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THE DUPLICATION OF MARRIAGE RITES AMONG GHANAIAN CHRISTIANS: MOTIVATIONS, CHALLENGES, AND THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract

The tenets of Christianity and its practices in Africa have been characterised by a struggle with long-standing traditions and beliefs from the first century until its reintroduction in the fifteenth century. The situation in Ghana, a sub-Saharan African country, is no different, particularly when it comes to marriage and the way Ghanaian Christians duplicate marriage rites. The duplication of marriage rites occurs when Ghanaian Christians who get married using traditional marriage customs undergo a second marriage ceremony, such as a civil marriage or church blessing, to demonstrate that their union is Christian. The purpose of this study was to investigate this trend by determining the motivations for the duplication of marriage rites among Ghanaian Christians and the difficulties they present. This is qualitative research which adopted the phenomenological method and employed in-depth interviews and observations to elicit data from participants in Akim Oda in the Eastern Region of Ghana. The study underscored that some Christians in Ghana repeat marriage ceremonies because they believe that traditional marriage is impure and un-Christian. Some Christians also believe that traditional marriage ceremonies have historically been marked by customs that are at odds with Christian principles and beliefs. The study also emphasised that the duplication of marriage rites in Ghana causes three major problems for Christians and their families: financial constraints, time waste, and energy waste. It was recommended that, instead of additional marriage rites for Ghanaian Christians, there is a need to have one marriage rite to release Christian couples and their families from any undue stresses and strains that conjugal relationships impose on them.

Keywords: *Marriage, Christian Marriage, Customary/Traditional Marriage, Marriage Rites, Marriage Laws, Duplication of Marriage Rites*

1. INTRODUCTION

Christianity in Africa has been the channel for Western civilisation, the origin of good education and health facilities, and a base for raising leaders, not only for the Church but also for economic development in West Africa (Darko, 2001). Yet, it is argued that "the history of the entry and re-entry of Christianity, its values and practices into Africa has been characterised by conflict with the African culture" (Mbiti,1991; Amoo,1946; Lartey, 2001; Wild-Wood, 2019). Sadly, Onyima (2014) suggests that "the consequences have been enormous, resulting in clashes with preexisting traditional beliefs and practices in Africa." The situation in Ghana, a Sub-Saharan African country, is no different, especially when dealing with issues of marriage and how Christians duplicate marriage rites.

Mbiti (1991) succinctly linked "the history of Christianity in Africa to the first century when Apostle Mark was believed to have preached the Gospel in Egypt, and later, Christianity spread all over as far as south of Ethiopia, where the Coptic Church, which began, has survived to date" (Mbiti, 1991). He mentioned that "modern-day Christianity in Africa began in the fifteenth century when European missionaries reintroduced it to the continent" (Mbiti, 1991). Ever since, there has been a major influence of Christianity on African culture and ethos.

In exploring this unfortunate phenomenon of Western influence on African cultural values and norms, Lartey (2001) asserted that "the missionaries and early African church agents were mainly concerned with the transmission of Christianity as it existed in Europe." Their concentration was

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on *training* and *education*, and hence, they placed lots of pastoral emphasis on how to civilise (i.e., Europeanise) and to inculcate Christian (i.e., European Christian) values into the local people and thus, gradually, but uncompromisingly, replaced the African customs and practices with Christian ones" (Lartey,2001). In this sense, as Twene (2019) observed, "many Christian practices, including Christian marriages, were considered Western culture in the minds of most Ghanaians and Christianity was also thought of as an eroding agent of control of African culture, tradition, and beliefs over its people."

Regrettably, most European missionaries and colonisers regarded the African traditional religious beliefs and cultural practices they came to meet as "fetishes and superstitions that had no place in the type of Christianity they brought to the Africans" (Onyima, 2014). In view of that, they used certain deceptive terms such as 'primitive,' 'savage,' 'fetishism,' 'juju,' 'heathenism,' 'paganism,' 'animism,' 'idolatry,' and 'polytheism,' in describing the African people's beliefs (Awolalu,1976). Consequently, they misrepresented the African people and ill-advisedly undermined the ethos and traditions of the African people. It was, therefore, not surprising, as Amoo (1946) puts it, "that conscious attempts were made by some of the missionaries of the European Christian denominations to create a distinct separation between the indigenous converts and their African religio-cultural contexts." There were some "age-old customs and practices which those missionaries and colonisers could no longer follow" (Bartels,2008). Most of the life cycle events and/or rites of passage, such as naming, puberty, marriage, and funeral rites in Africa, and particularly Ghana, faced a lot of criticism by Christian adherents.

Today, the traditional marriage (or the customary marriage) system has changed significantly, and according to Ogoma (2014), many people are quickly forgetting that there was a marital system in Africa, particularly Ghana, before the introduction of Christianity and civilisation. Traditional marriage (customary marriage), according to the Republic of Ghana's Marriages Act1884-1985 CAP 127, refers to a system of "marriage that is conducted in accordance with the customs of the community of either one or both of the parties to the marriage in question." In many traditional marriage ceremonies, some significant changes have occurred consequent to the influx of Christianity in Ghana. One of these is what this current study describes as duplication of marriage rites. This refers to the situation whereby Ghanaian Christians have to go through additional marriage rites, either civil or church blessings, after the customary marriage rites, for their marriages to be accepted as a Christian marriage. In other words, as Quashie (2014) puts it, "people who were married under customary marriage rites are also asked to go through another marriage ceremony through the Ordinance Marriage or *Church blessing*, to show that their marriage is Christian, even though each of the two rites is complete in itself."

Fortunately, many scholarly works exist on Christian marriage. Scholars such as Stott (1999), Mbiti (1977), O'Donovan (1995), and Haselbareth (1976) have discussed marriage, focusing on God's purpose for marriage as an institution and how God wants Christians to fulfil it. Others, such as Amoo (1946), Amanor (2009), Quashie (2014), and Lartey (2001), have discussed the duplication of marriage rites in Ghana to some extent; however, their studies largely focus on how Western missionaries introduced the European form of marriage to African Christians. Studies on the reasons behind the practice and its implications for Christian faith, marital commitment, and the understanding of marriage within the Ghanaian context are a bit sparse. Also, despite its prevalence, the practice may present challenges, including financial burdens, legal uncertainties, family expectations, and differing interpretations of Christian teachings on marriage. This study aims to investigate the reasons Ghanaian Christians duplicate marriage rites and also examine the challenges that are associated with the practice from a Christian perspective.

1.1 Methodology and Methods of Data Collection

The study made use of qualitative data gathered through in-depth, one-on-one interviews, observations, as well as existing literature on Christian marriage in Ghana. Although the study was limited to Ghana, apart from what is happening in other towns as far as the subject matter is concerned, the data for this study were obtained from Akim Oda in the Eastern Region of Ghana. The justification is that the various sample groups for the study were adequately represented in these towns. Furthermore, Akim Oda was considered suitable for this study due to its cultural diversity, the presence of different Christian denominations, the existence of the marriage practices under investigation, and the feasibility of accessing relevant participants.

The categories of people that were purposively selected in this study included pastors, church members, traditional leaders, and community members from Akim Oda. Following the selection process, the participants were interviewed using open-ended interview guides. The duration of each interview was roughly forty (40) minutes. Electronic recorders were used to capture the interviews, which were then transcribed and subjected to a thematic analysis closely related to the study's goals. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, the participants' personal identities were not disclosed. Instead, synonyms such as Research Participant (RP) were used.

