African Journal of Social Issues 8 (1): 2025
Available online at https://ajosdemar.com;
https://www.ajol.info/index.php/ajosi
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DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ajosi.v8i1.61

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p-ISSN 2672 – 5142; e-ISSN 2734 – 3324
Original Research

ASSESSING THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF HOLY MATRIMONY ON BETROTHED YOUTHS.

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ABSTRACT
This study assessed the biblical and theological foundations of holy matrimony among betrothed youths in Mbooni East Sub-County, Makueni County. The motivation for the study arose from the growing concern that modern Christian youths are increasingly influenced by secular values, leading to weakened understanding of marriage as a sacred covenant ordained by God. The objectives of the study were to examine scriptural teachings on holy matrimony, identify theological principles guiding marriage, and determine how these teachings influence the attitudes and practices of betrothed youths. The study adopted a mixed-methods approach combining both qualitative and quantitative techniques. A descriptive research design was used, targeting church members, youths, and church leaders from various congregations within the sub-county. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions. A total of 370 participants were selected using Krejcie and Morgan's sample size determination table, and the study achieved a high response rate of 92%, ensuring reliability and validity of the findings. The study established that the Bible provides clear and enduring foundations for holy matrimony, portraying it as a divine covenant characterized by unity, faithfulness, and mutual respect. Findings revealed that most respondents agreed that marriage should be entered into by believers who are spiritually prepared and guided by biblical principles. Theological teachings from Genesis, Ephesians, and Corinthians were found to reinforce marriage as a sacred and lifelong bond between a man and a woman. However, the study also revealed challenges such as secularism, materialism, and changing gender roles that threaten the sanctity of marriage among Christian youths. The study concludes that strengthening premarital counseling, integrating biblical teachings into youth programs, and promoting community mentorship within the church can help restore the sacredness of holy matrimony. It recommends that churches enhance spiritual formation and equip young believers with theological understanding before entering marriage.

Keywords: Holy Matrimony, Biblical Foundations, Theological Teachings and Betrothed Youths

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY
The Bible contains material based on tradition and assertions of faith. One significant tradition and model portrayed in it is marriage, which serves as a metaphorical language to communicate matters of faith. Certain unchanging traditions form the foundation of faith and are considered inherent to the order of creation, believed to be bestowed by God rather than being products of societal constructs (Baker, 2019). These fixed traditions not only contribute to shaping one's identity but also play a role in defining social roles. Despite changes in the form of marriage during Biblical

times, the underlying social roles remained unchanged. The culture continued to be patriarchal, with men predominantly assuming the roles of household heads, overseeing women, children, and slaves, who were expected to be obedient in all aspects (Guth, 2023). The Bible offers a clear perspective on the fundamental aspects of holy matrimony.

In the second creation story from Genesis, God recognizes that man shouldn't be alone, so He decides to create a suitable partner, a helper for him, stating, "I will make him a helper" (Genesis 2:18). God then crafts a woman from man's rib and presents her to Adam. Adam is overwhelmed with joy, acknowledging their deep connection and saying, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman because she was taken out of Man" (Genesis 2:22-23). This story emphasizes that woman is not inferior to man; she stands as his equal in dignity and holds a special place in his heart. The creation of man and woman for each other lays the foundation for marriage, as it says, "a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). Thus, marriage is not merely a human institution but a divine establishment from the beginning of time. Throughout the Bible, various passages reinforce the significance of marriage. Jesus, in the New Covenant, performed his first miracle at a wedding (John 3:1-11) and taught that marriage is a sacred and permanent union (Matthew 19:3-9). The apostles also emphasized the beauty and importance of marriage in the New Testament (1 Peter 3:1-12). St. Paul explained the mystery of the relationship between the Church and Christ the bridegroom, drawing parallels to the husband-wife relationship in the sacrament of Marriage (Ephesians 5:21-33). The Bible underscores the divine origins of marriage, depicting it as a sacred and significant institution throughout both the Old and New Testaments.

