preference was given to the rabbinical precepts. . . . While the people were occupied with trifling distinctions, the observances which God had not required, their attention was turned away from the great principles of His law. . . . (Being accused of violating the traditions of the elders, He rebuked them of what they were doing - But He answered and said to them, “why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?” Matthew 15: 3). He declared that by placing their requirements above the divine precepts the rabbis were setting themselves above God.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Buttrick, 750.

<sup>10</sup> White, *The Desire of Ages*, 395, 397.

Like as others have put it, White also argues that human beings should always regard themselves inferior to God, them being creatures created by God, by obeying that which God has commanded, rather than wanting to repeal that which God has sanctioned, and prefer their own devising. By so doing, humankind claims equity with or preeminence to God, something so dangerous for him/her. The supporters of the Abagusii traditional marriage for the widows by disregarding the wish of the majority of the widows and of both the active and the retired pastors that widows marry in harmony with the New Testament marriage model are in danger of becoming independent of God. For this reason, they should support the view of the majority as it is depicted in Table 1.

### **There Should Be a Change of Worldview**

If change from the Abagusii tradition for the marriage of widows is to be achieved and widows in Abagusii region marry according to the New Testament marriage model as disclosed in Table 1, there must be a change of worldview of the supporters' continuity of peoples' tradition. John Fowler defines worldview thus: "Worldview' has been defined as a 'construct about the make up of life as it struggles with the question of reality, truth, ethics, and history. It is a construct that provides a point of departure, a sense of direction, a locus of destination, and a strategy of unity for human thought, life, and action.'"<sup>11</sup> Hiebert talks of worldview in this regard as,

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<sup>11</sup> John Fowler, "Worldviews . . ." A Paper Presented at Faith Learning Seminar, University of East Africa, Baraton (UEAB), Kenya, 1998, quoted by Zacchaeus Mathema, "Towards an Understanding of the

“Worldview is the most fundamental and encompassing view of reality shared by a people in a common culture. . . . [It] is based on foundational assumptions about the nature of reality, the ‘givens’ of life, and clothes these belief systems with the aura of certainty that is, in fact, the way reality is.”<sup>12</sup> From this observation, worldview is the way people espouse and internalize concepts and issues. Once this has been done, it becomes difficult for most people to change from that trend however negative and inappropriate to truth it is. Hiebert explains this concept when he says, “To question worldviews is to challenge the very foundations of life, and people resist such challenges with deep emotional reactions. . . . People are willing to die for their beliefs and make their deaths meaningful.”<sup>13</sup>

At times, people do not change from their worldviews not because of being triggered with any substantial support but because of reification (making that which is abstract turn into complex). That is, when people have dwelt in a kind of practice, custom, or belief for a long time, they superficially make it to remain that way in their minds. Bradshaw elaborates this notion that: “When people forget that they constructed their culture, their customs begin to control them, so that they do not believe they have the power to change them, even if they wanted to. People in every

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African Worldview,” *The Church, Culture and Spirits, Adventism in Africa: Biblical Research Institute, Silver Springs, MD 20904* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2011),37.

<sup>12</sup> Hiebert, 84.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

culture need liberation from traditions that jeopardize their welfare, but their traditions have been reified.<sup>14</sup>

Most certainly, the problem of reification would never be done away with unless people have been indoctrinated with the message of salvation for humankind as it has been wrought by our Lord Jesus Christ and brainwashed from their traditions thus (Rom 10: 14 – 17). Hiebert, suggests that this work has to be applied first before soliciting for the change of people’s culture. He thus says,

Leading individuals to faith in Jesus Christ is the evangelistic dimension of mission. People come as they are, with their histories and cultures. We cannot expect an instant transformation of their behavior, beliefs, and worldviews. It is important, therefore to disciple them into Christian maturity. This includes a transformation not only in the way people think and behave but also in their worldview.”<sup>15</sup>

Michael Pocock compliments this concept that “People who receive the gospel change kingdoms from that of darkness to that of God’s Son. . . . Those who believe the gospel escape from the kingdom of darkness and are transferred into another realm, the kingdom of the Son God loves”<sup>16</sup>

According to Nichol, once people change worldviews by the influence of the gospel of Jesus Christ, they now do that which is perfect. “Divine culture brings

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<sup>14</sup> Bradshaw, 81.