1.2 Conceptualising Marriage and Christian Marriage Rites in Ghana

In Africa and elsewhere in the world, the study of marriage and its related issues has engaged the attention of a number of people. This is partly due to the role that marriage, as an institution, plays in the lives of many people. Kyeremanteng (1967) argues that marriage acts as "the springboard to procreation and the family." Marriage, as an institution, is celebrated as a social event in the open and is open to the public. In Ghana, marriage is celebrated with a display of pomp and pageantry that exemplifies its social significance to the Ghanaian people. Yet, the marriage rites that are performed differ from one cultural context to another. It is largely dependent on the ethnic group at stake.

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Owurasah (2015) maintains that "the concept of marriage is a universal phenomenon which occurs in most cultures of the world" and, for that matter, many attempts have been made to define it. These definitions vary according to different cultures. For example, Zarean & Barzegar (2016) define marriage as "the natural vocation of a human being, which enables him/her to achieve peace and tranquillity." From a sociological point of view, "marriage and family formation fulfil many functions, such as reproduction, socialisation, protection, emotional support, and regulation of sexual behaviour" (Zarean & Barzegar, 2016). However, Acheampong (2010) avowed that "marriage as a social and cultural institution is shaped by cultural norms and practices which tend to influence people's attitude towards it." From a religious and cultural perspective, Nukunya (2003) described marriage as "the recognised traditional and religious institution for the establishment and maintenance of family life all over the world." Likewise, Owurasah (2015) upheld that "marriage is an institution which is governed by social, cultural and religious norms and practices." According to her, these norms of practice are "highly culture-specific, as is the case with most customary practices" (Owurasah, 2015).

Owusu-Boateng et al. (2015) suggest that marriage "is usually an institution in which interpersonal relationships, usually intimate and sexual, are acknowledged." They noted that, "in terms of legal recognition, most sovereign states and other jurisdictions limit marriage to two persons of opposite sex or gender in the gender binary, and some of these allow polygamous marriage" (Owusu-Boateng et al.,2015). This is, however, the situation as found in Ghana. Nonetheless, issues of same-sex marriage, which are fighting for recognition and acceptance in Ghana, have attracted lots of debates within the Ghanaian socio-political and religious circles. For example, a bill was presented before the Parliament of Ghana to consider the legalisation or otherwise of homosexuality and other sexually related matters, herein referred to as LGBTQ. Many Ghanaians vehemently spoke against its legalisation due to religious and cultural reasons.

1.2.1 Types of Marriage in Ghana

There are several types of marriage across the globe. These include, but are not limited to, monogamy, polygamy, polyandry, polygyny, group marriage, exogamy and endogamy. The "marriage between two individuals, one male and one female, is known as monogamy, while marrying multiple partners is known as polygamy" (Mondal, n.d.). Monogamy allows one wife to have "one husband till death and only divorce separates them" (Mondal, n.d.). This "form is the most predominant even in societies where other forms exist" (Mondal, n.d.).

McConnel (2001) identified three primary types of polygamy, namely, "polygyny, consecutive polygamy or serial monogamy, and polyandry." McConnel (2001) explained that "polygyny is a form of marriage in which one male is married to more than one female simultaneously." This is chiefly "found in non-Western societies" (McConnel, 2001). There is consanguineous polygamy, which is "the practice of divorce and remarriage, primarily found in the West" (Mondal, n.d.), and lastly, polyandry, which is "a rare practice of a wife having more than one husband" (McConnel, 2001). This is scarcely practised in Ghana. However, wherever polyandry is observed, the co-husbands are usually "brothers, either blood brothers or clan brothers and are of the same generation" (Mondal, n.d.). The most predominant forms of marriage practised in Ghana are monogamy and polygyny.

It is generally avowed that "in Africa, marriage is potentially polygamous" (Phillips, 1953). Phillips (1953) argues that "for African men, monogamy is for the majority who are in fact monogamists, a matter of necessity rather than a choice." Hence, it is contended that "in Africa, polygyny is a socially approved, honoured, and preferential system, and that leading and respected members of the societies are expected to be heads of polygamous households" (Haring,1975). Polygyny has indubitably existed all over Africa as an aspect of culture and/or religion. Haring (1975) argues that this form of marriage has "been more present in the whole history of Africa, like no other continent in the world." Among the plethora of reasons advanced for the occurrence of this phenomenon is the fact that "the African societies have managed to see that children were a form of wealth and this way, a family with more children was considered to be more powerful" (Mbiti,1991). For Mbiti (1991), "in some traditional African societies, a marriage is not considered as such until children are born."

In support of this assertion, Boafo (2007) discloses that, "among the Akan of Ghana, a person qualifies to be an ancestor if he lived a quality life worthy of emulation and also died at a ripe age." Quality life, according to Boafo (2007), consists of "living pure, showing integrity in the society and above all marrying and bearing children to continue the family line." Mbiti (1991) reports that, "many men, not only in Africa but elsewhere, marry other wives if their first wives do not bear children. Many marriages break down if no children are born - although this should not happen, it often does." That notwithstanding, the present study supports the notion that, although polygyny is accepted in African societies, it is not the norm in recent times. As Oduyoye (1995) succinctly surmised, "this formerly prestigious institution of African marriage is beginning to lose its glamour and appeal as changes in society affect the nature and demands of marriage." Certainly, in a typical traditional society in Ghana, polygyny is permissible, but "the preferred option seems to be monogamy" (Oduyoye,1995). This amply suggests that, although polygyny is tolerable in African society, African men have given it a second thought.

1.2.2 Marriage Laws in Ghana

In Ghana, as in other African communities, marriage remains more important, since, according to Kyeremanteng (1967), "the nexus of all social relations is based on the family or their kinship organisations, tenurial rights, political allegiance, and participation in religious observances." Also, statutory intervention "modified various aspects of marriage, and in some cases, statute governs the main features of marriage" (Marriage Act,1884-1985). Marriage in Ghana, however, is contracted according to the customs of the ethnic group of the

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would-be couple. However, a "religious ceremony and a civic registration ceremony are involved" (Marriage Act,1884-1985).

Generally, like most African countries, Ghana has a multiplicity of legal systems (Pospisil,1974). In this regard, customary law, statute and the constitution govern marriage in Ghana (Pospisil,1974). The laws of Ghana recognise three (3) types of marriage, namely, Customary Law Marriage, Marriage of Mohammedans, and Marriage under the Ordinance (Marriage Act,1884-1985). Out of the three types of marriages, only Marriage under the Ordinance is strictly monogamous. The other two are potentially polygamous. Unfortunately, although Customary Marriage is a full-fledged marriage, many people describe it as an 'Engagement' in Ghana. Technically, engagement is a formal agreement that a man and woman "are serious about pursuing the lifelong commitment of marriage and that, though they are not yet fully committed to marrying one another, they are escalating their intimacy to ensure that they can be suitable for one another" (Challis, n.d.). Engagement is "a cultural, not a biblical, construct" (Challis, n.d.). It varies significantly from one culture to another. Some suitors present their partners with engagement rings as a prelude to the wedding ceremony to express their commitment to the marriage (Challis, n.d.).