In a comprehensive analysis, Pastwa (2018) examined two fundamental premises. Firstly, the study suggested that the Catholic Church's matrimonial law system is rooted in the legacy of Christian personalistic philosophy, intricately woven into its theological anthropology. Secondly, the adoption of a particular formula signifies a noteworthy transformation in the perspective of canon law, moving beyond contractual language to embrace personalistic representations. The Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches accurately portrays the covenant of matrimonial love, skillfully bridging the realms of natural and transcendent elements. This description allows for the revelation of the relationship between Christ and the Church, reflecting the communion in Christian matrimony rooted in God's Caritas, and unveiling the Trinitarian foundations of holy matrimony.

The Apostle Paul discussed the sacred covenant established by God between man and woman. In his teachings, Paul assumed that elders and deacons would be married with children, and he encouraged younger widows to consider marriage. As an apostle, Paul also asserted his right to have a wife accompany him. Hence, the Bible presents marriage as the norm, while singleness is viewed as an exception (Bauer, 2018). Marriage is esteemed as a holy, righteous, and commendable institution. Therefore, when interpreting passages like I Corinthians chapter 7 and Ephesians chapter 5, it is essential to recognize marriage as a precious gift from God, embraced and cherished by many Christians with gratitude.

Dreyer (2019) proposes that many people divorce and remarry casually, but according to the biblical perspective, such new relationships are considered adulterous unless certain exceptions apply, such as divorcing due to a spouse's marital unfaithfulness or abandonment by a nonbelieving partner, as pointed out by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7. Upholding the marriage covenant demands a profound commitment to one another. During the wedding vows, a man and woman pledge to love and cherish each other, emphasizing acts of the will rather than mere feelings. Their mutual dedication necessitates nothing less (Gabriel, 2021).

Van Eck (2020), on the other hand, argues that the modern view of marriage among numerous mainstream denominations, particularly in the context of South Africa, is not genuinely rooted in the Bible. Instead, it appears to be more influenced by cultural factors. These impacts come from early Christian adaptations to the Roman Empire rather than from morals and standards formed from Judeo-Christian concepts. It is contested that the conventional idea of Christian marriage, which entails a monogamous and eternal union between a man and a woman, has clear biblical foundation. This is because different conceptions of marriage from the time of the patriarchs to the second century provide evidence that ancient marriage customs diverge greatly from contemporary interpretations.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In contemporary society, the sanctity and understanding of holy matrimony have increasingly come under threat due to changing social values, secular influences, and the erosion of biblical teachings. Many betrothed youths today approach marriage without a clear comprehension of its biblical and theological foundations. This lack of spiritual grounding has contributed to rising cases of broken engagements, unstable marriages, and marital conflicts within Christian communities. The sacred covenant that once symbolized unity, faithfulness, and divine purpose is now often reduced to a social contract driven by convenience and material considerations.

Church leaders have expressed growing concern that the youth are embracing worldly perceptions of love and marriage influenced by media, materialism, and individualism rather than scriptural teachings. This has led to increased tolerance for cohabitation, divorce, and remarriage, practices that contradict biblical principles of holy matrimony. According to Guth (2023), the shift toward secular interpretations of marriage undermines the spiritual meaning that the Bible attaches to the union between a man and a woman. As a result, many Christian couples enter into marriage without the moral and theological preparation necessary to sustain it as a divine covenant.

The church's role in preparing betrothed youths for marriage has been limited by inadequate premarital counseling programs and inconsistent teaching of biblical doctrines on matrimony. In many congregations, marriage preparation focuses primarily on social or cultural practices rather than theological understanding and scriptural application. Consequently, young couples lack the spiritual maturity required to uphold the vows of fidelity, mutual respect, and lifelong commitment that define Christian marriage. This growing gap between biblical principles and modern marital practice poses a serious challenge to the church's mission of nurturing strong Christian families.

It is against this background that the present study seeks to assess the biblical and theological foundations of holy matrimony on betrothed youths. By examining how scriptural teachings can guide and strengthen young couples in their preparation for marriage, the study aims to contribute to the restoration of marriage as a sacred covenant ordained by God.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study objective was to assess the Biblical and Theological foundations of Holy Matrimony on betrothed youths.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it seeks to restore the biblical and theological understanding of holy matrimony among betrothed youths. In a time when secular influences are reshaping the meaning

of marriage, the research emphasizes marriage as a divine covenant rooted in Scripture rather than a mere social contract.

