

AN EVALUATION OF POLYGAMY POLICY IN THE
CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE IN AFRICA:
AFRICA CENTRAL FIELD CASE STUDY
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INTRODUCTION

Christians know that marriage is not an accident of history. Marriage is a gift from God and a key building block of human civilization. God instituted marriage as a concrete expression of his covenant love for humanity (oneness), as an expression of God's own nature (life-giving and nurturing creativity) and means it to be a source of happiness and fulfillment (sexual and relational intimacy). In God's wisdom and creative power, God gave humanity the capacity for a relationship between a man and a woman as intimate as any on earth can be.

This article will focus on polygamy, a form of marriage where several wives share one man.¹ The practice of polygamy is an issue across Africa. While the encroachment of Western values and styles of living increasingly make polygamy seem out of place and a relic of Africa's past, many Africans continue to practice polygamy and to defend it vigorously. In January of 2010, the marriage of Jacob Zuma, President of South Africa to a third wife and the announcement of yet another fiancé and the recognition a 20th child by yet another woman not his wife nor his fiancée made international headlines and provoked lively debate across Africa.² Not to be out done, in neighboring Swaziland, King Mswati III created as much controversy through the taking of a 17 year old school girl as his thirteenth wife at the annual Reed Dance Ceremony in 2005.³ King Mswati, himself is one of 67 sons of his father King Sobhuza II who died at the age of 82 with 70 wives and 210 children.⁴ The Christian church has not been left out of the controversy over polygamy. Almost uniformly, the Christian church has officially opposed polygamy, but has taken widely divergent stands on how that opposition should be implemented. This, in turn, has helped to fuel the controversy. All this raises the question of what should the attitude of the African church be toward the practicing polygamist and his family.

¹ The technical name for the state of one man having multiple wives is "polygyny". While the term, "Polygamy", can also refer to a woman who has many husbands, this is not commonly found in Africa and hence this paper will use the term polygamy as it is commonly understood.

² See for example, Franci Phillips, "Jacob Zuma's Wives: The Polygamy of the South African President", <http://south-africa.suite101.com/article.cfm/jacob-zumas-wives>, accessed: February 26, 2010; Lola Adesioye, "Jacob Zuma and his wives – African Embarrassment or Victim of Colonial Media Mentality?", posted: March 3, 2010, <http://www.lolacreative.com/2010/03/03/jacob-zuma-and-his-wives-african-embarrassment-or-victim-of-colonial-media-mentality/>, accessed: December 22, 2010; "South African President Jacob Zuma Marries Third Wife", *BBC News*, January 4, 2010, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8434865.stm>, accessed: December 22, 2010.

³ "Swazi King Picks New Young Wife", *BBC News*, posted 26 September 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4283932.stm>, accessed February 26, 2010.

⁴ "Mswati III of Swaziland", http://en.allexperts.com/e/m/ms/mswati_iii_of_swaziland.htm, accessed February 26, 2010 and "Sobhuza II of Swaziland", http://en.allexperts.com/e/s/so/sobhuza_ii_of_swaziland.htm, accessed February 26, 2010.

Polygamy has been a big problem in the Church of the Nazarene in Africa. It is a problem for two main reasons. First, the Church of the Nazarene has no clear policy about how to deal with the polygamists in the church. The Church of the Nazarene *Manual* is silent over the issue of polygamy. Second, the concept of polygamy raises a general moral question of whether the practice is really in conflict with biblical Christianity or whether the judgment against it is simply an example of Western cultural imperialism being imposed on Africa. Caleb Mathebula, while presenting a paper at a Nazarene theology conference in Africa, posed the question, “Is polygamy sin?”⁵ Despite heavy deliberations during the conference, no resolution was agreed upon.

Because of this lack of consensus and policy, some local churches of the Church of the Nazarene are said to be dealing with the issue differently from others in the same country or even on the same district. Some local churches are baptizing polygamists, receiving them into full membership, allowing them to partake of the Lord’s Supper and even appointing them to positions of leadership, while in other churches or districts of the Church of the Nazarene, polygamists are not allowed to be baptized, nor be received into full membership, nor allowed to partake of the Lord’s Supper, nor allowed to hold any leadership position. Pastors and other church leaders are handling the issue according to their own understanding or back-ground because of the lack of a guiding policy and serious theological reflection which ought to inform such policy. Pastors sometimes find themselves in situations that cause them to handle the issue differently. Sometimes the pastor may discover that the polygamists in his/her local church are faithful in tithing and active in various church activities. The pastor is therefore agrees to include these faithful givers and most active members who happen to be polygamists into his church board and then recommend the same polygamists to the district for leadership.

In view of the diversity of ways polygamists are being treated in the Church of the Nazarene in Africa and in particular on the Africa Central Field, this paper seeks to contribute to the discovery of a workable solution to the problem. In order to accomplish this task, this research will outline the traditional African perspective on marriage and polygamy. It will then survey briefly what the Bible has to say about polygamy. Then the paper will highlight the results of an extensive field survey that was undertaken in 2008 which revealed what the people of the Africa Central Field of the Nazarene actually think about the issue of polygamy. Once all of this is complete, we will be in a position to make concrete recommendations to the leadership of the Church of the Nazarene in Africa regarding the treatment of polygamy and polygamists and their families.

MARRIAGE AND POLYGAMY IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

While it is dangerous to generalize about a continent as diverse as Africa, marriage in most African societies is regarded as a very important thing to do.⁶ When a man or woman reaches a certain age (this of course varies from place to place) he or she is expected to be married. In African perspective marriage is the focus of existence in one’s lifetime. Africans regard marriage to be so important and of so great a value that if a

⁵Caleb, Mathebula, “Is Polygamy Sin”, *Africa Speaks, An Anthology of the Africa Nazarene Theology Conference 2003*, Linda Braaten, ed. (Florida: Africa Nazarene Publications, 2004), 66.

⁶See Sahaya G. Selven, “Preparing Young People for Marriage in Africa”, in *Marriage and Family in African Christianity*, ed. Andres A. Kyomo and Sahaya G. Selvan (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2004), 219.

person fails to get married under normal circumstances it means he or she will face a lot of criticism and rejection from the community. He or she may be considered a young child though he or might be in his or her forties or fifties. He or she might not be invited to attend or participate in certain cultural rituals or ceremonies in that community. Marriage therefore is regarded as a duty and requirement for every normal human being as a member of the society.

