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The Dilemma of Polygamy in Nigerian Pentecostals' Theology of Marriage

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Abstract

This paper examines marriage and polygamy in the teachings of two Nigerian Pentecostal denominations. Prior to the advent of the nineteenth-century missionaries in Africa, Africans practised polygamous marriage for its economic and social benefits. The missionaries' ideal of Christian marriage was monogamous marriage. The missionaries did not hesitate to take up the battle against the traditional marriage system and impose their belief in monogamy on their African converts. Polygamists who were converted to Christianity were compelled to send away all their wives except only the first wives. While many Christian denominations founded by the missionaries have either abolished or amended this position, certain Pentecostal and charismatic churches still hold on to it. Moreover, existing studies on polygamy in African Christianity barely focus on Pentecostal and charismatic churches. Hence, this article examines the views of two leading Pentecostal denominations' leaders, Pastor W. F. Kumuyi of Deeper Christian Life Ministry and Dr D. O. Olukoya of Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries, on marriage and polygamy. The two denominations are chosen because of their pronounced viewpoints on polygamy and how widespread their branches are in Africa. By examining the denominations, this article does not only fill a gap in the studies of polygamy in African Christian theology, it also shifts the focus of studies on polygamy from the mainline protestant denominations to Pentecostal and charismatic denominations which have been overlooked in many studies. Using the content-analytical method, the paper identifies illogicality and incompatibility with

biblical teachings in any theology of marriage that encourages polygamists to 'divorce' all their wives except the first ones.

Introduction

In many traditional Yoruba societies, polygamous and monogamous marriages were commonly practised based on the choice and socio-economic statuses of the individuals (Johnson 1921:113). The precolonial Yoruba people believed that it was inappropriate for traditional rulers to be monogamous because of their position as leaders in society. This belief gave traditional rulers impetus to marry as many wives as they could. Wealthy members of society were also expected to be polygamous. Members of the communities usually offered their female children to the rich in exchange for gifts and friendship or settlement of debts. The poor who were incapable of handling many wives due to financial constraints would be contented with monogamy. It was a matter of choice and status. Besides, the traditional Yoruba society was agrarian; engaging in polygamy guaranteed having many children who would assist in farming. Ayandele (1966:335) highlights some of the reasons the indigenous societies in Africa practised polygamy, as follows: farming, high rate of infant mortality, social, economic, and political standing, and elaborate funeral rites. Marriage in such societies is communally construed and considered as a necessity and a major factor in building friendships among peers (Pearsall 2022). Men of status and reputation received wives as gifts from their friends. In some cases, parents arranged spouses for their children. Men who disliked such spouses were free to marry as many wives as they could afford (Fadipe 1970).

Theologians, historians, sociologists, and anthropologists, among others, have documented how the European and American missionaries rid Africa of her values and cultural practices and imposed Western cultural values on their converts (Bascom 1953). One of the cultural practices that the missionaries contended against was polygamy. They believed that polygamy was incompatible with civilisation and Christianity. Their strong opposition to polygamy led to crises in some denominations. For instance, in 1917, Rev. G. O. Griffin, the Methodist chairman in Lagos, decided to expel ten church leaders who, according to him, were guilty of polygamy. Surprisingly, the ten leaders were joined by fifty-five others who openly admitted that they too

were polygamists. Nevertheless, undeterred by the number of the polygamists Griffin expelled all of them. Those who were expelled founded the United Methodist Church, Eleja, in Lagos (Sanneh 1983:179). The missionaries were almost successful in obliterating polygamy but for Islam in Yorubaland, African mission churches, and African independent churches founded by aggrieved Yoruba Christians who were amenable to certain cultural practices which included the practice of polygamy. The emergence of Pentecostal and charismatic movements in the 1970s heralded a return to the outright rejection of polygamy by their leaders, who were of Yoruba origin (Ojo 1997).

This paper focuses on the teachings of two general overseers of Nigerian Pentecostal churches on marriage and polygamy with a view to identifying and critiquing their positions on individuals who were polygamists before their conversion to Christianity. The church leaders are Pastor William Folorunsho Kumuyi of Deeper Christian Life Ministry (DCLM) and Pastor Dr Daniel K. Olukoya of Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries (MFM). The paper argues that the practice of ‘sending away’ wives in polygamous relationships is not only strange to Yoruba culture but is based on faulty theological premises. Marriage in Africa is a cultural tradition and Christianity has not been able to totally disrobe it of its cultural garbs even though Christianity is a major defining factor of social change in the continent (Ojo 1997). This is not an attempt to validate and promote polygamy as a Christian form of marriage. The paper is guided by Sanneh’s warning that ‘There is nothing inherently African about the institution of plural marriages’ (1983:248). That many people engaged in polygamy in certain traditional African societies does not mean that it was a universal rule that was applicable to all societies. The contention of this paper concerns the treatment Pentecostal and charismatic denominations usually mete out to those who were polygamists before their conversion.