The findings will assist church leaders and counselors in strengthening premarital counseling programs and teaching sound biblical principles on marriage. It will also benefit betrothed youths by deepening their understanding of love, fidelity, and commitment in accordance with Christian values. Additionally, the study will enrich existing theological knowledge and serve as a reference for future research on Christian marriage and moral development.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A theoretical framework consists interlinked concepts and ideas that are built upon established theories. It serves as a logical structure of statements, derived from and backed as the empirical data or evidence. By accounting for and elucidating phenomena, a theoretical framework aims to provide explanations for the underlying reasons behind observed occurrences. According to Kivunja (2018), theories empower researchers to draw novel conclusions, enhance practical actions, and foster the development of more advanced theories. This study was anchored on the structural functionalism theory and the solution focused theory.

Structural functionalism theory

Jennie McIntyre (1996) introduced the theory of structural functionalism, which views human society as a social body comprised of functional components, including families. According to this theory, society operates akin to biological and ecological concepts, maintaining stability through the proper functioning of each component. Any dysfunction within the society can lead to breakdown, disorder, and social instability. Functionalists distinguish between manifest functions, which are evident and intentional, and latent functions, which are less obvious and unintended, in social institutions. When each part fulfills its functions effectively, a state of balance is achieved, and the society adapts to maintain equilibrium (Willey, 2023).

The first tenet of structural functionalism holds that certain carefully crafted requirements must be met for society to survive. Marriage and the family are viewed as social institutions that serve a role in the complex society and must endure for the benefit of the entire population (McIntyre, 1996). The second premise focuses on the operational subsystem, where each social unit has a distinct function to fulfill. Functionalists contend that marriage's main goal is to maintain society by restocking its ranks and managing the population. Marriage also helps integrate newcomers into society while conserving significant cultural norms and values (Nweke, 2023).

The third element of structural functionalist theory emphasizes how important responsibilities within the family as well as society are to the social system (McIntyre, 1996). The theory highlights the presence of an ideal function that improves each component's functionality. Similarly, to how the human biological system functions, any failure in society must be identified and fixed to avert collapse. The structural functionalist approach is useful for identifying and treating marital issues, comprehending their effects, and suggesting workable solutions. It underscores the interconnectedness of marriage with the broader communal and religious aspects of society, highlighting the importance of maintaining equilibrium in social systems.

Solution focused theory

This theory was developed by Murray and Murray (2004) and suggests a solution-focused strategy as an effective structure for premarital couples looking to lay a solid basis for their future marriage. Premarital counseling of this kind assists couples in coming up with solutions that facilitate their adjustment to married life and support a long-lasting and mutually satisfied marriage. Solution-focused therapy concentrates on the current state of the relationship while evaluating the couple's strengths, cultural values, and worldviews. Solution-focused therapy, according to Murray and Murray (2004), is a brief therapeutic method that highlights clients' strengths and seeks to find workable answers to their current problems. It emphasizes customers' perceptions of problems rather than experts' opinions because it acknowledges that there is no one genuine reality and that knowledge and truth are culturally relative.

According to Murray and Murray (2004), a solution-focused approach in premarital therapy should help couples make use of the resources and talents they already have so they may work toward their shared future goal. The practitioner's main responsibility is to connect each partner's unique vision in order to promote the creation of a shared vision. If necessary, the counselor may include skill-building in the solution-focused premarital counseling sessions, such as communication and conflict-resolution techniques. The solution-focused paradigm is suitable to researching the efficacy of prenuptial counseling due to its emphasis on skill development. In a study on the benefits, applicability, and effectiveness of solution-focused therapy, Gruninger (2005) concluded that by assisting clients in coming up with and putting into practice solutions to their issues, the theory provides a successful alternative to more traditional methods. It has demonstrated success in relationship counseling. The idea offers suggestions for encouraging young people to enter marriage through the rite of holy matrimony and for encouraging them to make positive marital decisions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research serves as the foundation for planning, implementing, and analyzing a study. The selection of an appropriate research methodology is crucial in ensuring the effectiveness and success of original research. By employing a suitable research methodology, researchers can effectively achieve their desired objectives (Timans, Wouters & Heilbron, 2019). Mixed methods were used in this study. Hence, both qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed. Qualitative methods were used describe and explain relationships while quantitative methods were used to correlate variables using mathematical analysis method.