The laws that regulate marriages in Ghana are the Marriage Act, 1884-1985 (also referred to as CAP 127). This is a relatively new title which came into effect on 31st December, 2004. It stands as one of the significant results of the Laws of Ghana (Revised Edition), Act 562, 1998. Moreover, Act 562 led to the setting up of the Law Review Commission, which was "chaired by His Lordship, Mr. Justice V.C.R.A.C. Crabbe." Another notable fallout of the revision is the new title given to the ordinance marriage. Until 2004, even though Christians formed the majority of those who married under the ordinance, it was nowhere explicitly stated that it was Christian marriage. The Crabbe Commission offered to rename marriage under the ordinance, "Christian and other marriages." The Justice Crabbe Commission consolidated all the laws of marriage and titled it the Marriages Act, 1884-1985.

Thus, until 2004, three separate laws governed marriages in Ghana, namely CAP 126-Customary Marriages, CAP 127 - Marriage under the Ordinance, and CAP 129 - Marriage of Muhammedans. The three laws are now merely distinct parts of one law, the Marriages Act, 1884-1985. This is categorised into: Part One: Customary Marriages (section 1-19); Marriages of Muhammedans (section 20-34); and Christian and other Marriages (sections 35-85). Offei (1998) noted that in Ghana, "a marriage is valid if it is in conformity with all legal requirements." Legal requirements (based on the Marriage Act, 1884-1985, CAP 127) include a celebration between a man and a woman who are adults and with no kindred or affinity, with a certificate of notice of marriage, at a licensed place and by a recognised minister or registrar of marriages (Offei,1998).

1.2.3 Customary Marriage (Section 1-19)

Basically, "a marriage at custom is guided by the definition of customary law." Article II (4) of the Constitution of Ghana states that, "customary law means the rules of the law which by custom apply to particular communities in Ghana." Thus, for a marriage under customary law to be valid, there is a need for parties to follow the customs of their particular communities. However, certain rites that are performed during the customary marriage are unique to the families of the would-be couple. Meanwhile, others are very common among all the other cultures. More importantly, the exchange of gifts and payment of dowry to the bride's family is demonstrable in almost every traditional setting in Ghana.

It is helpful to note that "customary marriage on its own is not recognised by law, unless registered under the Customary Marriage and Divorce Registration Law, 1985 (PNDCL 112)" (Offei, 1998). Hence, one has to apply to the registrar of marriages in the district one lives in after the ceremony has taken place (Offei,1998). There is therefore no need to register a customary marriage if one has the intention to access marriage under the ordinance afterwards, since the latter is also covered by the law. Nonetheless, if one is only entering into a traditional marriage, registering it provides legal protection. Individuals are also allowed to register several customary marriages due to their polygynous nature. Nevertheless, it is only the registered ones that attract legal backing.

1.2.4 Marriage of Muhammedans (Section 20-34)

This form of marriage is "performed according to the religious requirements of Islam" (Marriages Act, 1884-1985). It was enacted "to provide for the registration of marriages and divorces among Muslims" (Marriages Act, 1884-1985). The assumption is that this form of marriage would have been celebrated in accordance with Muslim rites and laws. What CAP 129 does is provide a record of the celebration of the marriage through registration in a book called the Muhammadans Marriage and Divorce Register. By virtue of section 5, every Muslim marriage must be registered "in the manner provided" under the Ordinance (Marriages Act, 1884-1985).

More significantly, the marriage should be registered within a week of the celebration, with the attendance of "the bridegroom, the bride's *wali*, two witnesses to the marriage, and a Muhammedan priest licensed to pronounce that the marriage is valid" (Marriages Act, 1884-1985). The marriage is then "registered at the district office with the Registrar of Muhammedan marriages and divorces within one week of the marriage ceremony" (Marriages Act, 1884-1985).

1.2.5 Christian and Other Marriages (Sections 35-85)

Unfortunately, many people erroneously consider church marriage blessings or white weddings as Marriage under the Ordinance. This is a major mistake that mostly exists among Ghanaians when assessing marriages. Such specious details have been helplessly expressed because some Ghanaians, most often, see churches having gazetted officiants to perform marriages under the law. However, the truth is that marriage

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ceremonies which are held in chapels not gazetted and have not gone through all the legal procedures cease to be a marriage under the Ordinance, but simply a church blessing. It should be emphasised that church blessings have no legal backing.

On 19th November, 1884, the Marriage Ordinance (CAP127) was passed for two main reasons (Daniels, 1976). The first was the need for *lex loci* (the law of the place). This was "in respect of monogamous marriage for the European settlers and residents" (Daniels, 1976). The second was, "the desire of the missionaries to make available a legal form of Christian marriage for those Africans who, on grounds of religion or civilisation, might require it" (Daniels, 1976). In Ghana, "marriage under the Ordinance is registered with the Registrar General, one's local Municipal or District Assembly, and is recognised by law" (Daniels, 1976). It is also administered by "a marriage officer (a religious leader licensed to perform marriages by the government) or through a special license" (Marriages Act, 1884-1985). Marriage under the Ordinance is "strictly monogamous and does not permit any other marriage unions (registered or otherwise) with other parties" (Daniels, 1976).

The registration process of the Ordinance Marriage begins before the ceremony is held. This is done, basically, to protect the monogamous nature of the ordinance as enshrined in the Marriage Act. In this regard, one commits bigamy if "due process is not followed to dissolve previous marriages contracted under the Ordinance before new marriages are established" (Daniels, 1976). The following conditions must be fulfilled before one can perform a marriage under the Ordinance:

> *Firstly, there should be a written notice to the Registrar of Marriages explaining the intention to marry. Secondly, details regarding the parties involved should be clearly penned down (including names, marital status, age, place of residence, and venue of marriage celebrations). Lastly, consent from the family is required if there is a party below the age of twenty-one (21)* (Marriages Act, 1884-1985).

Afterwards, the "registrar of marriages shall publish a notice of intended marriage for twenty-one (21) days at a small fee. However, if there are no objections regarding the intended marriage, the marriage ceremony may then proceed" (Daniels, 1976). Legally, this should be "within three (3) months from the time the notice is receipted or made public" (Daniels, 1976). The Ghana marriage certificate may be issued to fortify the relationship" (Daniels,1976).

1.3 Christian Marriage Rites

Visser (n.d.) defines a Christian marriage as "a marriage which has been instituted and functions according to biblical principles." For her, Christian marriage is a "lifelong covenant between one man and one woman" (Visser, n.d.). According to Geisler (1989), "Christian marriage is a lifelong commitment between a male and a female that involves mutual sexual rights." Geisler (1989) added that marriage is the "solemnisation and formalisation or sanctification of the union of man and woman accepted by society (or church) as husband and wife." Likewise, Hale (1996) noted that "marriage has a special significance, because it is related to the spiritual union between Christ and his Church." Stott (1999) admonishes that "marriage is to be regarded as God's gracious gift to all mankind." In this sense, Mace & Mace (1980) ascertained that, right from the beginning, "Christianity has considered marriage as divinely ordained for good and necessary purposes." They affirmed that "one of such purposes is to provide a man and woman with an intimately shared life in which they can develop deep love and companionship" (Mace & Mace,1980).

In Christian teachings, marriage is believed to be sanctioned by God Himself. The Bible declares in Genesis 2:24 that "have you not read that He who made them from 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, they are no longer two but one flesh. What, therefore, God has put together, let no man put asunder." From this Genesis account, it becomes very significant to conclude that God is the source of Christian marriage. It is God Himself who established this institution called marriage, and hence, He did it for a purpose. In this light, Christians believe that since God is the source of marriage and He is the custodian of the essence of marriage, every Christian must depend on Him for a successful Christian marriage.