Conceptualising Polygamy in Nigerian Christianity

Polygamy can be defined as a practice whereby a man marries multiple wives simultaneously, as opposed to monogamy which is having one wife (Zeitzen 2008:3). It is derived from two Greek words: *poly* (meaning ‘many’) and *gamos* (meaning ‘marriage’). Together they mean plural marriage or being married to multiple spouses. Polygamy, in its broad sense, includes polyandry, that is, one

wife with many husbands, and polygyny, which is one husband with many wives.

Marriage means different things to various cultures even though it is a universal phenomenon. Pearsall's (2022:1) theory of marriage as an organising power states that 'for rulers across human history, marriages, including plural ones, have had particular significance, legitimating offspring, strengthening kingdoms, and ensuring takeovers'. This theory highlights the functional features of marriage and also traces the origin of polygamy to attempts by men to build and enforce patriarchal power structures. It explains why men benefit more than women in polygamy. Proponents of this view argue that polygamy gives men access to women and their bodies. It gives men more children upon which their kin connections are built. It 'supports men's public importance as well as their domestic potency' (Pearsall 2022:4). This does not mean that women in polygamous marriages do not have any benefits. However, whatever benefits they have are outweighed by men's interests. Women bear their husbands' names and are seen as parts of the properties of their spouses in some societies. They also have to contend with other women for the resources of their husbands. Advocates of polygamy, such as Mormons and some Islamic clerics, consider it a favourable avenue for all women to marry (Pearsall 2022). Those who hold this erroneous view believe that polygamy is in the interest of women as it affords them marriage because there are more women than men. There is no doubt that the view is based on wrong statistics. The United Nations World Population Prospects (United Nations 2024) estimates that there are 4.14 billion males and 4.09 billion females in the world.

Barash's (2016) research on polygamy reveals that human and non-human animals are polygamous in nature and it is very rare for animals to be sexually monogamous. Explaining the results of the research, Barash points out that evolution theory has subjugated the biblical account that Adam and Eve were monogamous. On the contrary, biological evidence shows that *Homo sapiens* have always been polygamous in nature from the onset. In other words, it is biologically wrong to hold the view that humans are monogamous in nature or have always been monogamous. They may be socially monogamous but, sexually, humans are intrinsically polygamous. While defining 'polygamy' Barash argues that the reason 'polygamy' is often used as a synonym for

'polygyny' is probably that polyandry is uncommon, so polygamy and polygyny are usually used interchangeably. That polyandry is rare in many cultures does not mean that women are sexually monogamous. Women are as polygamous as men but polyandry is frowned at in many societies. Barash admits that his theory is controversial and may be seen as 'politically incorrect' because of the Western preconceived notion of monogamy as a norm (2016:4).

Barash's theory which is based on the biological construct of humans' sexual behaviour raises some questions that cast doubt on its practicality and veracity. How does the theory account for the asexual or celibate? Are humans constrained to follow only their biological instincts? What of our social and psychological constructs? What of human values like self-control and discipline? Barash's theory does not take the complexity of human life into consideration. Having natural inclinations for a behaviour does not mean humans lack self-control over such behaviour. There are several people who, in spite of the sexual revolution, are celibate because of their religious commitments. It is no secret today that youths are delaying marital commitments because of social and economic reasons. Apart from this, studies have shown that women in polygamous marriages experience increased psychological distress and mental health issues compared to those who are in monogamous marriages. Not only that, men who are polygamists are prone to psychological problems which include depression, anxiety, and psychosis as well as lower marital satisfaction and more family conflicts. Polygamous marriages also have adverse effects on children's well-being and development. Other problems associated with polygamous marriages are sexual violence, bitter rivalry, and inequality (Riley 2015).

Relating Barash's theory to pre-colonial, traditional Yoruba society, it is pertinent to note that polygamy was more of a social and economic construct than biological. Men who were mostly farmers needed more hands in their farms; hence, they married as many wives as they could afford, to have numerous children who would assist them. Polygamy was not about having extramarital affairs, neither was it an alibi for marital infidelity (Caldwell, Orubuloye, and Caldwell 1991). In other words, polygamy, as practised by the traditional Yoruba, was not borne out of men's uncontrollable sexual drive.