It is believed in many African communities and societies that from the beginning of human life, that God commanded or taught people to get married and bear children. Prominent African scholar, John Mbiti writes,

Marriage is therefore looked upon as a sacred duty, which every normal human being must perform. Failure to do so means in effect stopping of life through the individual, and hence diminishing of human kind upon the earth. Anything that deliberately goes towards the destruction or obstruction of human life is regarded as wicked and evil. Therefore anybody who, under normal conditions, refuses to get married, is committing a major offence in the eyes of society and people will be against him.⁷

In most African societies everything possible is done to make sure that those who reach the age of marriage are encouraged to get married. Parents and relatives of unmarried young men and young women of marrying age are the ones who get more concerned and worried if their son or daughter has not broken news to them that he has found someone to share life with. They even go to the extent of investigating in order to find out whether their son is capable of having sexual intercourse with a lady.

Mbiti gives a brief list of reasons why marriage is so important in African society:

- **The obligation to bear children:** marriage fulfills the obligation, the duty and the custom that every normal person should get married and bear children.
- **A uniting link in the rhythm of life:** marriage is a uniting link in the rhythm of life. All generations are bound together in the act of marriage – past, present and future generations.
- **The building of a family:** the supreme purpose of marriage according to African people is to bear children, to build a family, to extend life, and to hand down the living touch of human existence.
- **Remembrance of parents after death:** Through marriage and childbearing, their children remember the parents when they die.
- **Giving a status in society:** Marriage puts the individual and his family on the social, religious and physical map of his community. Everyone recognizes that the individual is a full person when he or she is married and has children.

⁷John Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 200), 104.

- **The status of women in the Society.** The literate among them find that male and female roles are too far separated from each other. Men rule and women are subjected to a man's world full of violence.
- **The status of unmarried women in society.** "Marriage is an important affair and focus of existence, the point where the dead, the living and those yet to be born meet. He or she who does not participate in it is a curse to the community, he or she is a rebel and a law breaker, he or she is not only abnormal but under-human."⁸ So important is marriage, according to Mbiti, "that not to marry is to interrupt the sequence of life and is looked as failure towards society."⁹

Different societies within Africa have different ways of dealing with the unmarried person. Haselbarth wrote that, "Among the Batoro, for example, if a person of marrying age dies without getting married, people beat up his or her body with a thorn bush to show that an unmarried person does not receive respect from the community. A similar practice among the Swazi is to push a maize [corn] comb in his or her anus before burial."¹⁰ There are many other cultural practices which show that remaining single is totally discouraged and regarded as a failure to fulfill one's social, biological and cultural obligations.

In some African societies the state of an unmarried woman is very much crucial. Among the Konkomba people it is taboo for an unmarried woman to eat meat. Gaskin said that the reason behind this is, "...that the women will become thieves because they will crave after more and more meat, as meat is so expensive they will need to steal in order to supply their craving."¹¹ However, it would appear that the real reason for this taboo is to culturally pressure women to go into marriage for then they are free to eat meat, which is a symbol of status in society.

One can easily see from all of this that there is immense pressure on women to marry. The status of the unmarried, especially women, in most African societies was and still is in some, not good at all. This is why some women end up getting married to someone who is already married to one or more wives. The society, in some cases even ones' own parents, become so hostile to the unmarried person. What should a young unmarried lady do in such a hostile environment about her unmarried status? Many feel there is no choice but to get married, even if it means getting married to a polygamist.

Beyond the importance of marriage itself, there are other reasons given why polygamy has been practiced. Some of these have more validity than others. Some are little more than flimsy excuses perpetuated by those wishing to practice polygamy. We shall only list them here, saving critique of some of them for later:

- A man's wealth is measured by the number of his wives.

⁸ Mbiti, 98.

⁹ Ibid., 98.

¹⁰ Hans, Haselbarth, *Christian Ethics in the African Context* (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1994), 80.

¹¹ Ross Gaskin, "Conserving Culture with Biblical Integrity" *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 11.2 (1992), 114.

- Due to war and general reckless behavior, the mortality rate among men was/is believed to be higher, creating an oversupply of women as compared to men.
- In many African cultures, it is taboo to have sexual intercourse with a pregnant woman or a woman that is nursing a child. This functioned as a form of family planning, spacing the children out. However, this meant that the husband might have to wait years to have intercourse with his wife after conceiving a child. This made polygamy seem a better alternative than marital unfaithfulness.
- The status and social influence one gains in society from having many wives is great.
- Polygamy ensures your name will live on in the memories of your many children.
- Large families are an asset in agrarian and pastoralist societies.
- With high rates of child mortality, having many wives with many births ensured that there would be children there to care for one in old age.
- Childlessness is in many traditional families a sufficient warrant for polygamy. Marriages in some cultures are not considered to be “official” until the birth of the first child and when that does not take place, there is great pressure for the husband to take another wife. (Of course, this assumes that the problem resulting in the inability to conceive lies within the woman, and not the man!)

For all of these reasons and others, polygamy was and is practiced in most African cultures.¹² It is deeply engrained into African culture and worldview and to this day, Christianity and the encroachment of Western culture have not eradicated it. The fact that polygamy is still practiced in many African countries where the population is overwhelmingly Christian is not simply a testimony to how shallowly the practice of Christianity has penetrated those societies, but how deeply polygamy has.

POLYGAMY IN THE BIBLE

Before anyone can assume to give counsel to Christians on how to deal with polygamy, he/she must first consult the primary source of authority for Christians on any matter, polygamy or otherwise: the Bible. For many Western Christians it may seem like an “open and shut” case against polygamy and, in fact, when Christian missionaries from the Western nations came to Africa over a century ago they too felt that it was all too obvious that God opposed polygamy. But when they turned to the Bible to support their case, they found the scriptures were less than unambiguous.

¹² For lists of reason for the practice of polygamy in the African contexts, see Haslebarth, 73-74; Wilbur O’Donovan, *Biblical Christianity in African Perspective* (Nairobi: Paternoster Press, 1996), 288-89, Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Hippo Books of Zondervan Publishing House, 2008), 224.