We read again in Genesis 2:24 that, "the man shall leave his father's home and be joined together with his wife, and the two shall become one." Therefore, the first marriage was blessed by God. In line with this, Babaei (2014) claimed, among other things, that "in Christianity, marriage is a sign of God's love to humans, and by performing this, a man and a woman form a wholly and non-detachable connection." Moreover, Baab (1984) explained that "marriage was sanctioned by God by way of expressing His love for humanity, especially when God himself declared in Genesis 2:18 that, 'it is not good for the man to be alone, I will make a helper suitable for him.'" Without a doubt, the legitimacy of marriage in Christianity comes from God Himself as enshrined in both the Old and New Testaments.

Baab (1984) further elucidates: "In the Bible, marriage is regarded as a covenant entered into by two families who thereby form an alliance through their representatives, the bride and the groom." For him, "the justification for using the word 'covenant' derives in part from the use by biblical writers of the figure of marriage to describe the covenant relation between God and Israel, and in part from the place of the covenant in social contracts of the biblical community" (Baab,1984). Moreover, Allen (1984) explains that as a special covenant, "marriage brings together a man and a woman in the most intimate relationship in human life." In view of this, marriage needs to be seen as an institution established by God Himself. Marriage is the only institution created by God in the beginning; hence, it should be considered sacred, since it has a divine mandate.

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In addition to that, the understanding and focus of marriage is that it is instituted based on mutual agreement between the couple. This, however, suggests that marriage should not be covenanted under any compulsion. Individuals must enter into it of their own volition. In this regard, the couple themselves must be in agreement to live together as husband and wife. Hence, Christian marriage abhors forced marriages, which are found in some parts of Africa. There should therefore be zero tolerance for parental, peer, or cultural pressures or influences by any significant others so far as marriage is concerned. This does not imply that parental consent and guidance in marriage are not needed in contracting marriage in Africa.

1.3.1 Historical Antecedence of Church Rules on Marriage Rites

As a sacred institution in Christianity, marriage has its own rules and regulations that enable it to stand the test of time. There has been an age-old emphasis on tradition and church policy as far as Christian marriage is concerned, which calls for critical assessment. In this sense, we look at the historical antecedents of church rules on marriage. It is vital, right from the outset, to establish the difficulty in tracing the history of Christian marriage; however, it is essential to mention that generally, "the present form of a Christian marriage and customs is a contrast of the roots that Christianity had in its beginning along with some it inculcated from the ages and from the local customs of the lands where it grew" (Thomas, 2015). Moreover, since "early Christianity started and was formed from its Roman, Jewish and Hellenistic cultural context," it is very significant to discuss Christian understanding of marriage from these historical perspectives.

Thomas (2015) narrates that "Jewish history is richly full of individuals who lived in family networks and households where they were bound together in sometimes lifelong relationships." Basically, it is only in the intertestamental period that we see "an extant example of a Jewish blessing and prayer used as a part of the process of marriage" (Thomas, 2015). Ngundu (2011) aptly narrated:

> *In the Ancient Near East, where Christianity had its roots, marriage ceremonies and celebrations were never conducted in a religious building nor officiated by a religious leader, priest or rabbi. Traditionally, marriage-making was more of a social undertaking than either a religious or a civil responsibility…Even to the Jews, whose religion was at the centre of their social life, God was involved with their tradition of marriage-making, and that tradition did not belong to temple worship. In their view, every marriage, Jewish or non-Jewish, was contracted before God. There seems to be no evidence that Jews viewed their customary marriage as a universal pattern of contracting marriage to be imposed on non-Jewish converts* (Ngundu, 2011).

Equally, Thomas (2015) discloses:

> *At the time when Christians from the Jewish traditions were fashioning their rites in a Jewish cultural perspective, the Hellenistic Christians were abiding by their cultural traits. In Hellenism, even more than in Judaism, the central building block of society was the patriarchal family. Survival of this unit was possible only through the movement of women of childbearing age from one household to another. Hence, the role of women in this background was basically to ensure that their husbands and fathers were maintained. Marriage provided the societal and legal vehicles for this to materialise. In the early centuries, although Christians practised the ritual of marriage, it was not seen as a spiritual act unless two Christians entered into it with the intention of a relationship that would produce spiritual fruits* (Thomas, 2015).

Based on this, it could be maintained that "marriage rites or ceremonies were not linked up with religious or civil rules" (Ngundu, 2011). Hence, although biblically, God is the originator of marriage, marriage was purely by custom and devoid of civil or religious rules.

Ngundu (2011) further discloses that "among the early Church, which operated during the regime of the Roman Empire, traditional marriage ceremonies were considered "private and family festivals." For instance, Ngundu (2011) argues that Tertullian saw nothing wrong with customary marriages being the only means for one to enter into "a valid and legitimate marriage union." In view of this, Greenslade (1956) argues that "Tertullian did not dispute any marriage ceremonies that were contracted 'at private and family festivals." Nonetheless, he refused any attempt by a Christian bishop who engaged in pagan sacrifices during the traditional marriage ceremonies of their baptised Christians (Greenslade,1956). Moreover, Chambers (1969) observed that Chrysostom encouraged Christian couples to celebrate their traditional marriages in a way that would honour and respect God by distancing themselves from practices such as "drinking, dancing, and overeating during customary marriage festivals." It is instructive to note that "it was Tertullian who used the phrase 'Christian marriage' while referring to the Christian experience of marriage-making itself" (Ngundu,2011). Yet, he suggested that "Christians should sing praises, psalms and hymns to God at the celebration of their customary marriage but not during Church weddings (Roberts, 1969).

Equally, Thomas (2015) discovered that there were instances where "bishops of the patristic era questioned and contemplated the suitability of blessing marriages." However, if they were to be present at a customary marriage ceremony, they "might be called upon to offer a blessing that might be similar to what the father of the bride might offer at a non-Christian marriage feast" (Thomas, 2015). Nonetheless, marriage rites at the time were naturally domestic in nature without any Christian influences. Thus, marriage blessings occurred in households but not chapels. Schillebeeckx (1965) corroborated this by declaring that during that time "the bishops did not even consider solemnising any 'marriages of Christians at church." However, during the fourth century,

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there was evidence of prayer or blessing said by a priest at a customary marriage ceremony organised in the household of baptised Christians (Ngundu, 2011). This practice was based on an allusion that God blessed the first marriage between Adam and Eve. Yet, "the validity of marriage was still determined by conforming to established custom, and not by priestly participation" (Joyce, 1948). For example, Ngundu (2011) recounted:

> *A bishop went to congratulate a Christian couple at their home when a marriage feast was celebrated. Over there, the bishop said a domestic prayer which was intended for the groom and bride, asking that they would have offspring. From this time, it was always offered in the couple's bedroom. Although Christian couples may have appreciated the presence and participation of a bishop as a guest at the end of their marriage feasts, the validity of marriage was still wholly vested in the performance of the customary ceremony and not in a priestly blessing. It was by the fifth century that "a priestly Christian benediction was conducted in front of the church instead of in the home (away from church)*" (Ngundu, 2011).

The impact of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) on regulations governing Christian marriages during the medieval centuries cannot be discounted. As Western Europe and the Roman Empire continued to be Christianised, the church began to exert its influence in all aspects of life, including politics, finances and family (Ngundu,2011). In effect, politically and theologically, after gradually establishing itself and gaining influence in the Middle Ages, the RCC took authority over the areas of "doctrine, liturgy, patronage, education, charity, inheritance, oral promises, oaths, moral crimes, and marriage" (Ngundu, 2011). The state and the church got involved in matters of relationship, and hence, marriage became a combination of family traditions, Church and state. As if that was not enough, it was the "church's new legal and political prominence in the West that rendered the alliance of theology and law so powerful during the medieval centuries" (Ngundu, 2011).