Polygamy was widely practised in Africa, especially among the Yoruba before the advent of Islam and Christianity (Bolarinwa 2016:78). However, the Islamic practice of polygamy was similar to what the Yoruba were already practising except that the polygamy in Islam was for religious purposes. Muslim men were allowed to marry up to four wives if they had the wherewithal. This attracted many Yoruba people, including the traditional rulers, to Islam. Christian missionaries who came to preach the gospel to the Yoruba in the nineteenth century found polygamy inimical to the spread of the gospel. In his book, *Polygamy and the African Churches: a Biblical Appraisal of an African Marriage System*, Andrew Olu Igenozu (2003:3) notes that

polygamy has been at the very heart of the marriage debate within the churches in Africa from the mid-nineteenth century and onwards, in the face of the insistence of the white missionaries on monogamy.

Stanley H. Childs (1946), an expatriate in Nigeria in the early twentieth century, admitted that the missionaries held the strong position that Christian marriage must be monogamous for converts in Nigeria. Ojo and Adedokun (2016:474) trace the beginning of the polygamy controversy in African Christianity to the Lambeth Conference of 1868 where it was stated in Resolution 23 that 'polygamy poses one of the sharpest conflicts between the faith and particular culture'. The resolution further recognised monogamy as the will of God for humankind. Resolution 5 of the 1888 conference stated how the church was to handle polygamists. Polygamists were not to

be admitted to baptism, but that they be accepted as candidates and kept under Christian instruction until such a time they shall be in position to accept the Lord Jesus Christ. (Ojo and Adedokun 2016:475)

This viewpoint was strongly promoted by the missionaries sent to Africa without any biblical justification for it. At the 1926 conference of the Protestant Missions in Belgium, participants blamed the failure of Christian missions in Africa on Africans' inability to do away with their cultural practices among which was polygamy (Ayandele 1966).

The missionaries' rigidity on monogamy led to dissensions and conflicts with African converts so that, when Africans later found freedom to establish indigenous churches, they admitted polygamists as members. They believed that polygamy was not inconsistent with Christianity and was both cultural and biblical (Ayandele 1966:197–202). They welcomed polygamists into their congregations unconditionally and those who could not join the African indigenous churches converted to Islam (Ojo and Adalakun 2016:477). However, the Pentecostal and charismatic movements, which emerged in the 1970s and are evangelical in their worldview, continue to uphold the nineteenth-century missionaries' teachings on marriage. Pearce (2012) and I (Adalakun 2017) have independently explored how leaders of Pentecostal and charismatic movements in Nigeria use human emotions such as fear, guilt, and shame to instil conservative sexual concepts in their members. Both the DCLM and MFM employ these emotions, rather than the Bible, in arguing for the inappropriateness of polygamy.

DCLM Teachings on Marriage and Polygamy

Deeper Christian Life Ministry was founded by Pastor W. O. Kumuyi, formerly a lecturer in the College of Education in Lagos, as a Bible study group in his residence, Flat 2, University of Lagos, in 1973 (Ojo 1988). Kumuyi stated from the onset that the group would not metamorphose to a denomination but this changed in 1982 when he declared that a church had sprung up. The church thereafter planted branches in major cities in Nigeria. The success of DCLM can be attributed to various factors. The factors include evangelism, publication of tracts and books, organisation of house fellowship, the personality and charisma of Kumuyi, and occasional programmes organised by the church (Ojo 1988).

Every branch of DCLM has a marriage committee which is saddled with the responsibilities of guiding members to abide by the teachings and practices of the church on marriage. DCLM regards marriage as a sacred institution created by God (Kumuyi 2020). It is a legal union of a mature man and a grown-up woman, which enables them to live together as husband and wife (Kumuyi 2010:13). The church also teaches that 'marriage is one of God's methods to keep men and women free from fornication and immorality' (Kumuyi 1998:101), and should be seen as 'shared life, shared love, shared joy, shared

responsibility and shared destiny’ (Kumuyi 2009:3). To forestall engaged couples having sexual intercourse before marriage, DCLM advises unmarried couples to avoid living or staying together. They should not pay each other any visit without a third party who will be monitoring their conversation. Kumuyi (2010) encourages DCLM members to be serious with marriage because marital problems constitute the greatest cause of backsliding among Christians. Parents are to pray for their children and, as soon as the children become teenagers, parents must teach them how to seek and know the will of God ‘in all areas of their life with a subtle hint at marriage at the beginning’ (Kumuyi 2010:3). A vibrant relationship with the Lord, perception and discernment of God’s guidance, a regular, dynamic, and effective prayer life, and active faith in God are the necessary spiritual preparations for marriage. Other preparations include physical, social, and mental preparations.