Research Design

A research design refers to a systematic and well-planned strategy employed by a researcher to carry out a scientific investigation (Abutabenjeh & Jaradat, 2018). The study used a descriptive research design. This design entails observing and examining the study variables as they naturally exist, without any intentional manipulation or alteration (Siedlecki, 2020). The primary goal is to gain the subject’s comprehension, without any influence to the variables.

Location of the Study

The study was carried out in Mbooni east sub county, Makueni county. The sub county is characterised with intermarriage amongst the local community members, hence provides a suitable location for the study. It also has a strong presence of the African Inland Church (AIC), which has

long upheld traditional Christian values on marriage but is now witnessing changing attitudes among the youth. The capital and largest town in Makueni county is Wote. The county has a population of 987,653 (2019 census). The county neighbours Kajiado, Taita Taveta, Kitui and Machakos and spans 8,009 square kilometers. The county has six sub counties namely Kilome, Kibwezi east, Mbooni, Kibwezi west, Makueni and Kaiti. The major economic activity is farming and the dominant religion is Christianity.

Sample Size

The sample size for this study was 370 participants, as shown in the table 1. Selecting the right sample size is vital for striking a balance between the cost of data collection and the accuracy of the results. If the sample size is too large, it can lead to unnecessary expenses, consume more time and resources. Conversely, an overly small sample may not adequately represent the population, potentially compromising the reliability of the study's findings (Mugenda & Mugenda ,2003). To ensure that the selected sample effectively represents the accessible population and meets the research objectives, researchers need to calculate the optimum sample size. This is essential to achieve reliable and generalizable results. By carefully determining the sample size, researchers can obtain valuable insights into the subject under investigation, making their research more impactful and insightful. The Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table for sample size was used to arrive at the sample size. From the tables, the distribution of the sample size is as shown in Table 1: -

Table 1: Sample size

Category	Sample
Church members	113
Youth	113
church elders	108
Pastor	9
DCC Chairman	9
Secretary	9
Treasurer	9
Total	370

Data Collection Methods and Procedures

The researcher recruited and trained two research assistants. The research objectives were explained to the assistants. Together, they distributed the questionnaires to the target groups. study's objectives were communicated to the respondents, and those willing to participate received the questionnaires and sufficient time to complete them. The researcher and assistants aided participants who encounter any difficulties in completing the questionnaires. Subsequently, the collected questionnaires were reviewed for accuracy and completeness.

Response rate

The study recorded a highly satisfactory overall response rate of 92%, demonstrating strong participant engagement and data reliability. Out of 370 distributed instruments, 341 were successfully completed and returned. Specifically, youths and church members had exceptionally high response rates of 98% and 92%, respectively, while church elders recorded 90%. Among the

church leadership, pastors had a 78% response rate, DCC chairpersons and treasurers each achieved 89%, and secretaries had 67%. According to previous studies (Wu et al., 2022; Sammut et al., 2021; López, 2023; Shiyab et al., 2023), response rates above 70% are considered excellent and provide a reliable basis for analysis. Therefore, the overall response rate in this study was both ideal and dependable.

Table 2: Response rate

Category	Sample	Responses	Response rate
Church members	113	104	92%
Youth	113	111	98%
church elders	108	97	90%
Pastor	9	7	78%
DCC Chairman	9	8	89%
Secretary	9	6	67%
Treasurer	9	8	89%
Total	370	341	92%

Source: Research Data

Biblical and theological foundations on holy matrimony

The study's first objective was to investigate the biblical and theological foundations on holy matrimony. Church members and the youth were asked five questions regarding the objective. Likert scale was used to present responses. Out of 215 respondents, 35% strongly agreed (SA) that the bible had elaborated foundations on holy matrimony, 57% agreed (A) while 8% were not sure (NS). (Mean=4.28; SD(standard deviation) =0.596). A Christian should never marry an unbeliever was supported in that 30% strongly agreed, 62% agreed while 8% were not sure (Mean=4.23; SD=0.567).However, 46% strongly agreed that Christian couples may separate, but not remarry, 51% agreed while 3% were not sure (Mean=4.44; SD=0.542).Forty one percent strongly agreed that if their partner is not a Christian, let them go if they want to such that 55% agreed while 4% were not sure (Mean=4.38; SD=0.553). This is in line with Dreyer (2019), who proposes that many people divorce and remarry casually, but according to the biblical perspective, such new relationships are considered adulterous unless certain exceptions apply, such as divorcing due to a spouse's marital unfaithfulness or abandonment by a nonbelieving partner, as pointed out by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7. Upholding the marriage covenant demands a profound commitment to one another. During the wedding vows, a man and woman pledge to love and cherish each other, emphasizing acts of the will rather than mere feelings. Their mutual dedication necessitates nothing less (Gabriel, 2021). Forty one percent strongly agreed that a woman was bound to her husband as long as he lives, 55% agreed while 4% were not sure (Mean=4.37; SD=0.558).