OLD TESTAMENT

Scriptural evidence shows that polygamy, though it was not extremely common, was not unusual among the ancient Israelites, and certainly not prohibited or discouraged at all. Hebrew Scriptures record numerous references to polygamists, which include prominent figures with no or few remarks on their polygamy status, as though it were a “non-issue”. The first books of the Old Testament, known as Torah, place a few specific restrictions or regulations on the practice of polygamy such as Exodus 21:10-11 which states that, “if a man marries another woman, he must not deprive the first one her food, clothing and marital rights. If he does not provide her with these three things she is to go free, without any payment of money.” Deuteronomy 21:15-17 also states that,

If a man has two wives, but he loves one and not the other, and both bear him sons, but the first born is the son of the wife he does not love, when he wills his property to his sons, he must not give the rights of the firstborn son to the son of the wife he loves in preference to his actual firstborn, the son of the wife he does not love. He must acknowledge the son of his unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double share of all he has. That son is the first sign of his father’s strength. The rights of the firstborn belong to him.

Again Deuteronomy 17:17b gives another restriction on the kings, when it states that, “He (king) must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray.” However, Solomon seemed to have conveniently set this admonition aside in his excessive acquisition of wives and concubines. And no doubt he had difficulties in meeting the sexual needs for each of his seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines!

The point in this review of the relevant Old Testament texts is that there is no direct prohibition of polygamy in the Old Testament. In fact, and to make matters more difficult, many of the most highly regarded figures of the Old Testament were polygamists: Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, Solomon, etc. These persons practiced polygamy and the scriptures call them “righteous”. Polygamists in Africa are very quick to point this out. On this basis, should the Church welcome the polygamist with open arms? Is this all the Scriptures have to say about polygamy?

In order to develop a more nuanced understanding of what the Bible actually “says” about polygamy, one must dig a bit deeper to see how polygamy actually is portrayed in the lives of the biblical characters who practiced it and why it was practiced by them. This will help us to understand the role polygamy plays in the Old Testament narrative of salvation. Very briefly, the following are some of the main reasons biblical characters practiced polygamy.

TWO KEY REASONS FOR POLYGAMY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

CHILDLESSNESS: One of the reasons why some men married several wives was due to childlessness. Just as in African culture, childbearing was considered to be very important. Anyone without a child was considered to some extent not favored by God. Abraham’s entry into polygamy was actually because of his wife’s desire for a child. Another example of childlessness as a factor in polygamy is that of Jacob (though Jacob had already been a polygamist before this incident happened), when Rachel who had no children convinced him to sleep with her maidservant so that she could bear children (Genesis 30:3-5). Hannah suffered the scorn of Elkanah’s

second wife, Peninah and the anguish of her own childlessness, until God heard her prayers and answered with a son (1 Samuel 1ff).

POLITICAL POWER AND WEALTH: “Monarchs also practiced polygamy, primarily as a means of making alliances with powerful families and other nations. In such situations the wives might end up as hostages if political relations soured.”¹³ This is another reason we see in the Old Testament why some men opted for polygamy. King Solomon is probably the best example of this rationale for polygamy. According to 1 Kings 11:3, he took seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, many of whom were the result of arranged marriages as a route to international alliances and political power.

THE ROLE OF POLYGAMY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT NARRATIVE OF SALVATION

POLYGAMY AS A DEVIATION FROM GOD’S IDEAL FOR MARRIAGE:

Genesis 1 and 2 paint a picture of paradise—God’s ideal world. Included in those chapters is God’s ideal for marriage: one man cleaving to one woman and becoming one flesh. It is admittedly an argument from silence, but it should be noted that there is no mention here of the possibility of other spouses either for the man or woman. All cultural adaptations of marriage must be judged against this standard. In the words of Alex R. G. Deasley,

Marriage as God intended it to be and created it to be is thus a union of two like persons who, in covenantal commitment, find oneness in a partnership that engages their whole beings. Because they become one flesh, marriage is monogamous. Because it is a covenantal relationship divinely ordained, it is permanent and life-long. Nor does the ideal change with the Fall. As we have seen, Gen. 2:24 is written to explain not only the marriage of the first pair but also all marriages since then; and the saying makes clear that the first marriage is the pattern and design for all marriages after it.¹⁴

The exclusiveness of this covenant love between a man and a woman is highlighted in the bible by the numerous passages that use marriage as a metaphor for God’s love for Israel.¹⁵ Just as God’s love is a jealous and exclusive love that will allow Israel no other suitors, so the love of a man and woman in marriage is to be exclusive.¹⁶

¹³Ibid., 3.

¹⁴Alex R. G. Deasley, *Marriage & Divorce in the Bible and the Church* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2000), 20.

¹⁵For example, Ezekiel 16:8; the whole book of Hosea is based on this metaphor.

¹⁶Deasley, 21-23. It should be noted in defense of polygamy that the Old Testament does distinguish between adultery and polygamy. Adultery is clearly condemned. Polygamy is not. Still, it is impossible to conceive how a polygamous marriage could have been a model of Israel’s relation to God. Israel was to have no other gods. The image of God’s relationship with Israel was clearly a monogamous one. Some might argue that while Israel, the female in this analogy, was not permitted to be polygamist, God, as the male, was. But the Old Testament argues that Israel, among all the nations was God’s ONLY chosen people. While God wanted to

Genesis 3 portrays the fall of humanity into sin and the curses that come to humanity as a result of it. One of those curses is the domination of men over women. While there are many examples of polygamous families living together in perfect harmony and there instances in which polygamy is entered into with a view to addressing the real hardships of unmarried women, polygamy (more specifically, polygyny), as an institution, is a manifestation of this male domination of women. In a multitude of ways, the actual practice of polygamy in the African context often bears this out (e.g., patrilineal rather than matrilineal family ties, bride price, wife inheritance, lack of property rights for women, women being viewed as little more than pieces of property that demonstrate the wealth of the husband). The very fact that it would be unthinkable in most African societies for the roles to be reversed and for a woman to have multiple husbands demonstrates the essential inequality that polygyny as an institution perpetuates.