DCLM derives four marital principles from its interpretation of John 2:1–11 which contains the story of the wedding at Cana of Galilee. First, the wedding was not a joining of a man and a second woman. This is a reference to polygamy or marriage after divorce. Second, the wedding was not the marriage of a lady without the parent’s consent. This is a reference to 1 Corinthians 7:38. Third, it was not the marriage of an Israelite with a heathen or an unbeliever; and lastly, it was not the wedding of a pregnant woman who was almost ready to deliver. This is a reference to premarital sex (Kumuyi 1998:116). These four points are the cardinal principles on which the teachings of DCLM on marriage are based. While it is true that John 2:1–11 is a narrative about a wedding ceremony that Jesus and his disciples attended, the four points highlighted by DCLM from the story are products of eisegesis. The passage says nothing about ‘joining a man and a woman’, or seeking the consent of the bride’s parents. The aim of the author of John is to prove through signs and miracles that Jesus is the son of God (see also John 20:30–31).

DCLM forbids members to engage in polygamy because it is a sin. In a message Kumuyi preached on polygamy, he asserts that polygamy is against the Bible and traces the beginning of polygamous relationships to the desire of men to be in the company of more than one woman (Dalama 2022). The definition of polygamy, according to Kumuyi, is broader than its conventional definition. Polygamous relationships begin when married couples enjoy the company of

persons other than their spouses. Such persons can be marriage counsellors or pastors in their congregations.

DCLM states categorically that

God expects those who are wrongly married (those joined to a man whose first wife is still alive) to make right their ways before God and come out of sin (Ezra 10:1–5). (Kumuyi 1998:108)

Kumuyi cites Genesis 29:29–32 and 30:1–2, Matthew 19:4–6, and Ephesians 5:31 to substantiate that polygamy is a wrong type of marriage and a sin against God which must be avoided by believers. In Ezra 10:1–5, the Israelites who returned from captivity were requested to send away their pagan wives. Interpreting Ezra 10:1–5, the DCLM equates polygamy with marrying foreign women. That is, women who are wives in a polygamous relationship are ‘pagan’ or ‘foreign women’ who must be sent away as it was done in Ezra’s time.

It is to be noted that the Roman Catholic Church and evangelical churches in Nigeria do not support polygamy as an ideal marriage. The major contention is how to address converts who were polygamists before they converted to Christianity. The DCLM claims that no one can be a Christian and a polygamist at the same time. Married women who are not the first wives of their spouses are believed to be in adulterous relationships from which they need to repent. Thus, they are asked to separate from their spouses with their children. Such a separation is a necessary restitution which a godly man must do without delay. In DCLM, restitution is a core practice which must follow one’s decision to believe in Jesus. It is defined as

making amends for wrongs done against our fellow-men [*sic*], restoring stolen things to their rightful owners, paying debts, giving back where one has defrauded, making confessions to the offended and apologizing to those slandered so as to have a conscience void of offence toward God and man. (Deeper Christian Life Ministry 2021)

Applying this to marriage, DCLM believes that the restitution for a polygamist is to ‘divorce’ his numerous wives and retain the first wife who is believed to be the woman God wanted the polygamist to marry. A man can only have one wife. Other women living with him as ‘wives’ are not his wives. Both the polygamist and the other women are all in an adulterous relationship from which they must repent.

DCLM goes further to state that any Christian who remarries after divorce is a polygamist and such remarriage is invalid. Similarly, those who have had children with other persons before they married their current spouses are considered as polygamists. Such people must have had the children when they were teenagers but did not marry the partners through which they had the children. A DCLM member who impregnates a woman is advised to marry the woman after passing through some disciplinary measures (Adelakun 2022).¹ Curiously too, in Yorubaland, it is believed that a woman through whom one has a baby is more than a concubine. In other words, such a woman is more or less regarded as a wife. Probably, DCLM, founded by Kumuyi, being Yoruba, is influenced by this belief.

In summary, DCLM’s concept of an ideal marriage is a union between a man and a woman who have never married or had children before coming together as husband and wife. Anything outside this is regarded as a deviation from the will of God. Such deviation includes polygamy. The church is silent about marrying single mothers. Pastor Kumuyi’s remarriage after the demise of his first wife is an indication that widows are permitted to remarry.