Table 3: Biblical and theological foundations of holy matrimony

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	SD	D	N	A	SA
The bible has elaborate foundations on holy matrimony.	215	4.28	0.596	0	0	8	57	35
A Christian should never marry an unbeliever.	215	4.23	0.567	0	0	8	62	30
Christian couples may separate, but not remarry	215	4.44	0.542	0	0	3	51	46
If your partner is not a Christian, let them go if they want to.	215	4.38	0.553	0	0	4	55	41
A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives	215	4.37	0.558	0	0	4	55	41

Source: Research Data

Respondents were asked to give evidence that a wife fulfils an important part of a man's life. It was noted that a wife is a companion, providing emotional support and companionship. Consequently, having a life partner to share experiences, challenges and joys enhances the overall quality of life. The respondents noted that the Bible emphasizes that it is not good for man to be alone, and God created a wife to be a suitable companion and helper for him. Accordingly, the concept of "one flesh" is often mentioned in the Bible, highlighting the unity and oneness of the marital relationship. Husbands and wives are encouraged to become one in their thoughts, actions, and purpose. It was noted that the Bible encourages mutual respect between spouses. Husbands are called to love their wives, and wives are called to respect their husbands. This mutual respect contributes to a harmonious and fulfilling relationship. Consequently, husbands and wives work together in partnership to fulfil God's plan for their lives. This includes shared responsibilities, such as raising children, managing the household, and supporting each other in their individual callings. The partnership of marriage is often presented as a source of fulfilment and joy. A wife is considered a blessing and a gift from God, bringing happiness and completeness to her husband's life. Respondents revealed that in the biblical context, the role of a wife extends to building and nurturing a family. The family unit is viewed as a foundational and essential structure in society. In the same vein, a wife is seen as a partner in spiritual growth, encouraging her husband in his faith journey and holding a shared commitment to God. Ninety three percent of the respondents did not affirm that a Christian should marry a non-believer.

The study conducted interviews and asked the interviewees the biblical and theological foundations on holy matrimony. It was noted that the account of the creation of Adam and Eve in Genesis serves as a foundational text for the understanding of marriage. God declares that it is not good for man to be alone, and He creates a suitable helper (wife) for Adam. The New Testament, particularly in Ephesians, provides a theological perspective on marriage. The relationship between Christ and the Church is compared to that of a husband and wife. Husbands are called to love their wives as Christ loves the Church, and wives are called to submit to their husbands. This metaphorical connection elevates the sanctity of marriage as a reflection of the sacred bond

between Christ and the Church. In Corinthians, the Apostle Paul discusses the significance of marital unity and the mutual responsibilities of spouses. The emphasis is on the importance of the marital relationship for the well-being of individuals and the family. Jesus references the Genesis account when discussing marriage, emphasizing the divine intention for a husband and wife to become "one flesh." This concept reinforces the inseparable bond created in marriage.

It was noted that Many Christian traditions view marriage as a sacrament, a sacred sign instituted by Christ to confer grace. This understanding elevates marriage to a spiritual reality, with the couple participating in God's divine plan for human relationships. Marriage is often viewed as a covenant, mirroring God's covenant relationship with His people. The vows exchanged during the marriage ceremony are considered promises made before God, symbolizing the enduring commitment and faithfulness expected in the marital covenant. This is in line with The Apostle Paul, who discussed the sacred covenant established by God between man and woman. In his teachings, Paul assumed that elders and deacons would be married with children, and he encouraged younger widows to consider marriage. As an apostle, Paul also asserted his right to have a wife accompany him. Hence, the Bible presents marriage as the norm, while singleness is viewed as an exception (Bauer, 2018).