The idea that polygamy represents a deviation from God’s ideal of monogamy is perhaps hinted at in the very next chapter of the scriptures, Genesis 4, where we find the first polygamist, Lamech, a descendant of Cain following in his footsteps and killing someone. While one must be cautious here, the association of polygamy with the line of Cain, rather than the line of Seth is noteworthy. As Richard Taylor writes, “Perhaps it is significant that the first mention of polygamy in the Bible occurs in connection with one of the descendants of Cain (Gen.4:19), the implication being that the departure from the monogamous standard set in creation occurred in the lineage of one who had gone away from the presence of the Lord.”¹⁷

It is evident from the biblical record that polygamy often brought strife into those families which practiced it. In the case of Abraham, Sarah’s giving of her maidservant, Hagar, to Abraham to bear children for him led to an unbearable situation in the family. Hagar became arrogant and Sarah became so jealous that she forced Hagar and her child Ishmael to leave for the second time and that led to the separation between Abraham and his son Ishmael.

In the case of Jacob there was great strife between his two wives, Rachael and Leah and their maidservants, even though Rachael and Leah were sisters. The problem spilled over into the next generation and eventually contributed to Joseph being sold by his step-brothers. Hannah experienced conflict with her co-wife, Peninnah. There were all kinds of problems in David’s household between the children of his various wives, including rape, multiple murders, and attempted coups against David, and succession struggles.

While it is true that monogamous marriages are also subject to the curse of sin and that monogamy is no guarantee of marital happiness, these biblical examples of strife within polygamous marriages seem to be more than just statements of fact unrelated to the polygamy itself and the examples of polygamy seem to be more than just statements of fact unrelated to the main theological message of biblical writers. Why is it that almost

use Israel to be a blessing to all nations, God’s relationship with Israel was unique and exclusive. Any attempts to cast Israel as the “first wife” of God, with the Church or the gentile community as a “second wife” fail to understand the exclusive nature of God’s covenant with Israel and fail to understand the Church as the “new Israel”.

¹⁷Richard Taylor, ed., *Beacon Dictionary of Theology*, (Missouri: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1983), 405.

without fail, whenever polygamous marriages are mentioned in the scriptures, there are problems? While reminding ourselves that there is no out-right condemnation of polygamy in any of these texts, the implicit message in them seems to be that polygamy is not what God intended for marriage and whenever we deviate from that ideal, we can expect trouble.¹⁸

POLYGAMY AS A SYMBOL OF COVENANT UNFAITHFULNESS:

The Scriptures record that when Abraham and Sarah were growing old, they became fearful that God's promises would not come true as they had hoped. And so they essentially took matters into their own hands, concocting the idea that perhaps they could "help" God's plan along by giving Hagar to Abraham. This is clearly portrayed as an act of covenantal unfaithfulness. They did not trust God to deliver on his promises. Consequently, Abraham's polygamy cannot be understood as part of what was "credited to him as righteousness" (Romans 4:4) because it was not his faith, but his un-faith that led him to practice it.

The same is true with regard to Solomon. The Bible is equally clear that Solomon's many wives and concubines were a key part of what led to his downfall.

King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter...They were from nations about which the Lord had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods." Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines (1 Kings 11:1-3).

Specifically, those marriages that were arranged to promote political alliances were condemned as acts of unfaithfulness to God. (See 1 Kings 11:1-13, c.f. Deut. 17:17.) On balance, neither can Solomon's polygamy be held up as an example of faithful obedience to God.¹⁹

In general, it needs to be said that God was not happy with the kings of Israel who put their trust in powerful family alliances and other nations. These kings forgot the mighty power of the God of Israel. The God who brought them out of the land of Egypt where they were made to suffer is the one whom they should have trusted and not the foreign kings. The fact that the kings of Israel and Judah made political alliances with other nations through the use of polygamy demonstrated that they did not trust God to protect and build their nation.

It is important that we do not place too much weight on these arguments. We are not saying that all who enter into polygamous marriages are lacking in faith, though that may be the case for many (especially single women or widows who want the security of a male-led family). We are saying that the polygamy of some of

¹⁸ This truth is amply demonstrated in many African polygamous marriages where problems between the wives and their children are frequent.

¹⁹ It may be argued by defenders of polygamy that it in Solomon's case, the problem was polygamy, but rather it was the foreign wives and foreign gods who came with those wives. If Solomon had married only Israelite wives, God would have had no problem with that, the argument goes. While that may be true, the point here is that many defenders of polygamy who want to use the Bible to support the practice of polygamy will use Solomon as their prime example: "If Solomon can have 1000 wives and concubines, why can't I have two or three?" The bottom line is that Solomon's example is a poor one for polygamists to cite because of what his polygamy did to him and his reign.

these biblical heroes was part of what demonstrated their humanness and susceptibility to sin and not what demonstrated their faithfulness to God. In no way can their polygamy be understood as part of their spiritual or moral legacy for us to emulate.

MARRIAGE AND POLYGAMY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The issue of polygamy in the New Testament is not recorded as much as it is recorded in the Old Testament. No name of an individual is mentioned as being a polygamist. However, the New Testament is not silent on the issue of polygamy.

There is nothing in the record of the teaching of Jesus Christ and of his apostles to indicate that they gave to marriage any new social content, custom or sanction. They simply accepted it as it existed in the conventionalized civilization of the Jews. Beyond this, Jesus usually used figures drawn from marriage to illustrate his teaching about the coming of the kingdom, as Paul did concerning Christ and the church.

Regarding what attitude Jesus may have had toward polygamy, it is clear that Jesus validates the very Genesis passage that we have used as a basis for insisting that monogamy was God's intention for marriage as instituted in creation: "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one." (Matthew 19:4-6a.). James Orr summarizes well what must have been the position of Jesus:

On polygamy Jesus Christ did not directly forbid it nor even relent to the subject. No case of polygamy among the Jews is presented in the Gospel narratives and when a wife is mentioned, it is stated or implied in the account that she was the only wife. The only special social problem at that time was the facility of divorce, men putting away their wives for any often-trivial case. Jesus Christ when the Pharisees asked him (Matthew 19:3-9), whether it was lawful for a man to put away his wife for every case, he replied that, God at the beginning made them male and female, thus indirectly condemning polygamy as contrary to the original institute of marriage; with a male and a female only, polygamy is impossible.²⁰

The analogy of divorce and remarriage to polygamy must not be missed. On the one hand, African polygamists are quick to point out in Western nations where the divorce and remarriage rate is so high that this is simply another form of polygamy, called, "serial polygamy" where a person has multiple spouses, but only one at a time. Africans are rightly offended when Westerners condemn Africans for the practice of polygamy, when many Westerners go through as many spouses as African polygamists do. Africans feel like reminding the Westerners to take the log out of their own eyes before lecturing others about the speck in theirs.