MFM’s Doctrinal Position on Marriage and Polygamy

Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries was founded by Dr Daniel K. Olukoya as a prayer group in his sitting room in 1989. The prayer group metamorphosed into a church on April 24, 1994. Dr Olukoya, a native of Ondo town in Ondo State, Nigeria, was born on July 15, 1956, to Mr and Mrs Amos Olukoya who were members of Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) (Ajani 2013:80). He attended

¹ From an interview conducted with Bunmi Awojodu, former students’ pastor. In the interview, Awojodu asserted that DCLM does not force such people into marriage. The church is interested in their repentance.

the University of Lagos in 1974 where he studied microbiology and the University of Reading, United Kingdom, where he got his Doctor of Philosophy degree (PhD) in molecular genetics in 1984. He was a secondary school teacher before he became a research assistant at the National Institute of Medical Research, Yaba, Lagos, where he rose to the rank of deputy director before he resigned. He married Shade Adesanya in 1989 and the marriage was blessed with a child, Toluwani Elijah, after waiting for about fifteen years (Omotoye 2011:188).

Dr Olukoya belonged to the CAC before he founded MFM. Thus, his teachings, which constitute the beliefs and practices of MFM, reflect his conservative CAC background. He is well versed in using Yoruba traditional beliefs as the context for interpreting the Bible in order to attract his audience's attention and to arouse them to pray fervently. MFM is described on its website as

an end-time church [...] where a sinner enters with two options: he either repents or does not come back, contrary to the present day church where sinners are comfortable and find things so easy and convenient. (Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries 2021)

Olukoya boasts in one of his books that

With all humility I want to declare that trained members of the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries belong to the class of combatant spiritual soldiers. Other believers may decide to live like civilians in army uniform, but the kind of end-time believers which God had mandated me to raise up, cannot afford the luxury of living carelessly in the battle field. (1999b:9)

This is evident in the manner by which members engage in 'warfare prayer' which involves shouting and physical demonstrations such as jerking and swinging hands and legs as if in a physical battle.

Olukoya (2014) believes that outside a believer's decision to become a Christian, the next important decision is the decision to choose a marriage partner. The decision to marry determines one's destiny and it is critical. In

addition, the next worst thing after hellfire is problematic marriage. He encourages Christians to defend their marriages against the wicked arrows of the devil which can bring disharmony and intractable problems to Christian homes. MFM claims that marriage was instituted by God; therefore instructions on it must come from God. Likewise, one should not be influenced by the flesh in choosing a marriage partner (Olukoya 1999a). Marriage should be between a man and a woman, not a man and a man or a woman and a woman, and is meant for those who are physically, materially, and spiritually mature. The minimum age for one to get married as a man and woman is 21 and 18 respectively. Marriage is recommended as a panacea to lust and sexual sins especially, for those who are mature enough to marry. MFM believes that bachelors and spinsters must pray before choosing their partners as this will help them to avoid marrying witches and destiny destroyers. Sex outside marriage is seen as a destiny killer which has successfully destroyed millions of destinies (Olukoya 2012a:9). The church warns people to shun extramarital affairs because ‘immorality and sexual intercourse outside marriage attract strange spirits that move from one person to the other’ (Olukoya 2012b:91). In addition, Olukoya notes that

any man or woman that you come across and he or she does not want to wait for marriage before sex is not a believer but a sex addict. (2014:1)

Pre-marital sex is a wrong foundation for marriage. Olukoya believes that many marital problems can be traced to lack of good foundation.

MFM defines polygamy in broad terms. It is a situation where a man has more than one wife. Polygamy also involves having extramarital affairs. For singles, polygamy is having multiple girlfriends and boyfriends concurrently. Women or men, whether married or unmarried, who enjoy being in the company of the opposite sex are polygamous, even when they do not have sex. Having ‘strange women’ and concubines is polygamy. MFM prohibits polygamy as a form of marriage (Debs Devotion 2020). Olukoya (1999a) notes that polygamy was common in Africa prior to the emergence of Christianity. He states further that polygamy is not the will of God and will never work as a form of Christian marriage. Like the DCLM, MFM demands that polygamists who are converted to Christianity must divorce all their wives except the first wives. Even with

that, such people cannot be allowed to hold any leadership position in the church. Dr Olukoya discourages MFM pastors from conducting naming ceremonies for children whose mothers are not the first wives of their husbands or children who were born out of wedlock because such children are regarded as 'bastards' (Olukoya 2009). 'Naming ceremonies' for newborn babies are usually conducted on the eighth day by religious leaders in many parts of Nigeria. The Yoruba stigmatise anyone who is regarded as *omo ale*, that is, a child born out of wedlock. A baby which is believed to be a bastard may not be christened in a naming ceremony. The Yoruba believe that such children always grow up to destroy family ties and the family image. This belief probably underlies the MFM's stance on children from polygamous families (Olukoya 2013).