<sup>15</sup> Hiebert, 12.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Pocock, Gailyn Van Rheenen, and Douglas McConnell, *The Changing Face World Missions: Engaging Contemporary Issues and Trends* ( Grand Rapids ,Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005), 185, 203.



perfection. The divine culture of men and women will be carried forward to completion only as they are partakers of the divine nature.”<sup>17</sup>

Another underlying factor to people’s change of their worldviews is a realization that the Scriptures are God’s and are the yardstick to people’s behavior and conduct (1Pet 1:20, 21; 2Tim 3: 16, 17 ). Charles Colson discloses this notion that “The basis for the Christian worldview, of course, is God’s revelation in Scriptures. Yet sadly, many believers fail to understand that Scripture is intended to be the basis for all life.”<sup>18</sup> Indeed, changing people’s worldview is so requisite if the exponents of the change of people’s culture are to thrive in bringing about a change in people’s tradition of the marriage of widows in the Abagusii region, and liberate the widows in this region from the bondage of being objects of the families of their deceased husbands. For, as we have already observed, the Abagusii people’s tradition for the marriage of the widows bind them as wives of their husbands, whether their husbands are alive or dead. The Abagusii Christian widows, as we have observed in Table 1, need freedom from this tradition of the marriage of widows.

Having had such observations as to why the change from people’s cultures to God’s bidding is incumbent, now the question arises: How are they to be changed? As it were, there is need to come up with a solution to this question if this issue is to be tackled adequately to the point of materializing it. In actuality, unless a solution is

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<sup>17</sup> Nichol, 926

<sup>18</sup> Charles Colson, and Nancy Pearcey, *Developing of Christian Worldview of the Christian in Today’s Culture*, (Wheaton: Illinois: Tyndale House, 2001), 1.

achieved to this issue, syncretism would result in most churches because most people are so much engrained to their cultures that to turn them from these cultures, almost means to try impossibility. Thus, these changes are to be made categorically. This is so because there are some changes that are to be made with obviousness, and some with thoughtfulness. Our concern at this juncture is to look for a methodology that would deal with these changes without violating any of God's commandments.

### **There Is Need for Contextualization**

Owing to the fact that Abagusii people and their widows like most ethnic groups, are deeply rooted into their cultures that have greatly affected their way of thinking, to attempt to uproot them from their worldview is almost an impossibility. Furthermore, the influence of the theory of nationalism has made Abagusii people and their widows, like most people to view Christianity as a Western religion, and the elements of the theory of relativism have justified all people's cultures. Mugambi has disclosed this concept when he discusses it that:

Historically, one common response has been to reject all customs as pagan. . . . There was some validity in this rejection of old ways because in most traditional cultures no sharp line was drawn between sacred and secular practices. . . . Consequently, to incorporate old ways into the church life was to open the door for unintentional syncretism. The simple solution was to reject all traditional beliefs and customs. Such wholesale rejection of old beliefs and customs, however, creates several serious theological and missiological problems. First, it assumes that cultural forms of the Western Christians are themselves Christian. An uncritical rejection of other cultures as pagan is generally tied to an uncritical acceptance of Western Christian expressions as biblical. A second problem is that new beliefs and practices must be introduced to replace the old ones that have been rejected. This importation of practices from the outside has led people in many lands to see Christianity as foreign religion, and has alienated Christians

from their own people. It is this foreignness and not the offence of the gospel that has often kept people from following Christ.<sup>19</sup>

In this respect, if the Abagusii widows are to be liberated from the tradition of the marriage of the widows in the Abagusii region, and marry according to the New Testament marriage model as disclosed in Table 1, the principle of contextualization has to be applied to bring about the equilibrium in this issue. To contextualize the people's cultures so that they do not conflict with the teaching of Christianity is the best methodology that can be applied to solve the problem of confrontation between people's cultures and the teaching of Christianity. Hiebert defines contextualization as "the recognition that other cultures had to be understood and appreciated in terms of their own worldviews (when introducing the concepts of Christianity to a certain community that is rooted into her own culture)."<sup>20</sup> Thus, rather than people justifying their cultures at the expense of barricading the dissemination of the gospel, they realize that each culture in one way or another has impairments. As such, the best thing is to look for means of accommodating cultures, without at the same time, tampering with God's will.

In this regard, the need for contextualization is realized; for through its application, Christianity and people's culture work in juxtaposition without conflicting one another. In this way Mugambi urges that: "[It] is for churches to evaluate critically beliefs and customs in the light of their new biblical understandings, and to make

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<sup>19</sup> Mugambi, 20,21.

<sup>20</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1973), 81.

decisions on the basis of this new found truth.”<sup>21</sup> What is meant here is that the church is to recognize people’s cultures adequately and at same time, avoid any negative confrontation with the teachings of Christianity by the application of these cultures. Thus, there would be no any sort of syncretism since the people’s cultures would be accommodated to a certain limit to give Christianity way to sail through in accordance with the biblical teaching. That is, Christianity is accepted by people without doing away with their cultures where those cultures do not conflict with the teachings of Christianity. However, where cultures and Christianity confront one another, God’s bidding is given priority.