Marriage is esteemed as a holy, righteous, and commendable institution. Therefore, when interpreting passages like I Corinthians chapter 7 and Ephesians chapter 5, it is essential to recognize marriage as a precious gift from God, embraced and cherished by many Christians with gratitude. The theological foundation of marriage extends to the purpose of procreation and the nurturing of a family. The family unit is seen as a foundational structure for society and a context for the transmission of faith and values. Drawing from Ephesians 5, the theological foundation of marriage emphasizes mutual submission and love between spouses. Husbands and wives are called to sacrificially love and honour each other, reflecting the selfless love modelled by Christ. Indeed, God recognizes that man shouldn't be alone, so He decides to create a suitable partner, a helper for him, stating, "I will make him a helper" (Genesis 2:18).

God then crafts a woman from man's rib and presents her to Adam. Adam is overwhelmed with joy, acknowledging their deep connection and saying, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman because she was taken out of Man" (Genesis 2:22-23). This story emphasizes that woman is not inferior to man; she stands as his equal in dignity and holds a special place in his heart. The creation of man and woman for each other lays the foundation for marriage, as it says, "a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). Thus, marriage is not merely a human institution but a divine establishment from the beginning of time. Throughout the Bible, various passages reinforce the significance of marriage. Jesus, in the New Covenant, performed his first miracle at a wedding (John 3:1-11) and taught that marriage is a sacred and permanent union (Matthew 19:3-9). The apostles also emphasized the beauty and importance of marriage in the New Testament (1 Peter 3:1-12). St. Paul explained the mystery of the relationship between the Church and Christ the bridegroom, drawing parallels to the husband-wife relationship in the sacrament of Marriage (Ephesians 5:21-33). The Bible emphasizes the divine origins of marriage, depicting it as a sacred and significant institution throughout both the Old and New Testaments.
The study inquired whether secularism, independent spirit, materialism, and feminism have invaded holy matrimony. Interviewees argued that that …

'....secularism, when accompanied by a decline in religious values, could potentially erode the moral and spiritual foundation traditionally associated with holy matrimony.' [Oral interview, 08-12-2023]

It was noted that excessive independence might pose challenges if it leads to a lack of communication or collaboration within the marriage. Striking a balance between independence and interdependence is crucial. Additionally, excessive materialism, where the pursuit of wealth and possessions becomes a primary focus, may lead to conflicts, as priorities may shift away from the spiritual and emotional aspects of the marriage. Interviewees noted that certain interpretations of feminism may challenge traditional gender roles, potentially leading to tensions in relationships that are rooted in more conservative values.

The study sought to find out from the interviewees what is the church was doing to pass on these teachings to young couples. It was indicated that churches offered pre-marital counselling services, where trained counsellors or clergy provide guidance to engaged couples. These sessions typically covered various aspects of marriage, including communication, conflict resolution, financial management, and the spiritual dimension of the union. Additionally, the church conducted structured marriage preparation courses that cover both the practical and spiritual aspects of married life. These courses included workshops, seminars, or multi-week programs designed to equip couples with the skills and knowledge needed for a healthy and lasting marriage. Interviewees noted that the church frequently organize workshops and seminars focused on marriage and family life. These events covered a range of topics, including biblical principles of marriage, communication skills, intimacy, and parenting. They provided opportunities for couples to learn and grow together. It was noted that the church included teachings on marriage as part of their regular sermons or teaching series. This integration ensured that the topic was consistently addressed and that the congregation was continually exposed to biblical principles related to marriage.

The study sought to find out from the church elders, through FGDs, what the Bible teaches about holy matrimony. It was indicated that the Bible emphasizes that in marriage, two individuals become one. This unity is not only physical but also spiritual and emotional. Marriage is portrayed as a sacred covenant before God, where the couple makes vows and commitments to each other in His presence. The marital relationship is exclusive and calls for faithfulness and fidelity between spouses, both physically and emotionally. It was noted that husbands are called to love their wives, and wives are called to respect their husbands. This mutual love and respect form a foundation for a healthy and harmonious marriage.