Additionally, the RCC, through its canon law, began "to regulate marriages in Western Europe, and hence, marriage began to be regarded in ecclesiastical rather than simply social terms" (Ngundu, 2011). The RCC further "issued a steady stream of papal decretals that were to prevail throughout Christianity" (Ngundu, 2011). More importantly, "most of these papal decretals which became part of the codified canon law were taken from the answers given by the different Popes over the centuries to questions that had been put to them, usually by bishops from around the Western church" (Ngundu, 2011).

Ngundu (2011) established that in response to the medieval Catholic theology of marriage, "the Protestant Reformers of the sixteenth century (e.g., Martin Luther and John Calvin) vehemently rejected sacramental marriage." This, according to him, inevitably created "a legal vacuum which made developing a new court system a matter of urgency" (Ngundu, 2011). In this regard, "Continental and English Protestant theologians produced many ideas that eventually contributed to the development of civil marriage in the Western world" (Ngundu, 2011). However, for Logan (1974), this presented "reformed territories and states with the opportunity to develop and produce a new code of marriage laws."

Unfortunately, although the reformers were united in speaking against the RCC doctrine of marriage, they could not come out with a uniform policy that would serve as a model of marriage among themselves (Ngundu, 2011). For instance, Logan (1974) observed that Luther, out of his perception concerning the state, thought that "marriage was a social estate of the earthly kingdom of creation, not a sacred estate of the heavenly kingdom of redemption." Similarly, Wace (1904) contended that, "since matrimony had existed from the beginning of the world, and continues even among unbelievers, there were no reasons why it should be called a sacrament of 'a new law' and of the church alone." The RCC theologians upheld that "marriage was considered to be a sacrament which could only be conducted in church, by church leaders, whereas for the Protestant churches, contracting and conducting marriage in church was purely an effort to stop clandestine unions by promoting public unions" (Ngundu, 2011).

1.4 Results and Discussions

1.4.1 Duplication of Marriage Rites in Ghana

It should be reiterated that before the onset of Christianity in the then Gold Coast (now Ghana), the only form of marriage that was accepted and practised by our forebears was the customary marriage/traditional marriage. Customary marriage used to be a complex institution that generally proceeded by stages, most of which were characterised by the performance of prescribed rites (Meekers,1992). For example, among Africans in general, "marriage ceremony was not an event that took place on the wedding day, but was a long-drawn-out process" (Mbiti, 1977). According to Hastings (1973), "marriage did not take place at one single moment, but it came into being across a series of meetings, negotiations, and ceremonies."

Nevertheless, in contemporary Ghana, the traditional marriage (or the customary marriage) system has changed significantly. Ogoma (2014) argues that today, "many people are fast forgetting that there was a marriage system in Ghana, before the coming of Christianity and civilisation." In many traditional marriage ceremonies, quite a number of significant changes have occurred consequent to the influx of Christianity in Ghana. Some notable additions to traditional marriage-making in Ghana are the inclusion of wedding rings and Bibles and the replacement of pouring libations with Christian prayers. Another notable development is the additional marriage rite which is performed at Church for Christian married couples after the customary marriage rite. In this sense, Ghanaian Christians who were married under the customary marriage rites were to either bless their marriages in the Church or access an Ordinance marriage to show that

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their marriage was a Christian marriage. Consequently, Christians in Ghana have had to go through duplication of marriage rites.

In Ghana, though many churches accept customary marriage, they encourage their members to bring their marriages before the altar. Churches also normally conduct marriage blessings for couples who have already been married customarily. Therefore, it has become a norm for Christians to present their marriages before the altar after the traditional marriage, either on the same day or after some weeks or even some months, so that the marriages would be accepted as Christian marriages. Moreover, those accepting leadership positions in most of the churches are obliged, as a matter of church policy, to bless their marriages in the church or present them before the altar.

This development of accessing Christian marriage rites after the traditional marriage rites has put many Ghanaian Christians in a dilemma due to the coexistence of customary marriage rites and civil or church marriage-making systems in Ghana. In an interview with a Christian married man (RP1), he noted that his decision to have only one marriage ceremony, in this case, a customary marriage rite, created a huge misunderstanding between him and his spouse prior to their wedding ceremony. According to this study participant, he preferred the customary marriage alone without necessarily attending a church wedding, but his would-be spouse had a different opinion. The spouse insisted that they register the marriage at the court and further bring the marriage before the altar for church blessings. This, without a doubt, has been a challenge to many Christian prospective couples. The Ghanaian Christian, undoubtedly, is often at a loss as to which of the marriage rites to go through. More often than not, they find themselves in a state of confusion as to whether to do the traditional marriage rites alone or to follow it with a church wedding. Without a doubt, many Ghanaian Christian couples are always torn between the claims of tradition and Christianity.

In dealing with this phenomenon, all the study participants who were interviewed in this present study expressed an in-depth understanding of the whole idea of duplication of marriage rites as a practice within the Christian community in Ghana. They further expressed the need for thorough discourse on this subject matter because, according to some of the Christian participants, many Christians in Ghana are worried about this situation, but out of fear of intimidation, they are unable to voice it. For example, a married Christian man (RP2) in an interview lamented: "We are not able to express our displeasure concerning this phenomenon due to fear of intimidation by members of the Church who would claim that the traditional marriage we have undertaken was not complete. We are to make the individuals know that the white wedding is Western culture; hence the traditional marriage is complete in itself."

Similarly, a study participant who was a chief (RP3) in an interview was of the view that this phenomenon has come to stay. He reasoned that the phenomenon has been with Ghanaians for quite a long period of time; therefore, it would be quite difficult for Christian bodies to make amends in connection with the duplication of marriage rites. Yet, the motivations for such practices and the inherent challenges need further investigation, which the ensuing sections attempt to address.

1.4.2 Motivations for the Duplication of marriage rites in Ghana

It has already been stated that since the time of the Western missionaries, the phenomenon of duplication of marriage rites has been a prominent feature in the life of Christianity in Ghana. However, why some Ghanaian Christians duplicate marriage rites continues to be a mystery after several years of encountering the missionaries. Nevertheless, diverse opinions emerged when participants of this present study were asked why Christians in Ghana perform additional marriage rites in church after the customary marriage rites.

A study participant (RP4), who was a pastor, explained that the traditional marriage rite is unchristian and unholy. The participant claimed that "it is the Christian marriage blessing that makes the marriage holy and sacred." It seems to me that this participant sees marriage as a holy institution; therefore, the process of duplication of marriage rites is intended to make Christian marriages holy. The pastor further declared that duplication of marriage rites is "just upgrading of marriages by the Church but not another form of marriage rite" (RP4). In this sense, the pastor does not see anything wrong with Christians bringing their marriages before the altar for church blessings after the traditional marriage ceremony since, for him, the traditional marriage alone is unholy. This assertion was reinforced by another study participant (RP5) who remarked:

> *It is a question of how acceptable the African tradition is to God, in the view of the Church; As far as I am concerned, the Church deems traditional marriage as unholy matrimony; hence, one cannot have a Christian marriage outside the church or chapel, not even in a mission house; that is illegal to both the state and Christianity. Even the priest or minister officiating, as well as the chapel, has to be legally registered by the state* (RP5).