²⁰Ibid.

But the analogy with divorce and remarriage is a sword that cuts both ways. In this passage, Jesus goes on to say about divorce that, “Moses granted it because of the hardness of their hearts.”²¹ Divorce and remarriage were never what God wanted or intended for marriage. At best, they are concessions to the reality of a sinful, fallen world.

In the same way it can be argued that the practice of polygamy existed by permission, not by command. It was allowed because of the “hardness of humanity’s heart”, but it was not God’s intention or design. Just as Jesus did not endorse the general practice of divorce, Jesus would likely not have endorsed the general practice of polygamy for the same reasons. But he did categorically endorse the monogamous and permanent marriage described in Genesis 1 and 2.

This principle of distinguishing between what God has commanded and what God has permitted is helpful in understanding the practice of levirate marriage commanded by God in the Old Testament (Deut. 25:5-10). Levirate marriage was the practice of a widow being given in marriage to her deceased husband’s next of kin (most often a brother) for the purpose of propagating the deceased husband’s family line and the maintenance of property rights.²² In the words of Kunhiyop, the text “...makes it clear that anyone who refused to impregnate his brother’s widow and raise up children for his brother would be perpetrating a grave social injustice and would incur a stigma and a severe penalty...”²³ We must assume that in many instances the brother of the deceased was already married. This naturally led to a kind of divinely commanded polygamy. Two examples of levirate marriage in the Bible are those of Tamar (Gen. 38:6-30 and Ruth (Ruth 2-4). The relevance of distinguishing the difference between what God’s ideal and design are versus the realities of what a sinful and fallen world sometimes create is that in some cases polygamy may be the result of an honest attempt to do what is right by a widow in a particular culture. In such cases, polygamy is still not God’s ideal for marriage and one must question the culture in which a woman must remain in the family of her deceased husband rather than remarry outside that household. To be sure, polygamy as an institution perpetuates the inequality of men and women. But we are making here still remains: polygamy in some rare instances may be an attempt to mitigate an even greater evil. This should caution us about “painting all polygamists with the same brush”.

“The teaching of Paul about marriage as a symbol or analogue of the mystical union of Christ and his church (Ephesians 5:22-33), has had a profound effect on Christian thought, elevating and purifying the conception of marriage.”²⁴ Marriage for Christians according to Paul is something more than an ordinary social institution; it is, above everything else, a man and woman becoming no longer two but one. The biblical model for marriage presented here by Paul applies to all marriages across all cultures and ages. “If wives are to model their behavior on the relationship between the Church and Christ, the husbands are to model their behavior on

²¹Ibid.

²² This same tradition of levirate marriage (or wife inheritance) is practiced in many cultures of Africa today and is in fact one of the many reasons given to justify the practice of polygamy.

²³ Kunhiyop, 231.

²⁴ James Hastings ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*. Vol. viii., (New York: Charles Scriber’s and Sons, 1921), 434.

the way Christ loved the church and demonstrated his love by dying for it on the cross. Such divine love goes far beyond sexual love or even friendship love. It sacrifices itself for the one it loves.”²⁵

Now the kind of love that Christ has shown to the church is only possible in a monogamous marriage. Christ had only one bride, so he was able to give himself up for it. He cherished and cared for it. And finally he died for it. In the same way, this kind of whole-hearted, exclusive commitment is possible only for a one-man one-woman relationship. It would be difficult if not impossible for one man to love all his wives the way Christ loved the church. For which one would he sacrifice himself? He may love one and despise the other. Clearly monogamy is the ideal that Paul used in this analogy. Jesus has only one bride (the church) and so should we, humans, have only one bride or spouse.

In 1 Timothy the criteria for those who would be overseers are given and it says, “Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife.” (1 Timothy 3:2b). People interpret this verse differently. Some use this verse to teach against polygamy. They reason that all the conditions that Paul set for the overseers are also for all the Christians. Others, on the other hand, say that only overseers or leaders in the church were prohibited from polygamy according to the text, implying that “regular members” could practice polygamy and still be in good standing. It does appear that the text in question was specifically referring to overseers not any other members in the church. It indicates that there were likely some polygamists in the congregation because if there were no polygamists in it then it is unlikely that it would have been put as a condition for electing or choosing overseers and deacons. It was a condition that Paul set for the church that no leader should be a polygamist. However, this text should not be taken as permission for polygamy in the church. Paul was not promoting polygamy at all; what he was doing here was setting up some qualifications for leaders in the church. Once again, it seems that we are seeing another example of how God is revealing to us what his ideal is for the Christian life.

SUMMARY OF POLYGAMY IN THE BIBLE

From this brief survey of the Bible, it is evident that polygamy was never part of God’s original plan for humanity. Monogamy has always been God’s intention for human marriage as demonstrated in the Creation story, as validated by Jesus in his own teaching and as illustrated in Christ’s love for his one bride, the church. Polygamy represents a deviation from that divine will in the same way that divorce does.

SUMMARY OF FIELD RESEARCH

In 2008, an extensive field research was undertaken on the Africa Central Field (Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe) of the Church of the Nazarene, the purpose of which was to ascertain the views of the church on the issue of polygamy and to search for a way forward. Pastors, district superintendents, missionaries, and local

²⁵ Barnabe Assohoto, and Samuel Ngewa.,”Genesis” *The Africa Bible Commentary*, Tokunboh Adeyemo, Gen. Ed. (Nairobi: World Alive Publishers, 2006), 1436.

church members were surveyed for this research. 543 persons in total. The following is a brief summary of those results coupled with further reasoning grounded in scripture.²⁶

1. Salvation for the Polygamists

Can the polygamist be saved? This is a very crucial issue. If the polygamist, so long as he is still keeping his several wives cannot be saved, then all that the church may do to accommodate him is meaningless and of no purpose. But if the polygamist who repents can be saved, then the church should do everything possible to reach him with the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, so that he too can receive salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. However, by looking at the figures of the field research and also how the Bible dealt with the polygamists in Old Testament, one is left with no answer but to believe that a polygamist who has genuinely repented and has given himself and his life to the Lord Jesus can be saved. The field research indicated that a high percentage (78%) of the respondents to this question said that a polygamist can be saved. Again the Bible has not indicated any sign that may show that a polygamist cannot be saved. The Bible actually lists some of the polygamists on the list of heroes of faith. (Hebrews 11:1-40).