MFM believes that polygamy has destructive effects which Christians who are from polygamous homes must pray against. People from polygamous families who are having difficulty having meaningful relationships are being inhibited by a manifestation of the spirit of polygamy. Such people must pray violent prayers to be detached from polygamy because it is a breeding ground for envy, rivalry, evil competition, and lack of peace. It is the major cause of female oppression, teenage pregnancy, promiscuity, premature death, high maternal mortality rate, mental illness, and suicide (Debs Devotion 2020). Some of these problems often extend to the third or fourth generation.

In addition, MFM considers polygamy as a manifestation of marine spirits (Olukoya 1999b:58-59):

Polygamy is a common African practice, especially among riverine communities. Hardly can you find a man who practices monogamy among those who come from riverine areas. For people from those areas, monogamy is an abomination rather than the norm. What do you expect from a man who has six wives? You can be sure that at least one of them is a member of the marine kingdom. If you visit their homes, you will see that all the wives are sharing everything common. Their children also share everything in common. Such a situation is a breeding ground for multiple demonic bondages. As they

share everything, they also become initiated (Olukoya 1999b:58-59).

In Yoruba cosmology, it is believed that there are spirits living in rivers, seas, and oceans. The abode of such spirits is known as the marine kingdom. Awolalu (1996:46) explains the Yoruba belief in 'marine spirit[s]' thus,

As there are spirits in the earth, so the Yoruba believe that there are spirits dwelling in the rivers, lagoons and the sea. These spirits are revered principally by those who dwell near rivers, lagoons or the sea and who believe that the spirits, if suitably provided, can in return provide man's needs.

Awolalu (1996:47) notes further that

the *ḷjẹ̀bú* and the *ḷḷàjẹ́* who dwell along the rivers, and the *ḷjaw* of the Niger Delta, firmly believe that there are divine creatures living under water, and that they have wonderful towns of their own; the creatures are thought to be light in complexion and gorgeously attired in coral beads and costly garments. People refer to them as 'Mammy-Water.' Stories abound among the *ḷḷàjẹ́* of brave men and women who have gone under water for a number of days together, have lived among the water-creatures and have returned home with some dried fish. We have also met *ḷḷàjẹ́* old men who bear on their bodies the mark of machete-cuts claimed to have been received from these water spirits.

It is clear from the above quotations that the Yoruba do not think of these spirits as evil. Marine spirits have nothing to do with the number of wives people marry. They are benevolent to people who seek their favour. They are part of the Yoruba ecosystem. Yet, MFM links them with polygamy. For this reason, polygamy which is generally considered a social issue is spiritualised by MFM. Any man who engages in polygamy is believed to be possessed by marine spirits. Olukoya believes that riverine spirits are also the cause of marital problems and that people from riverine areas are always tormented by polygamous spirits. He clarifies this further, thus:

Take a look at an average family from riverine areas. How many of them have settled homes? How many of their marriages are stable? Have you not discovered that most of the men are polygamous? They hardly stay with one wife. It appears strange that these men are incurable polygamists. It is funny but strange, that the sexual organs of most of these men contain demonic deposits which make it difficult to stay with one woman. (Olukoya 1999b:8)

There is no doubt that this assertion is based on assumption and superstitious belief which is difficult to substantiate. Apart from the fact that there are no statistics to support the assertion, Olukoya does not disclose his sources of information. As a pastor and a scientist, he is expected to cite Bible passages and scientific data to support his claims. There is no place in the Bible or even the Yoruba cosmological belief where it is stated that ‘demonic deposits’ make it difficult for people to have monogamous relationships. Polygamy, as mentioned earlier, was a standard practice in Africa in the pre-colonial era. It was not instigated by evil spirits. It was practised because of economic, cultural, and social factors.