In support of this claim, a study participant who was a married woman (RP6) unequivocally contended that some Christians come before the altar for church blessings because the altar is a sacred place. Thus, as they present the marriage before the altar, it is established that it becomes a Christian marriage and is sacred as well. For instance, the RCC believes that "the man and woman confer the sacrament of Marriage upon each other when they express their consent to marry before God and the Church" (ACCORD, n.d.). In its teachings on the Sacrament of marriage, the RCC believes that "since God created man out of love and calls on him to love, it is proper that the union of man and woman should be a sacrament" (ACCORD, n.d.).

Similarly, the RCC believes that "the presence of the Priest and of other witnesses testifies to the fact that marriage is part of the Church which recognises the lifelong and exclusive

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commitments of the bride and groom to each other" (ACCORD, n.d.). However, the question that comes to mind is what exactly makes Christian marriage? Is it about bringing the marriage before the altar or following Christian principles and standards of marriage that makes it a Christian marriage? This study realised that most often, the concentration has been on the Christian marriage ceremony itself, and therefore, little attention has been paid to the inherent principles and standards of Christian marriages. In a similar development, Quashie (2014) ascertained that, "emphasis is placed on the particular form of marriage rite and not the meaning of Christian marriage itself, which has led to the refusal to accept customary marriage rites by many Christians."

It was further discovered that Christians in Ghana duplicate marriage rites because they feel it is great dishonour to God for not bringing their marriages before the altar. For example, a Christian married woman (RP7) declared that, "Ghanaian Christians feel it is a great dishonour to God for not bringing their marriages before the altar; hence, after the customary rite, they are obliged out of guilt to come to church for blessing on their marriage. As a result, they do not even care about whatever financial or economic constraints are associated with it." In addition to this, an unmarried Christian study participant (RP8) disclosed that many Christians duplicate marriage rites out of prestige and the level of respect attached to church weddings. This participant mentioned that most churches even prescribe mass weddings for their members, yet some of the members opt for individual marriage ceremonies to attract public attention and to exhibit their worth in terms of the cars they use, the flamboyant wedding dresses, the veils they wear, and the unending queue of bridesmaids and best men that are displayed ceremonially (RP8).

This latter assertion was confirmed during the observations made by the researcher on traditional marriages and church weddings during fieldwork. For instance, in one of the church wedding ceremonies, the wedding rings of the couples were brought to the altar by a drone machine. What is more, apart from the pre-wedding photo-shoot dresses the couples wore, they also put on more than one dress on the wedding day. A different dress was worn for the reception besides the actual wedding gowns and suits. This development, according to a Christian unmarried man (RP9), enables the couples to feel more relaxed to dance after putting on a somewhat restricted wedding gown. However, an unmarried study participant (RP10) also contended that the couples do so to show off and exhibit their wealth ceremonially. Though all these views are acceptable, the underlying point is that there have been some appendages to the wedding ceremonies which have added extra cost to the Christian marriage-making process in Ghana.

Furthermore, some of the Christian study participants who were interviewed declared that Christians attend church or white weddings after the customary marriage rites to protect the members from the polygynous nature of the traditional marriage. They reiterated that though the churches approve of traditional marriages, their polygynous nature is what has led Christian denominations in Ghana to encourage their members to bring their marriages before God to receive God's blessings and also to be registered at the court of law for legal protection against polygyny. For such participants, the Bible frowns on polygyny, and since customary marriages are potentially polygynous, there is a need to access additional marriage rites that would protect Christian couples, especially the women, against polygyny that emanates from their male counterparts.

These Christian study participants argued, based on their understanding of Genesis 2:22, that "God made only one man and one woman"; therefore, marriage should be monogamous. As Mann (1989) observed, "the mandate to Adam and Eve could only be monogamous and not normative because there was only one woman, making polygamy impossible." More importantly, many Christians believe that God intended this partnership between one man and one woman to last for a lifetime. The Bible declares in Matthew 19:6-8 that "for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh…therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." In support of this lifetime proposition is O'Donovan (1995), who intimated that "since God provided one woman for one man at creation, polygamy is not the will of God."

Without disputing these assertions, the present study contends that if some Christians decide on the polygamous marriage system, they must consider any inherent moral implications. As Kraft (1996) maintained, "before making any moral judgement concerning custom or seek to change it, respect for the people who practice it demands that we make every effort to understand the custom from their point of view." Hence, the problem of polygamy should be considered as a moral issue but not a salvific issue. It is the notion of monogamy that the Western missionaries to Africa transferred to the Ghanaians who converted to Christianity, for which they realised that the customary marriage system that existed was not enough, and for that matter they saw the need to adopt additional marriage rites which for them had the added advantage of protecting their marriages against polygamy.

Aside from this potentially polygamous outlook, customary marriage was considered by the Christian study participants as traditionally being characterised by practices that are inconsistent with Christian beliefs. One of them, who was a married man (RP11), mentioned, for instance, that "a typical traditional Akan marriage will witness the pouring of libation, invoking ancestral spirits to guide the couple in their marital journey rather than a Christian prayer." This participant disclosed that "what the Church seeks to achieve is to Christianise for its members that which was instituted by God but appears to be perceived as a secular enterprise" (RP11). Therefore, marriage blessing in church, for him, is "the Church's way of ensuring that her members follow Christian conception of marriage" (RP11).

One of the reasons why Ghanaian Christians duplicate marriage rites was disclosed by a male unmarried Christian study participant (RP12). For him, the practice of this phenomenon ensures a peaceful coexistence between tradition

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and faith as it provides a point of convergence (RP12). This participant noted that customary marriage alone may not be suitable for the Church owing to its propensity to deviate from Christ's teaching. Also, he established that "ordinance marriage devoid of customary requirements has no place in the socio-cultural context of Ghana because marriages in Ghana are regulated by customs" (RP12). In other words, the participant reasons that ordinance marriage cannot be entirely divorced from the customs and traditions of Ghanaian society.

Akoto (2024) explains that "marriage in Ghana operates within a plural legal system that recognises customary, Islamic, and ordinance marriages." Despite this diversity, customary marriage remains socially significant because of its close connection to traditional values, family relationships, and inheritance. This suggests that the legal requirements governing marriage as well as the cultural beliefs and practices that influence how it is perceived and practised in society, must be considered in dealing with marriage in contemporary Ghana.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that although customary practices remain culturally significant, they are not important prerequisites for marriages to be legally valid in Ghana. The recognition of ordinance marriage under Ghanaian law demonstrates that marriage can be contracted through statutory procedures without necessarily undergoing customary marriage rites. Therefore, the assertion that ordinance marriage without customary requirements has no place in Ghana's socio-cultural context may be considered too broad if it is interpreted as a legal requirement.

According to Woodman (1977), "the customary law applied by the courts does not always reflect the customs practised by communities." This highlights the fact that customary practices are neither entirely uniform nor static across Ghanaian society. Therefore, while customary marriage practices remain important to Ghana's cultural identity and social relationships, they must be distinguished from the statutory requirements governing ordinance marriage. The issue, therefore, is not necessarily whether ordinance marriage can exist without customary rites, but whether its legal recognition adequately reflects the cultural values and social expectations of the communities in which it is practised.