2. Belief in Jesus Christ

The Bible in John 3:16-18 declares that,

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him. Whosoever, believes in him is not condemned, but whoever, does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one only Son.

This scripture is inclusive ("whoever") and should be understood to include polygamists who do what this scripture says. The Bible again states that we are saved by the grace of God and not by our own acts of righteousness. Romans 3:21-26 states the following,

But now a righteous from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished- he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies the man who has faith in Jesus.

²⁶ Joe Lilema, "An Evaluation of Polygamy Policy in the Church of the Nazarene in Africa: Africa Central Field Case Study", (Master of Arts in Religion Thesis, Africa Nazarene University, 2009).

This scripture shows that we are all saved by faith in Jesus Christ. It is through Christ that we are all made righteous and justified. This scripture makes it clear that there is no difference regardless of our marital status, because all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. And all have been justified freely by the grace of God. Does this not include polygamists? If a polygamist gives his life and surrenders to Jesus Christ, can't he be justified by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ? Can't his sins be forgiven and be cleansed by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ? The answer to the above questions is "yes", a polygamist who genuinely repent from his sins and believes by faith that Jesus is Lord will be saved. If a polygamist genuinely trusts in the atoning work of Jesus Christ the only Son of God, he will be saved. Supporting this, 59% of the laity, 92% of the pastors, 63% of the district superintendents, 98% of teachers and students and 75% of the missionaries surveyed said that "polygamists can be saved while remaining polygamists." The church seems to be in general agreement on this issue. However, the relatively large portion of laity (41%) and district superintendents (37%) who say that polygamists cannot be saved is still enough to bring chaos and disunity to a church and/or a district. Hence the need for a policy guidance.

3. Should Polygamists be Accepted in the Church?

This is a question, which cannot be answered by a simple "yes" or "no" answer. This question needs some explanation and discussion. In particular, there is a serious question as to whether polygamists should be allowed to participate in the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper and also whether polygamists should be received into full membership of the church.

The approach which the early missionaries to Africa took was that a polygamist should not be baptized, nor participate in the Lord's Supper, nor be received into full membership of the church. However, through the years the stand has softened with some churches accepting polygamists as full members, baptizing them and even allowing them to participate in the Lord's Supper. Let us look at each of these three areas in an effort to determine to what extent polygamists should be accepted in the church: baptism, Lord's Supper and Membership.

Baptism

Baptism of polygamists is a crucial issue in the church. It should be borne in mind that the Lord's Supper and Baptism are sacraments, which are known as means of grace. They are known as means of grace because they are primary vehicles through which God gives His spiritual blessings upon His people. Because of the meaning and the purpose of the Lord's Supper and the Baptism, everyone who has accepted the Lord Jesus Christ is free to participate in them. Regarding Baptism, the *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene paragraph 16 says,

We believe that Christian baptism, commanded by our Lord, is a sacrament signifying acceptance of the benefits of the atonement of Jesus Christ, to be administered to believers and declarative of their faith in Jesus Christ, as their Savior, and full purpose of obedience in holiness and righteousness. Baptism being a symbol of the new covenant,

young children may be baptized, upon request of parents or guardians who shall give assurance for them of necessary Christian training.²⁷

This quote clearly shows that anyone who confesses Jesus Christ as Lord should be baptized. If a polygamist has genuinely accepted and has faith in Jesus Christ he should not be denied the right to baptism. The quote further states that baptism is a symbol of the new covenant and it signifies one's acceptance and faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. A polygamist who has shown commitment to the Lord Jesus and has a change and growth in his relationship with Christ should be baptized, so that his faith may be strengthened and become more and more like his Lord Jesus Christ. The field research revealed that 65% of the laity, 79% of the pastors, 60% of the district superintendents, 81% of the teachers and students, 75% of the missionaries surveyed think that polygamists can be baptized. This is a considerable basis for unity within the church but as with the previous issue, the large number of lay persons (35%) who believe that polygamists should not be baptized is problematic for the church.

The Lord's Supper

As in the case of baptism, whether polygamists should be allowed to partake of the Lord's Supper or not is also a very crucial issue in the church. The field research has shown a sharp difference of opinion on the matter. For example the missionaries are divided with 50% in favor and another 50% against. The district superintendents had 54.6% against while 45.4% in favor. The split among pastors was 65% in favor and 35% against. This indicates that there is a big problem in the church about how polygamists should be handled. This calls for a clear solution on how to deal with polygamists.

How should the beliefs of the Church of the Nazarene about the Lord's Supper influence its thinking on this issue? In addition to the argument above that since Baptism and the Lord's Supper are sacraments, their nature as sacraments implies that they belong to all who have trusted in Christ for their salvation, the *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene says,

We believe that Memorial and Communion Supper instituted by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is essentially a New Testament, declarative of His sacrificial death, through the merits of which believers have life and salvation and promise of all spiritual blessings in Christ. It is distinctively for those who are prepared for reverent appreciation of its significance, and by it they show forth the Lord's death till He comes again. It being the Communion feast, only those who have faith in Christ and love for the saints should be called to participate therein.²⁸

This quote from the *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene clearly explains that the Lord's Supper is for those who have faith in Jesus Christ. In it, we see no prohibition against persons with "pre-existing conditions"

²⁷Church of the Nazarene, *Manual*, (Missouri: Kansas City, 2005-2009), 36.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

like polygamy.²⁹ If a polygamist has faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and has shown it in his life, he should not be denied the right to participate in the Lord's Supper.

Church Membership and Leadership

On membership, the field research has shown that a high percentage of the respondents have said that a polygamist should not be accepted as full member of the Church but he should only be an associate member.³⁰ The respondents probably based their opinions on the ground that a full member of the church should have all the rights and benefits of the church without discrimination, and that may create a problem when it comes to leadership roles in the Church.