In actuality, this is the principle successful missionaries and missiologists applied when they brought the gospel of Jesus Christ to people who had been rooted in their cultures. Hiebert observes pertaining to this issue: “It is not surprising that missionaries and missiologists came to place a great deal of emphasis on contextualization, not only of the church in local and social structures, but also of the gospel and theology in local cultural forms.”<sup>22</sup>

The best biblical exemplar in applying contextualization is Paul. His success in disseminating the gospel successfully in different cultures came about as a result of applying contextualization. Kent R. Hunter articulates this concept when he puts it that:

In order to keep the central message, Paul recognized that the form (not the content!) had to change in order to get the results. He noticed that he had to make changes as he went to different groups so that the gospel could get

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>22</sup> Hiebert, 84.

through to his hearers. The end justified the use of any strategy, as long as it is not sinful. Paul was flexible in his communication for the sake of the results. The nature of language requires Christians of all ages to do the same.<sup>23</sup>

In this regard, if the requirements of the great commission are to be attained effectively and adequately, there must be cultural relevancy in the church today tantamount to that which Paul applied during his time. Kent R. Hunter thus observes: “The Great Commission and the mission-centeredness of the early church demand a culturally relevant church today. It is on the same solid theological ground on which Paul enunciated his theology in 1Corinthian 9 that the church must build its theological foundations for culturally relevant church growth today.”<sup>24</sup> The discarding of the marriage of the Abagusii widows according to the tradition of the marriage of the widows in Abagusii region and the espousing of the New Testament marriage model as revealed in Table 1, is part of the gospel Great Commission, as this enables the widows who so marry to achieve salvation the Lord has wrought for humankind.

However, in spite of the fact that this method has always succeeded, it has to be applied with caution since no any people’s culture under the sun is perfect. Or else, as it were, compromise might be brought about that would result syncretism. The Word of God must be the yardstick in determining the extent peoples’ culture is to be accommodated. Russel C. Burrill discloses this idea when he says:

[I]n making Christianity culturally relevant, the church must not accept and follow fallen culture. Since all cultures, including the American Anglo-Saxon, are

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<sup>23</sup> Kent R. Hunter, *Foundations for Church Growth: Biblical Basics for the Local Church* (Corunna: Church Growth Center, 1994), 121.

<sup>24</sup>Hunter,

fallen, it is sometimes difficult for a church to determine what is culturally acceptable and what is not. The tendency of most Christians is to determine acceptability as defined by the dominant culture. Yet biblically, the only determinate of right must be the Word of God. Culture can only be affirmed or negated based on conformity to the Bible.<sup>25</sup>

Mugambi compliments relative to this issue that “[It] is for the churches to evaluate critically beliefs and customs in the light of their new biblical understandings, and make decisions on the basis of this new found truth.”<sup>26</sup> In actuality, there must be a balance when applying the principles of the gospel to people in the light of their cultures. This principle should be applicable to those who espouse change of the marriage of the widows in Abagusii community from that of tradition to the New Testament model as disclosed in Table 1. The target being that the gospel reaches all the widows in the Abagusii community wanting to become followers of Jesus Christ without any obstacle hindering them.

### **Balance between People’s Cultures and Christianity in the Application of Contextualization**

Because syncretistic worship is a detest to God, the Scriptures warn that:

Don’t team up with those who are unbelievers. How can righteousness be a partner with wickedness? How can light live with darkness? What harmony can there be between Christ and the devil (devil= Greek Beliar – various other manuscripts render this proper name for devil as Belian, Beliab or Beliah)? How can a believer be a partner with an unbeliever? And what union can there be between God’s temple and idols? . . . . Therefore, come out from among unbelievers, and separate yourselves from them, says the LORD. Don’t touch their filthy things, and I will welcome you (Isa 52: 11; Ezek 20: 34). And I will be your Father and you

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<sup>25</sup> Russell C. Burrill, *The Life and Mission of the Local Church: Recovering an Adventist Approach* (Hart Research Center: U.S.A, 1998), 34.

<sup>26</sup> Mugambi, 27.

will be my sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty (2Sam 7: 14) 2Cor 6: 14 – 18 (NLT).