Furthermore, the findings revealed that some study participants preferred to perform additional marriage rites because of societal expectations and pressure from family members and the wider community. For example, an unmarried Christian woman (RP13) during the interview preferred going through both customary marriage and a white wedding or church blessing because the practice has become a norm. This position demonstrates how marriage ceremonies in Ghana do not solely depend on personal preferences of the couple but are influenced by the couple's desire to gain social acceptance and meet culturally established expectations.

It is significant to note that marriage in Ghana is often regarded as a union between two families, making the observance of customary practices important to how the marriage is recognised and accepted. This viewpoint agrees with the position of Akapini, Chirani, & Bamora (2024), who maintained the continuing importance of customary marriage traditions in Ghana, irrespective of the periodic changes that have occurred to the traditional marriage-making process in the country. In this sense, the preference of the study participants for additional marriage rites is an attempt to maintain cultural identity, ensure family satisfaction, and approval by their communities.

Additionally, when study participants were asked whether there is a need for Ghanaian Christians to duplicate marriage rites, divergent views emerged. For example, the traditional leaders in the study area who were interviewed expressed their displeasure about the rate at which some churches in Ghana have taken over the marriage rites of Christian adherents. One of them did not mince words when he posed these critical questions: "Who gave birth to the will-be couple? Is it the church or the couple's parents?" (RP14) The *Nana* (chief) answered in affirmation that it is the parents of the couple who gave birth to them; hence, the Church should desist from taking over authority of the marriage process and allow the family to handle it from the traditional perspective (RP14). The chief further admonished that the churches should not interfere with the marital issues of their members. He insisted that marriage rites should be the sole responsibility of the family but not the church. The *Nana* further remarked:

> *When we talk about marriage, it is the traditional one. Unfortunately, today, it is the church that even seeks suitors for their members. It is no longer the role of the father or the family. It is the father who is supposed to bless the couple by custom. I want the church to appreciate the fact that Christianity without tradition is meaningless. Why have we thrown away our tradition and now practice that of the Europeans*? (RP14)

This assertion by the *Nana*, who also doubled as a Christian married man, was in support of Amanor (2009), who emphatically opined that "there is not even one example of a church wedding in the New Testament." For Schillebeeckx (1965), who is a prominent Roman Catholic theologian, "the presence of Jesus at the home-based marriage reception at Cana should not be seen as a sign of the Christianisation of customary marriage." Amanor (2009) further ascertained that "the early Church did not meddle in the marriage ceremonies of her members and did not make any regulations regarding the marriage ceremonies of her members." For Amanor (2009), among the early church, "while marriage was considered by them to have been instituted by God and needed to be jealously guarded, marriage ceremonies were done according to people's customs."

Similarly, Fieldler (1998) argued that "church wedding is not a constituent part of the Christian faith, nor was it an integral part of African culture." He therefore proposed that "a Church wedding is not needed to make a Christian marriage; hence, Churches should accept any genuine African marriage as a valid marriage" (Fieldler,1998). This, in effect, suggests that

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the marriage-making systems of Ghanaian Christians must be within the context of their customs and ethos but not that of the West. In other words, there is a genuine need to decolonise the marriage-making process of African Christians in general and Ghanaian Christians in Particular.

Another study participant (RP15) lamented that most of the churches in Ghana generally are not doing right when it comes to matters of marriage. She argues that marriage is a social endeavour or union and the Church should stay away from it (RP15). This study participant did not seem to appreciate why the church should meddle in the marriage rites of her members. In light of this, she argues intensely that she is yet to see any instructions in the Bible regarding how Christian marriages should be conducted. She aptly declared:

> *The white wedding is a cultural anecdote of how the Europeans conducted their marriage ceremonies, which even predates Christian marriage rites. For example, the woman wears a white veil to signify that she is pure and a virgin. That has now been lost through time. The couple are presented before the altar with the woman wearing a veil under the guise that she is a virgin, but in practical or real terms she has had carnal knowledge with the man* (RP15).

Furthermore, an unmarried Christian man (RP16) in an interview maintained that it is neither biblical nor logical for Christians to insist on a white wedding or Church blessing after the traditional marriage. Again, he claimed that "the signing of the marriage register is not what makes the marriage." For him, it is modern-day security for marriage" (RP16). He further maintained that "the marriage is what happens when parents join their children in matrimony. The church brings in the spirituality while the state brings in the legal backing." Hence, he argued that the traditional marriage ceremony is enough and that there is no need for Church blessings or white weddings. He surmised that the traditional marriage ceremony is the marriage itself" (RP16). This participant further admonished that "the blessings of the marriage can be properly done by the parents of the would-be couple. If the parents wholeheartedly consent to the marriage and pronounce their blessings on their wards, then the marriage is blessed indeed. Therefore, there would be no need for another marriage rite to be performed in the church" (RP16). Equally, a married Christian man (RP17) in an interview admonished:

> *As Ghanaians, we need to psyche our minds and respect the sanctity of our values and also remain resolute in our marital choices. Christians in Ghana are far from right to go through customary marriage and thereafter, the church blessing or ordinance marriage. Christians should allow their families to contract their marriages and also accept the outcomes as sacred. Sacred, in the sense that people who marry through the traditional way should be allowed to partake in all the religious sacraments in the church* (RP17).

According to this study participant, God expects everyone to go through the same procedure and process laid down by the people. For a marriage to be legitimate, the tradition and customs of the people become a vital pivot around which it receives acceptance by God. In other words, God recognises and blesses such marriages that have been approved and endorsed by the families involved. Therefore, it is a non-starter in no uncertain terms for customary/traditional marriage to receive church blessing before it gains legal and religious recognition.

1.4.3 Challenges of Duplication of Marriage Rites

In dealing with the challenges of duplication of marriage rites on Christians and their families, most of the research participants in this present study were of the view that duplicating marriage rites has recurring challenges. Almost all the participants who spoke against the duplication of marriage rites identified finance, energy, and time constraints as the most predominant negative effects that this phenomenon has on Christians and their families in Ghana. For instance, delayed marriages were cited as being a common development among the youth due to fear of financial constraints. In this regard, many young people have refused to get married, but are cohabiting because of the expenses involved in recent marriage ceremonies.

A married woman who is a Christian (RP19) in an interview identified the high cost of bride wealth or bride price with its other accompanying expenses during recent traditional marriage rites as very disturbing. According to her, in some families, the bride price is high to the extent that the would-be husband and their families have to bargain (RP19). After going through this financial stress of paying the bride price, the couple now have to continue with another church marriage ceremony, which would require that a new set of dresses is sewn, wedding rings are bought, and perhaps refreshments are provided. This demonstrates that how would-be couples choose to celebrate their marriages is influenced by financial considerations, especially when the cost of additional ceremonies does not meet their available financial resources. More importantly, this finding supports Abdul-Korah (2014), whose study of bride-price payment among the Dagaaba of northwestern Ghana highlights concerns surrounding the financial demands of customary marriage. Equally, Aasoglenang et al. (2024) discovered that "high bride-price demands created financial difficulties for prospective grooms among the Brifors of the Upper West Region." Basically, these studies demonstrate that prospective couples' choice of marriage rites can be influenced by the economic demands associated with the marriage practices in their communities.