Related to the marine spirit phenomenon is the belief in spirit husbands and spirit wives. MFM believes that it is possible for people to be married and give birth to children in the spirit world. The church also claims that polygamy is a common practice in the spirit world. It is also believed that a spirit spouse is a spiritual problem which is responsible for many difficulties humans face in the physical world. People who are married to spirit spouses often have marital problems. The spirit spouses always prevent them from having settled homes. Apart from inflicting on their victims marital woes and barrenness, they also create polygamous tendencies in their victims (Olukoya 1999a). Without any statistical evidence, Olukoya claims that the spirit spouse problem is not limited to Africa but it is universal. The belief in spirit spouses is deeply rooted in Yoruba and Igbo cosmological beliefs. It is known as *Oko Orun* among the Yoruba while it is *Ogbannje* among the Igbo (Bastian 1997). Unlike the Igbo, the spirit wife (*aya orun*) is not well pronounced among the Yoruba. Olukoya’s claim that Christians can suffer from spirit spouses is an example of the fusion of Yoruba mythological beliefs with the Christian message. It is one of the

reasons Olukoya's message is considered as a 'security gospel' (Ayegboyin 2005).

Olukoya (2011) is of the view that the polygamous home is a polluted home. Women in polygamous relationships are witches and their children are in bondage to evil spirits. Such women always look for diabolical means to protect the destinies of their children while suppressing the destinies of their stepchildren. Writing on witchcraft and family problems, Olukoya (2003:70) identifies rivalry among women in polygamous relationships as 'polygamous witchcraft' and explains further that witchcraft flourishes well in polygamy. He clarifies it thus,

The time has come to raise a cry against the Pharaohs of family destruction. Unfortunately for Africa, the enemy has also vomited polygamy into our lives and this has given us what is called, polygamous witchcraft. More than any other spirit, this one has destroyed so many potentials in Africa. For instance, a man married seven wives, six of which were witches. All the six witches descended on the only one who was not a witch and were bent on making a mince-meat of her children. (Olukoya 2003:70)

Finally, MFM believes that God, who instituted marriage, did not intend it to be polygamous. Therefore, those who are polygamists have violated God's principle for marriage. Children from polygamous families have to say some 'deliverance prayers' after they have been born again to be set free from the bondage of polygamy (Olukoya 2012b). The following prayer points reflect MFM's disdain for polygamy:

Every foundation of polygamy in my family line, break in the name of Jesus;
I release my destiny from the evil grip of polygamous spirit, in the name of Jesus;
I refuse to dance to the music of the polygamous spirit, in the name of Jesus;
Every problem connected to polygamy in my life, receive solution by the blood of Jesus, in the name of Jesus;

Every wicked spirit, sponsoring polygamy in my life, I bind you and cast you into the bottomless pit, in the name of Jesus (Olukoya 2012c:86-88).

It is clear from the prayer points that MFM believes that polygamy is imbedded with a powerful spirit that is capable of destroying destiny. Apart from saying these prayers, polygamists are expected to make restitution for their prayers to be answered. No woman is expected to be the second or third wife in a Christian home. Olukoya (1999a:78) states this categorically, that

It does not make any sense to pray fervent prayers while holding tenaciously to adulterous or polygamous relationships. A man is not supposed to have more than one wife, while a woman is not supposed to be the second, third or fourth wife.

Appraisal of DCLM and MFM's Teachings on Marriage and Polygamy

It is clear from the foregoing that DCLM and MFM share some similarities in their views on marriage and polygamy. The two denominations are conservative in their worldviews. They both define marriage as an institution established by God and a union between a man and a woman. They both aggressively reject deviation from their 'biblical' understanding of marriage. They also condemn polygamy as incompatible with Christian marriage, just like the nineteenth-century European and American missionaries. They both define *polygamy* broadly, to include sexual relationships among singles and polyamorous relationships.

Although DCLM and MFM agree that polygamy is unchristian, they differ in their conceptions of what constitutes polygamy. While DCLM regards polygamy just as a sin and disobedience to God, MFM goes beyond this by identifying polygamy as a demonic manifestation. To MFM, polygamy is spiritual. It goes beyond the ordinary. While the DCLM comprehends polygamy from a holiness point of view, MFM considers it from the security gospel perspective – people who want their future and destinies secure must avoid polygamy. Nevertheless, it is to be noted that the Bible neither explicitly

sanctions nor condemns polygamy as sin and does not call it a demonic manifestation. Without obscuring the fact, the Bible presents monogamy as God's original plan for marriage but also accommodates polygamy. Evangelical Christians generally believe that polygamy is a product of Adam and Eve's disobedience in Genesis 3 (Loader 2012).