From this standpoint, there should be avoidance of all kinds of compromise when applying the principles of contextualization in the marriage of the Abagusii widows or any other cultural agreement reached in the context of contextualization; that nothing like mingling the teachings of the Scriptures with humankind cultures is experienced. Pertaining to this concept Hiebert observes, “.a call for contextualization without a simultaneous fall for preserving the gospel without compromise opens the door to syncretism. The gospel must be contextualized, but it must remain prophetic. It must stand in judgment of what is evil in all cultures as well as in all persons.”<sup>27</sup>

Most likely, the question that arise is that: what can measure where contextualization has been applied to know whether it has been compromised or not? The perfect criterion is the Scriptures. As most Christians realize, the Scriptures are the standard of all norms, mores, beliefs, and practices. In this regard, anything that is contrary in conduct, behavior, or practice to the Bible, according to the divine assessment, is wanting. For this reason, to keep the equilibrium of the peoples’ cultures and Christianity, the Scriptures have to be the measuring stick to whatever conclusion is reached concerning the place of people’s culture, and Christianity. Hebert discloses this notion that “critical contextualization takes the Bible so seriously as the rule of faith and life. Contextualized practices, like contextualized theologies, must be biblically based. This may seem obvious, but we must constantly remind ourselves that biblical

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<sup>27</sup> Hiebert, 86.

revelation is the standard against which all practices are measured.”<sup>28</sup> Hunter further compliments relative to this notion that: “When the content is the Gospel, it must not change. Therefore, as receptors change, the medium has to be changed. Otherwise, the relevancy and potency of the gospel will be lost for the hearer.”<sup>29</sup>

Regarding this concept, nationalism, ethnicity, or clannism, should not take precedence over the authority of the Scriptures. The Scriptures should always control the sentiments of all these disciplines. Thus, the equilibrium is kept pertaining to the place of culture in the light of Christianity.

In actuality, Jesus and Paul kept this equilibrium in this manner. As observed in the Scriptures, they instilled the concepts of Christianity in people’s minds amidst their cultures, without contaminating Christianity in any way. Thus, as a matter of fact, when the people’s cultures contravene with the teachings of Christianity, Christianity is to be given precedence. That is why Mugambi admonishes Christians from Africa always to be conscious of contextualization by applying it aright; that Christianity would always make sense in the light of its teaching. He thus says:

“If acceptance of Christianity is morally praiseworthy, then African religiosity which facilitates such positive response ought to be appreciated rather than ridiculed. Appreciation does not mean uncritical adoption. As illustrated in the ministries of Jesus and Paul, appreciation means constructive criticism which would help individuals, families and communities to improve on their heritage.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 91.

<sup>29</sup> Hunter, 123.

<sup>30</sup> Mugambi, 2.



To this end, it is hoped that the significance of contextualization has been realized. Too, that it is not a new concept but has been in existence since the inception of Christianity, for Jesus and Paul applied it. In actuality, that is how the issue of people's cultures where Christianity has been taught and accepted is dealt with. It is good that the Lord, knowing the extent people are engrained to their cultures, devised that method that that problem can be solved in that way. As such, the issue of the marriage of widows in the Abagusii community as has been displayed in Table 1 would be solved through the application of contextualization. This is so, owing to the fact that the widows in Abagusii region, are living in Abagusii culture pertaining to the marriage of widows that is so binding in terms of its demands. Furthermore, currently, there is a tag of war from the hypothesis of relativism that all cultures are valid so long as those who practice them accept them as good. Not only this, the theory of nationalism that the Western Christian culture should not take preeminence over other cultures also contributes to the reasons as to why we should apply contextualization if the widows' marriage issue is to be tackled well here.

As already been observed, if this issue would not be tackled well here, the church in the Abagusii region would continue applying syncretism in her Christian spiritual practices. Furthermore, the widows in this region would ever be enslaved to the culture of this place pertaining to the marriage of widows. Result? Several widows would be shut out from achieving the salvation Jesus Christ has wrought for humankind!

To apply this method of contextualization pertaining to the marriage of widows in the Abagusii region, the researcher has come out with the following suggestions:

1. A widow marries from elsewhere any Christian gentleman of her choice; but the child/children she bore with her late husband, belongs/belong to her late husband and her late husband's family. That child or those children inherits/inherit all the properties and possessions of the late husband. Furthermore, that widow together with her new husband, and the family members of her late husband, devise a suitable mechanism as to how that/those child/children would be brought up until maturity. The child/children this new couple would bear shall belong to this widow and her new life-partner (The Western world and some countries in the Southern part of Africa apply this method).
2. A widow, continues to stay at her deceased husband's home after the death of her deceased husband as a family member of her deceased husband according to Abagusii customs, possesses and keeps the properties of her deceased husband as a copartner of her deceased husband, brings up the child/children she bore with her late husband as the child/children of the late husband, but officially marries someone in the Lord from somewhere. However, this new life-partner would have nothing to do with the properties of this widow. He will possess his own properties separate with the widow's. Only marital life they would share. The child they might bear would be brought up by both. He/she would take the name of his/her father if that widow had children with her deceased husband. If her new husband has children already (may be, he is a widower as well), he will bring up that/those

child/children together with his new wife, the widow; but that/those child/children stays/stay at the widow's, or they both arrange and establish a separate home from theirs for him/her/them somewhere. If the widow's new husband does not have children, that/those child/children would be his. He/she/they would take his name (My advice is that, if possible, let this couple avoid getting children if already they have some. This marriage model does well for those with children but would like to marry for marital purposes).