Elders explained that marriage is part of God's design for human relationships. It is a context for companionship, support, and the procreation and nurturing of children. From the FGDs, it was noted that the bible teaches that marriage should be honored by all. It discourages behaviors that would undermine the sanctity of marriage, such as adultery and sexual immorality. Marriage is presented as a partnership where spouses work together, support each other, and share responsibilities in various aspects of life, including decision-making, parenting, and household management. The church elders advised that Bible provides guidance on the roles and responsibilities of husbands and wives, emphasizing mutual submission, mutual support, and the recognition of each other's unique contributions.

The study sought to find out the theological foundations of holy matrimony. FGDs revealed that marriage is considered a sacrament, a sacred and visible sign of God's grace. It was explained that biblical teaching that humanity is created in the image of God is extended to the marital

relationship. The unity and complementary nature of man and woman in marriage are seen as reflecting the divine image in the world. The church elders noted that the marriage covenant is considered a reflection of God's faithful and enduring love. It was highlighted that the New Testament, in Ephesians 5, draws a parallel between the relationship of Christ and the Church and that of a husband and wife. The sacrificial love of Christ becomes a model for husbands, and the Church's submission becomes a model for wives, emphasizing mutual love, respect and submission within the marital union. Christian theology recognizes the role of marriage in procreation and the nurturing of children. Families are seen as fundamental units of society and the context within which children are raised in the knowledge and love of God. Christian theology teaches mutual submission between spouses, as well as sacrificial love. Both partners are called to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ, fostering a relationship of mutual respect and care. Marriages, seen as reflecting God's design and love, are considered a powerful witness to the world. The quality of Christian marriages can impact how the world perceives the transformative power of the Gospel. Some Christian traditions emphasize the eternal significance of marriage, suggesting that the union of husband and wife may have implications beyond this earthly life, echoing themes of the eternal relationship between Christ and the Church.

The study inquired how the biblical and theological teachings could enhance holy matrimony among betrothed youth in the church. The church elders advised that by viewing marriage as a visible sign of God's grace, betrothed couples can approach their union with a sense of the sacred, recognizing their roles as stewards of a covenant that mirrors God's relationship with His people. It was advised that

> '…through pre-marital counselling, couples can explore how to integrate principles of love, respect, forgiveness and selflessness into their daily interactions. This ensures that biblical teachings become not just theoretical concepts but lived realities within the marital relationship. Emphasis on the biblical principle of mutual submission and partnership encourages betrothed youth to view marriage as a collaborative journey.' [Oral interview, 08-12-2023]

It was noted that emphasis on communication skills, drawn from biblical teachings, equips betrothed couples with tools to navigate conflicts and express their thoughts and emotions effectively. Encouraging open and honest communication, rooted in biblical values, fosters a strong foundation for marital growth. It was noted that theological teachings on fidelity and purity within marriage would emphasize the sanctity of the marital bond. By reinforcing the biblical call to honor marriage and maintain sexual integrity, betrothed youth are reminded of the commitment required to uphold the sacred covenant they are entering. The church elders noted that,

> '……community support in the church is integral to enhancing holy matrimony. The church can provide positive role models, mentorship programs, and opportunities for fellowship to betrothed couples. Through these avenues, experienced couples can share their testimonies, offer practical insights and provide a network of support for the challenges that may arise.' [Oral interview, 08-12-2023]

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that holy matrimony is deeply rooted in biblical foundations that define it as a divine covenant between a man and a woman. The scriptural principles emphasize unity,

faithfulness, and mutual respect, reflecting marriage as both a social and spiritual institution ordained by God. From the creation narrative of Adam and Eve to the teachings of the New Testament, marriage is portrayed as a lifelong bond intended for companionship, procreation, and moral stability. These theological insights form the moral framework guiding Christian marriages and distinguish them from secular unions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends that husbands and wives become one in their thoughts, actions, and purpose, as per Bible teaches. Husbands are called to love their wives as Christ loves the Church, and wives are called to submit to their husbands. Husbands and wives are called to sacrificially love and honour each other, reflecting the selfless love modelled by Christ. The study recommends open and honest communication, rooted in biblical values, fosters a strong foundation for marital growth. It was noted that theological teachings on fidelity and purity within marriage would emphasize the sanctity of the marital bond.

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