On the question of whether polygamists should be allowed to have leadership positions in the church, 68% of those surveyed agreed that polygamists should not be given such positions.³¹ On this point the church seems to seeking to align its practice with the scriptures in 1 Timothy and Titus which, as we have seen, clearly teach against giving positions of leadership to those are not "the husband of one wife". These scriptures should be enough to convince the polygamist that he cannot have key leadership roles in church. It is often a matter of debate as to which key leadership roles are "off-limits" to the polygamist. Most will agree that polygamists cannot serve as ordained clergy, but what about situations where the Jesus Film or some other evangelistic method has been used in a particular village and the people have responded positively, but the key leaders of that community are polygamists? Who will lead the brand new church that should be the natural fruit of that evangelistic endeavor? But despite the general agreement about proscribing polygamists from the clergy, what about other leadership roles in the church? Can a polygamist serve as a board member? A worship leader? A Sunday School teacher? There is little agreement among the Nazarene church in Central Africa on these issues.

Furthermore, many people take the position of being opposed to full membership for polygamists as a means of "gate-keeping" so that polygamists will not qualify for leadership positions in the church. This is convenient but is it biblical? The authors of this research want to argue counter to the position of majority of those surveyed that polygamists should be accepted as full members of the church, especially after they have gone through a membership class and they have shown obedience to Christ. Associate membership functions better as a probationary phase of membership that one may pass through on the way to full membership, rather than as a permanent "second-class" membership in the church. Because of the parallel that has been noted between polygamy and divorce and remarriage, should we also say that those who are divorced and remarried only qualify for associate membership, and not full membership in the church? So long as the polygamist

²⁹ In the United States and elsewhere, pre-existing medical conditions can be the basis for denying someone health insurance. Analogously, polygamy has become in many African churches a spiritual pre-condition that denies them Holy Communion.

³⁰ 81% of the laity, 96% of the pastors, 100% of the district superintendents and 100% of the missionaries opposed full membership privileges for practicing polygamists while 74% of the laity, 75% of pastors, 64% of district superintendents and 100% of missionaries agreed that associate membership could be extended to polygamists. The difference in these two sets of responses is due to the fact that some respondents felt that even associate membership should not be available to polygamists.

³¹ Many of those surveyed who felt that polygamists should be allowed to have leadership positions in the church were the polygamists themselves or family members of polygamists.

accepts the biblically-commanded limitations on their service to the church, there is no reason to fear accepting them into full membership.

4. SUMMARY

From the field research it would seem that there is fairly widespread agreement with the Scriptures on the availability of salvation for the polygamist and his incorporation into the life of the church and that of his family. This provides a promising platform on which to make the recommendations below. It is important to be reminded that polygamy, if it should be called a sin, is a sin no different from any other and should not be treated as though it were. In fact, as we have argued above, it should be seen and treated in the same way as divorce and remarriage. Are persons guilty of divorce able to be saved? Does the grace of God extend to them? Should they be allowed to take the sacraments and be members of the church? Whatever answer we give to these questions should be basically the same answers given in the case of the polygamist. And the Church of the Nazarene has answered those questions with regard to divorce and remarriage.³² It is time to bring its handling of the issue of polygamy into conformity with that. Let us now turn our attention toward the offering of some recommendations to the church in relation to issue of polygamy.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE CHURCH

1. **Teaching and Training:** The church needs to come up with a spiritual formation and transformation program, where the polygamists and their families can be taught about the nature of the Christian family and life. This spiritual formation and transformation class will help the polygamists and their families to know and understand the will of God in their lives and family. The church should identify certain mature families in that local church and assign them the responsibility to mentor the polygamous families. This is consistent with faith or spiritual mentorship. A faith mentor is one who travels with us on our spiritual journey, pointing the way, teaching us life and spiritual skills, modeling the holy life, holding us accountable, providing a caring and trustworthy environment, and helping us discern God's will for our own spiritual vocation or calling.³³ And because many polygamists are persons of status and influence in their communities, this faith mentor must be a highly respected person in the community or the polygamist will find it difficult to think of this person as mentor.

The churches need mentoring and discipling programs like this which would help weak Christians, new converts, and polygamists to grow in Christ. This will help churches to have strong and mature Christians. And after a polygamist and his family have gone through training and teaching about the life of a Christian and if the

³² In 1989 the Church of the Nazarene established a committee to investigate and make recommendations to the Church regarding how to handle the issues of divorce and remarriage which had become so prevalent in western societies. The results of the work of that committee and its recommendations to the General Assembly of the Church in 1993 with some few subsequent changes are summarized in the *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene, paragraph 35.

³³ Wesley Tracy, et al., *The Upward Call: Spiritual Formation and the Holy Life*, (Missouri: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1994), 165.

family shows some sign of commitment to Christ, then they should be baptized and received into full membership of the church.

The church should not impose on the husband the decision to divorce or send away his other wives. As a church we should never be seen to advocate for divorce of the other wife or wives. As the saying goes, “Two wrongs don’t make it right.” The polygamist has made a commitment to his family. In most cases, it is not just the wives who would be impacted by such a decision but the many children of those wives. The converted polygamist, just like the converted divorced and remarried person, now finds himself in a situation the responsibilities of which he cannot run away from. In many cases, sin has consequences that simply must be lived with even after the sin has been forgiven.

As a church we should be careful not to say, “Those who have committed this kind of sin should not be allowed into our church.” If we do that then we have said this is a sin that cannot be forgiven, or this is a sin that is unredeemable. All need pastoral care, whatever their situation or marital status. All people, including polygamists, need Christ, and the only place they can find Christ is in the church. They have to come as they are. In the church, Christ will work on them according to this divine purpose.

2. Policy Document on Polygamy: The research has revealed a very important issue, which needs to be tackled sooner than later. The research revealed that 485 or 94.1% of the respondents said that they do not have a document of the church’s policy about polygamy.³⁴ It is not hard to imagine that this is the key reason which has led to the confusion as to why polygamists are handled differently from one country to another and from one district to another within the same country. The problem is that there is no guiding policy which pastors and other leaders in the church could refer to when dealing with polygamists. This has led to a state where in the words of the Book of Judges “everyone did as he saw fit” in handling polygamists in their respective churches and districts. This therefore calls for a response from the leaders of the Church.