3. If it will be possible, a widow arranges with the family of her late husband to marry one of her brothers-in-law (the brothers of her deceased husband). However, the child/children she bore with her late husband would belong to the late husband, and he/she/ they shall take his name. The child/children born from this new marriage relationship will belong to the new husband of this widow (her deceased spouse's brother who is now her husband). He/she/ they shall take the name of his/her/ their father (the man who bore him/her/them, the brother of the widow's late, former husband) and possesses/possess all his properties. This new couple, shall bring up the children of the deceased spouse to maturity (The Kalenjin ethnicity applies this model).
4. A lady who becomes a widow being childless, (a) either repudiates the family of her deceased husband and marries a man of her choice elsewhere, or (b) stays and lives as a member of her late husband's family but on condition

that she marries as it is stated herein in numbers 2 and 3. However, the man she marries agrees with the whims of the widow and of her late husband's family that the child/children they will bear shall belong to the widow's late husband and shall possess all the properties of the widow's deceased husband besides taking his name. Nevertheless, he assists that widow in bringing up the child/children they bear together from humanitarian grounds and as it is stipulated in the Constitution of the Government of Kenya. If the gentleman who wants to marry her is her brother-in-law, the brother of her deceased spouse who has never married before and had children, hence, would also want to have children to inherit him, they would negotiate to share the children they would bear. The first born children would bear the name of the late husband, and the last born the name of this new husband (the brother of the widow's late husband) or as they will arrange themselves.

Table 2 shows the preferences of the widows in the study as far as choosing a more suitable method for marriage.

*Table 2. Choosing the More Suitable Method.*

ITEM	Response in agreement	Percentage
1. Widow marries a man of her choice and moves from her deceased husband's home but the children remain to be her deceased husband.	4/12	36%
2. A widow continues to be identified as a wife of her deceased husband but marries a certain man from elsewhere whom she does not share neither her properties nor her children with.	6/12	45%
3. A widow marries her brother-in-law but the children her deceased husband bore with her remain to be of the deceased father; the children born with the deceased husband's sibling belong to him as their father legally, hence, take his name.	2/12	19%
4. Ladies who become widows being young and childless, either	7/12	60%
(a) Quit permanently, or,		
(b) Remain but the families of their deceased husbands have to see that they marry according to numbers, 2, and 3 above.	5/12	40%

Table 2 shows a noteworthy point we need to observe in this interview is that proposal number 2 is more preferred because it is more involved with the traditional setup than the rest of the proposals. Proposal number 3 is less preferred because it absolutely counters the traditional practice of the marriage of the Abagusii widows. For, according to Abagusii custom, one woman never bears children for two or three siblings. The children, whether born by several gentlemen, belong to the gentleman who stays

with their mother as a couple lately. The first gentlemen who bore some of the children with this woman are never recognized as the fathers of these children except the one who stays with this woman lately. Proposal 1 becomes second in preference because at times, it is practiced in the Abagusii community. Proposal number 4 is a bit different from the rest of the proposals. As can be observed (a) is more preferred because it is more comfortable to the widows than (b). However, (b) is more cultural but (a) is absolutely contrary to Abagusii custom of the marriage of the widows. This is a clear indication that widows are not comfortable with the traditional marriage of widows of the Abagusii ethnicity.

At this juncture, the widows having indicated to us that these proposals are appropriate to handle this issue, the most important point the parties that would be involved in these marriage models have to know is that all these marriage models are to be undertaken in the Lord (1Cor 7:39), not just done literally. That is, these people (the prospective husband, and wife), have to follow the right church procedures in reaching the consummation of their marriage. Thus, they have to undergo the following steps in terms of their negotiation so that their marriage that is conducted by the principle of contextualization may not break any of the Lord's commandments or bring sheer reproach in the community but as it were, ever extol the Lord's name in the community and to their own families.

1. They have themselves to discuss it at length and in-depth, considering it in all its aspects so that they may come up with sound, substantial conclusions.