Does the Bible recognise women who are in polygamous relationships as legitimate wives? The answer is in the affirmative if we consider the question from the Old Testament's perspective. The women married by Moses, David, Solomon, and other Bible characters, who were polygamists, are recognised as 'wives' and even distinguished from 'concubines' in some cases. (For example, Solomon married 700 wives, 1 Kings 11:3.) The Jewish patriarchs practised polygamy which was not forbidden in the Torah. The Ashkenazi Jews were forbidden to marry multiple wives in the eleventh century while the Sephardic Jews persisted in it till the modern era (Bennion and Joffe 2016). There are indications that polygamy was common among the Jews during the time of Jesus (Jeffer 1999). The New Testament authors recognised that there were polygamists among the believers. Such people were exempted from leadership positions. For example, 'The husband of one wife' (RSV) is mentioned in the criteria for bishops and deacons in Titus 1:5–9 and 1 Timothy 3:1–10. This phrase ('the husband of one wife') suggests that there were believers with more than one wife. Besides, the New Testament is silent on the children and wives of the polygamists probably because of the authors' understanding of the Old Testament stance on such women and children.

It has to be pointed out that neither Ezra 10 nor John 2, as well as other passages cited by DCLM, explicitly condemns polygamy. In fact, none of them address it. The foreign women in Ezra 10 were sent out of their homes because they were not Jews. They were pagans who did not worship Yahweh, God of Israel. The Israelites had been warned to avoid contracting mixed marriage with those who did not worship Yahweh (Exodus 34:15–16). This was done to prevent them from worshipping other gods. The Jewish returnees from the Babylonian captivity were mindful of this (Becking 2011:48; Myers 1965:55–56). On the other hand, there is a racial tone in the story. The Jewish returnees considered the gentiles 'unclean'. Marrying the gentile women amounted to 'contamination' of the Jewish race. Hence, the need to send away foreigners and their children who were regarded as mixed-blood children.

Both biblical and Yoruba traditions show that children from polygamous families are to be treated as blessings and not as nuisances or outcasts. Based on this background, this researcher believes that it is improper for a church that is supposed to be a harbinger of hope for vulnerable children and women to cast them away from parental and spousal cares respectively. As noted above, there is no biblical account to support this practice. Arising from this is that the theology of marriage among Pentecostal and charismatic movements is sometimes not a product of sound biblical interpretation but is based on their leaders' understanding and theological dispositions (Adelakun 2016).

Finally, women and children are not only subjugated in communities in religious gatherings where patriarchal rules are enforced, they are also always demonised. DCLM and MFM are two of the few Pentecostal and charismatic denominations where women are not allowed to take leadership roles. Women are viewed as potential sources of distraction and temptation during worship services; thus, they are guarded by rules which are meant to mutilate their beauties so that sons of God will not be lured and be polluted. They must dress according to the dress code enforced by the church (Marshall-Fratani 1998:294). They cannot wear jewellery (Ojo 1988:158). They cannot preach. They cannot serve as pastors in the same capacity as men (Olademo 2003, 2009, 2010).

Conclusion

This paper is neither an advocacy for polygamy nor an argument for monogamy. It is an assessment of the positions of two Nigerian Pentecostal churches on marriage and polygamy. Their positions, as highlighted in this paper, reflect a popular view among Pentecostals in Nigeria. It has created a dilemma which Pentecostals have not been able to resolve. The position, as pointed out earlier, is estranged from biblical teaching on marriage. It is a relic of the imposition of the Western culture of the colonialists and missionaries of the nineteenth century on African people which has continued to affect family values in the continent. It is the submission of this paper that people who were polygamists before their conversion to Christianity should not be forced to send away their wives and children. This submission is in tandem with Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 7:24 which says, 'So brethren, in whatever state each was called, there let him remain with God' (RSV). Suffice it to say that there

are many unfounded claims in the teachings of the two Pentecostal leaders under consideration in this paper. There is no boundary between their personal opinions and what the Bible says. Pastor Kumuyi is reported to have started correcting some of the measures he imposed on the members of his church at the inception of his ministry. He promised in a sermon that he would remove certain Deeper Life doctrines he himself set up (Ojo 2022). One can only hope that the concern of this paper will be addressed someday by not only Kumuyi, but Olukoya and other Christian leaders. The recounting and removal of certain doctrines which many people held as the word of God when they were first preached raises an issue of hermeneutical trust. How far can religious adherents trust the interpretation of the Bible by their leaders?

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