



A duplication of marriages? An ethnographic account and assessment of the necessity for both traditional and Christian marriages for African Christians

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Abstract

This article is based on ethnographic research for a doctoral study that was conducted in 2016 among the Ndau people of Chimanimani, Zimbabwe. The article described and assessed the practice of some African Christian churches, especially missionary founded churches, to conduct 'white church weddings' after getting married customarily. The study employs a postcolonial approach as a theoretical lens. It argues for a hybridized form of Christian marriage that takes into cognizance the validity of African customary marriages in and for themselves, while at the same time appreciating the importance ascribed to 'church weddings' in especially missionary-founded churches. The study uses the case study of the Ndau people, but the phenomenon is widely practised among African Christians across the continent. In the article, doctoral thesis findings were related with Erlank's (2014) work on marriages in South Africa. The article offered description, critique (postcolonial, gender, class), and suggested interventions. Critical phenomenology was utilized to assess the findings and to expose the power relations that exist in the hierarchical treatment of African customary marriages as of an inferior status compared to church weddings. The economic aspect of the duplication of marriages was also foregrounded. The article underscores the importance of ethnographic research on religion as a human phenomenon in Southern Africa and beyond, as well as a critical assessment of the phenomenon. It provided several possible interventions for African missionary-founded churches.

Keywords: Ndau people, African traditional marriages, Christian marriages, hybridity, decolonization, social stratification.

Introduction

This article focuses on the duplication of marriages in a missionary-founded church in Zimbabwe. The duplication is as a result of the fact that African Christians are required in some churches to conduct church weddings after having married traditionally or customarily. The article is an ethnographic presentation of the research that was conducted in 2016 among the Ndau Christians of Chimanimani, Zimbabwe. Critical phenomenology (Chidester, 1994:227-229) and postcolonialism were utilized to assess the findings and expose the power relations that exist between African customary marriages and church weddings. The economic aspect and social-stratification caused by the duplication of marriages were also considered. The article treated issues regarding gender imbalances as well. The article related doctoral



thesis' findings with Erlank's (2014) work on marriages in South Africa. It offered description, critique (postcolonial, gender, class), and suggested interventions. Although the research was conducted in this specified setting, the findings can be applied broadly since the phenomenon is quite pervasive in Africa. Several possible interventions were proposed so as to assist missionary-founded churches in Africa to address the challenge of the duplication of marriages. The conclusion reiterates that Africans, irrespective of whether they are Christian or not, need not repress traditional African ways of marriage. This would be some real African emancipation that buttresses the assertion that Africans do not necessarily need to be Westerners to be recognized as Christian.

Case Study of the Ndau people of Chimanimani, Zimbabwe

The Ndau people of Chimanimani, Zimbabwe live in a region that was evangelized by the South Africa General Mission (SAGM) missionaries from the late 19th century into the 20th century (Dube, 2017). SAGM missionaries established a mission station in 1897 at Rusitu in Chimanimani, and later a second mission station at Biriiri, still within Chimanimani. The mission that they founded is now called the United Baptist Church of Zimbabwe (UBC or UBCZ) after missionaries ceded power to black leadership in the 1960s to 1970s (a protracted process). The Western missionaries' teachings have contributed immensely to the current situation where customary marriages among the Ndau are deemed to be insufficient for church purposes. Black Church leadership from the 1960s has not rethought its position on this and other issues (Dube, 2017). There is an apparent acceptance of the teachings by missionaries as gospel truth.

This article is an attempt to answer the following question: Why are some African Christians expected in some Christian churches to conduct 'white weddings' after getting married customarily, and whether the practice should be continued in its present form?

Methodology

The study employs postcolonialism as a research paradigm. Postcolonialism is essentially the critical academic study of the cultural, political and socio-economic legacy of colonialism. It focuses predominantly on the impact of human control and exploitation of colonized people and their lands. In the religious arena, postcolonialism argues for a hybridization of Christian marriages that takes into cognizance the validity of customary marriages in and of themselves. The study also appreciates the importance ascribed to 'church weddings' in missionary founded churches (Dube, 2017). The article underscores the importance of ethnographic research on religion as a human phenomenon in Southern Africa and beyond.

Using the phenomenological approach to collect data and postcolonialism as the research paradigm, the study sought to develop an in-depth understanding of the Ndau people's perceptions and experiences on the connection between and the necessity for both marriages among the Ndau of Chimanimani, Zimbabwe. Twenty individual and five focus group interviews were conducted. Seven themes emerged from the data. The themes covered married practices of the Ndau, the most preferred way of marriage, various reasons for having church weddings, perceived relationship between the two marriages, different views on the sufficiency of traditional marriages, thoughts on the expenses of church weddings, and how participants married and reasons thereof (Dube, 2017).