2. Those who are not affected by the fourth proposal, choose which one of the first three proposals better suits them.
3. To this end, they now extend their sentiments to the close family members (children, parents-in-law, brothers-law, and close first cousins if possible), and share with them of their decision extensively and intensively.
4. The family members, giving them a go ahead (they have to actually, unless their marriage would be involving something that is contrary to the commandments of God or the constitution of the country); then they now take a step of informing the church.
5. Immediately the church is informed, the church board is convened and these parties are invited there besides their close family members, and in-depth express to the church board of their marriage arrangements and the kind of marriage model they have preferred.
6. The church board keenly listens and takes the minutes of all the proceedings. That is, the sentiments of the parties who have agreed to marry one another; the kind of marriage model they have wished to adapt; the issue of the children, how they will be brought up; the issue of the properties of both parties; the confirmation of the family members to their marriage (however, if the family members object their marriage on baseless grounds, that objection is to be forfeited by the church board and their marriage arrangements be given a go ahead); and any other

relevant issues the church board would deem necessary to be taken as minutes.

7. The church board minutes pertaining to this issue are recommended to the church business meeting for approval.
8. When these minutes are adopted in the church business meeting according to the Seventh-day Adventist procedure of adopting minutes, these parties are to proceed with their marriage arrangements by being officially united in their matrimony by an ordained minister of the gospel besides him being approved by the Government of the Nation for this business.
9. The widows in the fourth category also undergo this process.



## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### SUMMARY

Abagusii widows, whether they are Christians or not, are bound to marry according to the traditional marriage of widows (inheritance) of Abagusii ethnicity. Thus Christian widows in the Abagusii region always face acute problems when they confront the issue of marriage. This comes about because the traditional marriage of the widows in the Abagusii region is not in harmony with the New Testament marriage model. Thus, once a Christian widow marries according to this kind of marriage, obviously, she is dropped from the church membership for that kind of marriage is contrary to the requirement of the seventh commandment of the Decalogue. Worse still, this situation that faces the Christian widows in the Abagusii region has been in this way since the inception of the Seventh-day Adventist church and other Christian denominations in this region.

Not only in spiritual matters does the Abagusii traditional marriage for the widows affect the widows in this region, but also in social and economic matters. Currently, the traditional marriage of the widows in this region has tremendously become complicated socially and economically. As such, the widows are tremendously affected in this situation.

In this regard, our concern is, why should the widows in the Abagusii region undergo this suffering pertaining to their marriage when the Bible is so clear as regards to their marriage? The Bible clearly teaches that widows should marry if they choose to do so (1Cor 7: 8, 9, 39; 1Tim 5: 14; Rom 7: 1\_\_3). The only caution they are given regarding their marriage is that they marry in the Lord (1Cor 7: 39). In this connection, if the widows are to be assisted from the marriage trauma they undergo after the death of their husbands, they have to be assisted marry in the Lord, as the Scriptures declare.

Relative to this concern, the exponents for the change of people's traditional marriage of widows in this region suggest that widows have to marry in alignment with the New Testament marriage model. The cardinal ground they base their premise for change is that widows should also have a free and fair way of following Jesus as their personal Savior, for this is the chief most achievement one ever attains (Jeremiah 9: 23 – 24 ). They assert that becoming followers of Jesus authentically is paramount to maintaining traditional customs, practices, or beliefs. As a fact, it is immaterial to preserve these entities but miss eternal life.

In response to this concern and to the Scriptures' declaration that widows marry in the Lord, a survey was done to scrutinize this issue as it counters the Abagusii tradition relative to the marriage of widows. As Table 1 shows, the majority of the widows and both the active and retired pastors responded positively that they marry in the Lord. Besides this, 99 % of the church elders that were interviewed relative to this issue responded positively.

However, the exponents of the support of the continuity of the peoples' cultures with the views of nationalism and relativism advocate for the existence of the traditional marriage of the widows in this region. For, as it were, the exponents of the traditional marriage of widows in this region consider it illegitimate when making any change of this marriage model. To them, change is imposing foreign views on what people in this region regard as good.

Unfortunately, the Adventist church and all other Protestant churches in this region have not come out with an official guideline as to how widows in this region should marry in the Lord as it is stated in the New Testament. Presumably, the church here, either, sides with the traditional model of the marriage of widows in this region, or it has lacked fortitude of countering the traditional paradigm of the marriage of widows in this region.

Most definitely, Christian widows undergo unnecessary stresses after the death of their husbands as the demands of their sexual drive are not officially met. This situation leads them to a couple of negative consequences. Because, being active sexually, they (1) either do away with following Jesus as their personal Savior and move sexually with certain men recklessly (for the traditional marriage by inheritance is so rare currently due to its complications as it has been indicated in the Introduction), or (2) they remain in the church as active members but privately committing adultery with certain men. For this reason, several of them are subject to sexually venereal diseases more especially, the current HIV/ AIDS epidemic.