As some of the respondents suggested, a document should be produced that will give guidance about polygamy in the Church of the Nazarene, particularly in Africa. One of the research respondents, Rev. Gary Sidle, said the following:

The church should have a theological discussion on the issue of polygamy and invite participation by a wide variety of people from across the region from all levels of leadership. They should develop a policy that applies to Africa theologically. Among the issues to be clarified are; who is a full member or associate member and clarify how we should accommodate those who were polygamists before their conversion to Christianity. Another responsibility of the same committee should be to develop material to be included in our curriculum and for local churches which would clarify the policy of the church on this important matter.³⁵

³⁴ Lilema, 109.

³⁵ Ibid., 91.

Several others have said that right now the Church of the Nazarene has no clear policy on the issue. Actually on the point of how clear is the Church of the Nazarene policy on polygamy, out of the 518 respondents who responded to the question, 373 or 72% said that the policy of the Church of the Nazarene on polygamy is not clear.³⁶ This is an issue that the church needs to look into so that a clear policy is formulated and be followed by the church particularly in Africa where the issue is so crucial.

3. A Conference to Discuss Polygamy: A high profile theological conference should be organized at a regional level. Participants to this conference should be drawn from all levels of leadership in the church. They should be given the task to formulate and document a policy on polygamy.

The current problem in regard to polygamy cannot of course be blamed on any particular individual or a certain section of the people, but it is our problem as African believers together as a denomination. We need to discuss the issue and come up with something that will guide our church especially in Africa. Those who are receiving and baptizing polygamists or those who are not receiving them in any way cannot be blamed because there was no any clear policy to guide them on how to deal with the polygamists as they came to church. So each group did what was right in their eyes. Again out of 497 respondents who responded to the question about receiving guidance on the issue of polygamy, 382 or 76.8% said they never received any guidance on the issue of polygamy.³⁷ This is a problem which is as a result of the lack of a well-documented policy.

4. A Full Member who Marries a Second Wife. The question arises as to what to do with a professing Christian who is a member of the Church and who then takes a second wife. Such a person, having been taught what the Biblical standard is, is clearly guilty of intentionally falling short of God's standard for marriage. The research revealed that a majority of the respondents believe that such a person should not be expelled or excommunicated, at least not immediately.³⁸ Indeed it would not do the church any good to expel someone from the church because he has married a second wife. However, such a man or a woman who takes a second spouse should not be left without the discipline and counsel of the Church. Such a person should be placed on some form of church discipline.

When we look at the scriptures, especially in the Old Testament, we see that there was a kind of punishment or discipline that was in place to deal with offenders. Faith Lugazia says,

The Jews practiced declaration of *Anathema* in order to purify the community. Anathema, was a declaration/punishment declared to the one who committed sin that according to the law from Pentateuch could not be forgiven. These sins were like those of adultery (Lev. 18:6-20), idolatry (Lev. 19:4) and murder (Lev. 18:21). When one had fallen into these sins one was stoned to death as a way of purifying the society.³⁹

³⁶ Ibid., 110.

³⁷ Ibid., 110.

³⁸ Ibid., 102.

³⁹ Faith Lugazia, *Marriage and Family in African Christianity*, (Nairobi: Acton Publishers 2004), 164.

However, Jesus Christ did not follow the disciplinary example of the Old Testament. He showed a different way of dealing with offenders. When we read in the book of John 8:1-12, we see Jesus' way of dealing with offenders. When the woman caught in adultery was brought he neither punished her nor judged her but he said go and sin no more. Jesus taught a new way of dealing with offenders. He showed in his teaching a heart of forgiveness. However, in the book of Matthew Jesus taught another way of dealing with offenders in the church. In Matthew Jesus says,

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

As can be seen from the scripture, Jesus' way of dealing with offenders is a good example that the church should emulate in dealing with offenders, including professed Christians who take a second wife.

The Church of the Nazarene *Manual* has clearly explained reasons for church discipline. The *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene* in part says,

The objectives of church discipline are to sustain the integrity of the church, to protect the innocent from harm, to protect the effectiveness of the witness of the church, to warn and correct the careless, to bring the guilty to salvation, to rehabilitate the guilty, to restore to effective service those who are rehabilitated, and to protect the reputation and resources of the church. Members of the church who do violence to the Covenant of Christian Character or the Covenant of Christian Conduct, or who willfully and continuously violate their membership vows, should be dealt with kindly yet faithfully, according to the grievousness of their offenses. . . . Thus the purpose of the discipline is not punitive or retributive but is to accomplish these objectives.⁴⁰

The Church *Manual* says that an offender should be dealt with "kindly yet faithfully, according to the grievousness of their offenses". And therefore, in the case of a full member who marries a second wife, he should be dealt with accordingly. The field research indicated that most Nazarenes on the Africa Central Field believe that such a man should not be chased from the church, but he should be disciplined, as a correction to him and also as a warning to others.⁴¹ Such a man should be disciplined by dropping him from full membership of the church and placing him on probation. If he had any leadership role in the church, he should be dropped immediately. He should then be placed in a special class for spiritual formation as discussed above. He may be given back his membership status in the church after showing spiritual maturity and character transformation. But if he shows no sign of repentance or he refuses to accept the church discipline then, as the scriptures indicate such a man can be treated as a pagan and be expelled from church membership.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, as has been observed, the practice of polygamy is a big problem in the Church of the Nazarene in Africa. Polygamists are being treated differently from country to country and district to district.

⁴⁰ *Manual*, 220.

⁴¹ Lilema, 83.

The above stated differences in dealing with the polygamists in the Church of the Nazarene are largely due to lack of a definite policy. The research has showed that pastors and other leaders are handling this issue according to their own understanding because there is no guiding policy or guidelines for them to follow.

The research is therefore recommending that a committee should be formed to look into the issue of formulating a policy on polygamy. This policy will be a guide for all the churches to follow, and it should be included into the curriculum for our colleges. Those who are receiving and baptizing polygamists or those who are not receiving them in any way can hardly be blamed because there has been no clear policy to guide them on how to deal with the polygamists as they came to the church. So each group did what was right in their eyes. Again out of 497 respondents who responded to the question about receiving guidance on the issue of polygamy, 382 or 76.8% said they never received any guidance on the issue of polygamy. This is an issue, which is a result of the lack of a well-documented policy.

The Church of the Nazarene is growing rapidly across Africa and if the issue of how to deal with polygamists is not addressed, this confusion will follow the church wherever it goes.

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