There are also issues of the high cost of refreshments, the use of exorbitant wedding gowns and rings, and the hiring of wedding cars to convey the groom and the bride, which may lay a heavy financial burden on the couple. As a result of these, most of the couples who can sail through to their wedding expenses make special appeal for funds, together with their refreshment programmes immediately after the church wedding, to receive fringe support from their loved ones to defray their heavy debts. An unmarried Christian male

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participant (RP18) revealed that there are a great number of couples who go for loans at the money banks and micro-financial institutions to support their wedding expenses. This supports Amoo's (1946) claim that such "heavy expenses often incurred in wedding celebrations have reached astronomical proportions that it is extremely difficult for a man of limited means to acquire a wife at all; in any case, he is often involved in such debt that it may be many years before he can free himself." This assertion was corroborated by some of the participants in this present study.

Finally, the study participants identified time and energy constraints as one of the challenges associated with the duplication of marriage rites in Ghana. For example, one of the traditional leaders (RP20) in the study area maintained in an interview that having two separate marriage rites is a waste of time and energy. He noted:

> *The Westerners do just one marriage ceremony in the church. They do not have any traditional marriage to attend before they go to the chapel for the church wedding. As Ghanaians, we already had our traditional marriage system before the Westerners came in. Why are we denigrating our traditional marriage system and, instead, giving credence to that of the West? Duplicating marriage rites is really a waste of time and energy, and it is affecting young couples and their families. Hence, the Christian body must reconsider its decision on this subject matter* (RP20).

1.5 Conclusions

Overall, this present study tried to find out why Christians in Ghana duplicate marriage rites and their inherent challenges. The study revealed that Christians in Ghana duplicate marriage rites to safeguard their marriages against polygamy through church blessings and civil marriages. In this sense, it was argued that traditional marriage alone would not suffice for Ghanaian Christians if they wanted to seek security for their marriages. It was equally highlighted that customary marriage alone is not suitable for Ghanaian Christians owing to its propensity to deviate from Christ's teachings.

The study discovered that many Christians consider the traditional marriage rite as unchristian and unholy and that it is the Christian marriage blessing that makes the marriage holy and sacred. Thus, Christians who prefer additional marriage rites deem the traditional marriage as unholy matrimony. Such Christians argue that the customary marriage rites have traditionally been characterised by practices that are inconsistent with Christian beliefs. Therefore, these Ghanaian Christians believe that presenting their marriage before the altar for church blessings makes the marriage holy, because they consider the altar a sacred place.

Furthermore, in examining the views of Ghanaians on whether there is a need for Christians to duplicate marriage rites, the study realised divergent opinions from the study participants. While some participants saw the need for Christians to duplicate marriage rites, others saw no justification for such practice among Christians. The former participants reasoned that the process of duplication of marriage rites is just an upgrade of marriages by the Church but not another form of marriage rite. Therefore, having separate marriage rites is the church's own way of ensuring that her members follow due processes in Christian marriage-making. Moreover, the blessing of marriage in church is the church's way of ensuring that her members acknowledge the Christian conception of marriage. Hence, as Christians present their marriages before the altar, it is established that it becomes a Christian marriage and sacred as well.

The other participants vehemently argued that the duplication of marriage rites by Ghanaian Christians should be discouraged. The participants proposed unequivocally that Ghanaian Christians should give credence to the traditional marriage rites since there is nowhere in the Bible that states that marriage rites should be controlled by the church before marriages of Christians are considered as Christian marriages. They emphasised that the traditional marriage rite is enough to be accepted by Christians as marriage in itself. Therefore, there is no need for Church blessings or white weddings; the traditional marriage ceremony is the 'marriage itself.' Hence, Christians should perform only the traditional marriage rites without any additional marriage rite in the Church. This is because, according to them, all marriage events in the Bible were reported in a social but not religious setting and hence, religious leaders attended such marriage events but only as social participants. Thus, church marriage blessing was a blessing of a social endeavour or union.

It was emphasised that even the early church did not interfere with the customary marriages of its members. Thus, among the early Church, which operated during the regime of the Roman Empire, traditional marriage ceremonies were considered private and family festivals" (Ngundu,2011). Furthermore, a valid marriage was determined by conformity to established customs and not by church or priestly participation or involvement. Therefore, marriage rites or ceremonies were not linked up with religious or civil rules, although, biblically, God is the originator of marriage. Marriage was purely by custom and devoid of civil or religious rules.

The study underscored that it is unjustifiable to encourage people to duplicate marriage rites and wrong to look upon marriages conducted customarily as any less of marriage. It was emphasised that for a marriage to be legitimate, the tradition and customs of the local people become a vital pivot around which it receives acceptance by God. In other words, God recognises and blesses such marriages which have been approved and endorsed by the families involved. Therefore, it is a non-starter, in no uncertain terms, for customary/traditional marriage to receive church blessing before it gains religious recognition.

Lastly, the study aimed at finding out the challenges associated with the duplication of marriage rites in Ghana by Christians. It was realised that duplicating marriage rites in Ghana has recurring challenges. Finance, energy, and time wasting were identified as the three most predominant

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challenges that the phenomenon imposes on Ghanaian Christians and their families. For instance, delayed marriages were cited as being a common development among the youth due to fear of financial burdens. In this regard, many young people have refused to get married, but are cohabiting because of the expenses involved in recent marriage ceremonies. There are also issues of the high cost of refreshments, exorbitant wedding gowns and rings, and hiring of wedding cars to convey the couple and the bride, which may lay a heavy burden on the couple.

Consequently, the study found that most of the couples who are able to sail through to their wedding expenses attach special appeal for funds to their reception programmes in order to receive financial support from their loved ones to defray their heavy debts. It was finally highlighted that having two separate marriage rites is a waste of time and energy. This was grounded on the premise that the couple and their families and loved ones have to spend time and energy on the traditional marriage, and afterwards, they have to move to the chapel for another ceremony either on the same day as the traditional marriage rites or on different dates.

The study concludes that Ghanaian Christians' interpretation and practice of marriage must have the custom of the people in mind. In this sense, any additional marriage rites that have the tendency to frustrate the traditional and cultural disposition of the Ghanaian people must be questioned. The study underscores that it is not the ritual or rite that makes a marriage a Christian marriage, but following Christian principles and teachings on marriage is what makes it a Christian marriage. Yet, many Christians see marriages celebrated in church as Christian marriages and those celebrated outside church as otherwise. There are a great number of Christian couples who have accessed only the customary marriage rites, yet they are enjoying their marriages owing to the fact that they obeyed the Christian principles and teachings on marriage.

It is, however, based on the views gathered through in-depth interviews and observations, that it is concluded that each of the two rites - customary and church weddings is complete in itself; therefore, to have both rites separately is a complete duplication of marriage rites. Once a marriage is contracted under the traditional/customary arrangements, there is no need for a second marriage ceremony in the chapel. God accepts and endorses traditional marriage, and God alone must grant legitimacy and recognition to marital union irrespective of where it is contracted. Therefore, the practice of Christians forming marital union again when they come before the altar after the customary marriage rites somehow tends to relegate to the background the customs and standards of the Ghanaian traditional culture. This creates an impression that it is only marriages brought before the altar that are acceptable to God. Therefore, Ghanaian Christians must reconsider their traditional marriage-making process as important, which defines them properly.

In a nutshell, Ghanaian Christians must uphold the customary/traditional marriage with no external influences such as church involvement in the marriage-making process. Thus, instead of additional marriage rites for Ghanaian Christians, there is a need to have one marriage rite to release Christian couples and their families from any undue stresses and strains that conjugal relationships impose on them. Besides, there is a need for constant dialogue between faith and culture in the marriage-making process of Ghanaian Christians since this is a complex area that one cannot look at with simplistic lenses.

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