## **CONCLUSION**

From their perspective, the proponents for change of people's traditional marriage of widows in this region suggest that whereas syncretism is never acceptable before the Lord, a method should be devised upon which there should be equilibrium in bringing about a solution to widows' problem in this region. This method would enable widows in this region preserve their culture relative to their marriage, and at the same time they marry in the Lord. The best method that squarely meets this requirement is contextualization. Thus, the widows in the Abagusii region have to be encouraged to marry according to the New Testament marriage model as Table 1 shows by applying the principle of contextualization in their marriage.

Finally, let it be incumbent to liberate the widows from the thrall of traditional marriage of widows in this region. As a matter of fact, let their salvation be more important to those who insist that they should continue in marrying according to the Abagusii tradition of the marriage of widows rather than the New Testament marriage model.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

To this end, it is appropriate to deduce that widows in the Abagusii region should marry according to the New Testament marriage model. For this reason the researcher of this study makes the following recommendations:-

1. It is more important if widows in this region attain salvation our Lord Jesus Christ has wrought for humankind than preserving the Abagusii culture

regarding their marriage. For, as it has been observed, if widows continue to marry according to the traditional model of marriage in this region, their chances of being saved would be minimal because this marriage model distances them further from Jesus.

2. Since syncretistic worship is detestable to the Lord (Josh 24: 14 – 16; 1Kgs 18: 21; Matt 7: 21 – 23; 2Cor 6: 14 – 18), the church of Christ on earth, has to do away with it by not letting the widows in this region marry according to the traditional model of marriage as it causes it; and, instead, adapt the New Testament marriage model.
3. Because of the social and economical factors also, the traditional marriage of widows in this region should be done away with as the widows and their children both those born before and those born after the death of their husbands (through the marriage of Abagusii traditional marriage of the widows the model), are socially and economically affected.
4. The church and her leadership, as God's children, should be mindful of the widow' welfare. For it is incredible as God's children to tolerate, and/or condone and to compromise with that which affects the widows spiritually, socially and economically.
5. There must be a constant realization that the widows, never cease to be human beings with full sexual drive after the death of their husbands. As such, should be given optimum support in maintaining their relationship with Jesus Christ and minimizing for them any obstacle that hinders this thrive.

6. Because the main objective as to why traditional marriage of widows as practiced and encouraged here in the Abagusii region is just terrestrial and mundane, hence, their accomplishments are mere earthly and temporary; by contrast, the church and her leadership has to provide for the widows in this region an environment conducive for them to maximize their energy, means, abilities, and spirituality for that which is celestial and permanent by letting them marry according to the New Testament marriage model. “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil 2: 19). Such is the spirit and the longing of the Lord’s followers in every era. On this account the Scriptures attest that “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them from afar off were assured of them, embraced, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. . . . Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them” (Heb 11: 13 – 16). Jesus displays how immaterial it is to do otherwise to this aspiration of the saints when He says, “For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” Matt 16: 26.
7. By all means to rescue the Abagusii widows from this predicament they are undergoing in being forced to marry according to Abagusii traditional marriage, let the administration bodies of the Abagusii Conferences,

Nyamira, and South Kenya apply these suggestions to meet squarely the widows marital, social, economical, and spiritual needs.

APPENDIX A

CORRESPONDENCE

The Letter to the Conference Executive Directors

Dear Pastor

RE: PERMISSION TO DO A STUDY SURVEY IN YOUR CONFERENCE

I am writing a project in my Masters degree in Pastoral Theology entitled: Strategy for Enabling Widows in Nyamira and in South Kenya Conferences Marry in Accordance With the New Testament Teaching Pertaining to Their Marriage. As you might know, our church here in this region, has not come up with an official position pertaining to this issue. Thus, I am working out some recommendations as to how we can come up with an official position in accordance with the New Testament teaching relative to the marriage of widows.

As it were, before I make any such recommendations, I have to hear the opinions of some particular people in these Conferences regarding this issue. Thus, as it is referred to above, I am requesting for your person to let me do this survey in your Conference.

I hopefully anticipate for your positive response regarding this request. Thus, thank you in advance for so responding.

Yours Faithfully

Pr James C. Otore



**Response**

**OFFICE OF: EXECUTIVE SECRETARY, NYAMIRA CONFERENCE**

**DATE: 9<sup>th</sup> JANUARY, 2012**

Dear Pastor,

**RE: EMPIRICAL SURVERY**

This is to let you know that the Executive Committee sitting on 6<sup>th</sup> March, 2012, took action Vide Min 74/2012 to approve your request for permission to conduct an Empirical Survey for your MA studies at Nyamira Conference churches.

We are willing to provide you the necessary assistance you may require during the period you will be conducting your survey.

May God bless you in abundance and wish you well as you prepare for the exercise.

Thanks.

Yours in Service

ZABLON AYIERA

EXECUTIVE SECTETARY

APPENDIX B  
QUESTIONNAIRE  
To the Widows

A STRATEGY FOR ENABLING WIDOWS IN NYAMIRA AND IN SOUTH KENYA CONFERENCES  
TO MARRY IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING

My dear sisters in Christ, the widows in Nyamira and in South Kenya Conferences,

As you might be aware, the Bible in the New Testament section, clearly states that widows marry in the Lord if they are interested and if it is possible. However, here in our Conferences, among the Abagusii community, we have no official stand for this to be so because this concept is in conflict with Abagusii culture pertaining to it. What is your opinion concerning this issue? Circle the number/numbers of your choice.

1. I strongly feel that they official marry in the Lord as it is stated in the New Testament.      Yes    No
2. I strongly disagree with this idea because it is not in harmony with Abagusii culture.    Yes    No
3. I am not sure because I have not understood how it will work without confronting with the Abagusii culture.    Yes    No
4. If a good way is devised that can enable them marry and no problem is incurred with Abagusii customs, I am for that idea that they marry in the Lord.      Yes    No



## To Retired Pastors

### STRATEGY FOR ENABLING WIDOWS IN NYAMIRA AND IN SOUTH KENYA CONFERENCES TO MARRY IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING

My dear retired pastors in Nyamira and in South Kenya Conferences,

As you are aware from your knowledge of the Bible teaching, the New Testament clearly teaches that widows marry in the Lord. However, because this teaching counters the Abagusii customs, the church in Nyamira and in South Kenya Conferences has not officially come out with a stand pertaining to this issue. What is your position in regard to this issue? Tick the number/ numbers of your choice.

1. I strongly agree that widows marry in the Lord as it is taught in the New Testament.      Yes    No
2. I strongly disagree that widows marry in the Lord for this issue disagrees with the Abagusii culture.      Yes    No
3. Still, I am in dilemma regarding this issue because both sides are so binding.
4. If the church works out appropriate ways that do not conflict with the Abagusii culture, I will accept the idea that widows marry in the Lord.  
Yes    No

## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEWS

#### STRATEGY FOR ENABLING WIDOWS IN NYAMIRA AND IN SOUTH KENYA CONFERENCES TO MARRY IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING

##### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

If you are of the idea that widows of the Abagusii community marry in the Lord, which of the following methods would you prefer we adopt in their marriage?

1. A widow marries from elsewhere any Christian gentleman of her choice; but the child/children she bore with her late husband continues to belong to her late husband and her late husband's family. He/she/they inherits/inherit the properties and possessions of the late father. Then that widow together with her new husband, and the family members of her late husband, devise a suitable method as to how that/those child/children would be brought up to maturity. The child/children this widow bears with her new life- partner, belongs/belong to her and her new life-partner.
2. After the death of her husband, a widow still stays at her late husband's home as a family member of her late husband according to Abagusii customs, possesses and keeps the properties of her late husband, brings up the child/children she bore with late husband, as the child/children of her late husband, but officially marries a brother in the Lord from elsewhere. However, this new life-partner would have nothing to do with the properties of this widow. He will possess his own properties separate with the widow's. Only the marital life they would share.
3. If it will be possible, a widow arranges with the family of her late husband to marry one of her brothers- in -law (the brother of her late husband). However, the child/children she bore with her late husband belongs/belong to the late husband and bears/bear his name and possesses/possess all his properties. The child/children born from this new marriage relationship will belongs/belong to

the new husband of this widow (the widow's husband's brother). He/she/ they would bear the name of his/her/their father, and possesses/possess all his properties after his death.

4. A lady who becomes a widow being childless, either, (a) absolutely repudiates the family of her late husband and marries a man of her choice elsewhere, and becomes a member of this new family for good, or (b) stays and lives as a member of her late husband's family but on the following conditions: (1) marries as it is stipulated in numbers 2, and 3 above, and, (2) the man whom she marries agrees with the whims of her late husband's family that the child/children they will bear shall belong to the widow's late husband by bearing his name and by possessing all his properties. Furthermore, he assists that widow in bringing up that/those child/children as it is stipulated in the Constitution of the Government of Kenya and from humanitarian grounds.

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PREVIOUS EMPLOYMENT	Ordained pastor, April 30, 1983; Mission Director (Station Representative) [Conference board member by the virtue of this position], 1989 – 1991; Departmental Director (Sabbath School/ Personal Ministries/ Women Ministries and Satellite Evangelism Ministry), 1998 – 2000; District pastor, 1977 – 1991; 2001 –
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