To avoid just giving descriptions of the findings, critical phenomenology (Chidester, 1994:227-229) was adopted in this article to assess the power relations that exist in the duplication of marriages that this article focuses on. Together with postcolonialism, critical phenomenology helped me to go beyond a mere presentation of the descriptive findings to a more nuanced and critical assessment. Chidester (2000:433) identifies two extreme positions in postcolonial



studies: indigeneity and hybridity. Indigeneity seeks to go back to the indigenous pure form, whereas hybridity neither focuses on the colonised nor the colonisers but takes historical change seriously and focuses on the diversity and mixture of religious traditions as well as on diasporic communities which emerged as a result of the cultural encounters. Hybridity was utilized in this article to show how both the African customary marriages and the church weddings could co-exist without any hierarchical form of treatment between them.

Perceptions about church weddings and African customary marriages

Growing up in Chimanimani, Zimbabwe, as a member of UBC, the author was convinced that the only credible and acceptable way of getting married included having a church wedding. In fact, he thought church weddings had always been part of the social fabric of the Ndau people of Zimbabwe. Churches like the Zion Christian Church, which also has some significant presence in Chimanimani, were to him inferior because they accepted customary marriages without making church weddings an additional prerequisite for its members. The author has, however, come to understand now that church weddings came as a result of Western evangelization and Westernization in general. Erlank (2014:30), writing on church weddings in a South African context, demonstrates that church weddings were never part of the social fabric of Africans until a certain historical point. Erlank (2014:30) mentions that: "Discussions of church weddings are not standard in accounts of African marriage in South Africa in the early twentieth century, before roughly 1940. However, from the 1890s onwards church weddings were becoming more common, and that by the 1930s more Africans married in church than did not." In more succinct terms, Erlank (2014:32-33) asserts that, "Weddings are far from standard in accounts of African marriage in the early twentieth century, which focus instead on process and bridewealth (*lobola*) ... Bridewealth and polygyny have a more extensive pedigree in African writing."

Underlining the indispensability of customary marriages, Erlank (2014:35) further submits:

In pre-colonial Southern Africa, wedding ceremonies were only one part of the often-complex transition into married life for men and women ... For Sotho-Tswana and Ndebele chiefdoms, marriage almost always rested on the transfer of cattle according to rules of endogamy or exogamy, from the groom's family to the bride's. Often the transfer of cattle was on-going since it could still occur after a wedding ceremony had taken place, a traditional wedding ceremony usually involving the process through which a bride took up residence in her husband's family's homestead or village. This constituted the general pattern of what I refer to as customary or traditional marriage ...

The aforementioned underlines the fact that Africans had their own customary marriage practices that involved traditional weddings, before the advent of the Westerners. Such traditional marriages are still extant, at least among conservative traditionalists and members of African Independent Churches, where church weddings are not a pre-requisite for social acceptance and/or for church purposes. The author has seen some few traditional weddings, the subject of which would be for another article.

Apart from the fact that missionaries required African Christians to conduct church weddings in order to be recognized as married for church purposes, Erlank (2014:30) notes that, "weddings were often a double-edged indicator of status, through their reference to sexual purity and its link to white frocks." There was and there is some form of status that is still associated with conducting a white wedding among African Christians. This in itself has caused some commercialization of the church wedding, making it too expensive for many aspiring young African Christians and in fact all ethnic group Christians who wish to get



married. This commercialization causes some social-stratification within African missionary founded churches. The ones that have some material resources conduct expensive church weddings and those that are not so materially gifted are embarrassed to have some less expensive kind of church weddings that do not need much resources to conduct. For fear of being looked down upon, the latter spend protracted periods of time trying to raise the needed financial resources in order to have expensive and impressive church weddings. In this case, the missionary-taught expectation causes some unwarranted economic divisions among members and, in a sense, missionary founded churches contribute to the burdening of some of its own adherents. This point will be revisited later.

In the light of the above, it is crucial to underline the fact that “church weddings” are expensive, at least in the manner in which they are currently conducted in UBCZ. They feed off a growing consumer culture and they are modelled on Eurocentric views on marriage (Erlank, 2014:37). Church weddings, seen in the above light, can therefore be understood to be a mere transplanting of Western capitalist tendencies associated with marriage practices (in the West) to the African soil.

The status as mentioned by Erlank (2014:30) also relates to matters of sexual purity. Wearing a white gown is in some African settings associated with sexual purity. The impression given is that the bride preserved herself and kept her virginity until the wedding ceremony. The wearing of a white wedding gown, however, does not necessarily mean that, in all cases, the bride would have successfully maintained sexual purity until the wedding day or wedding night. On the other hand, expecting only the bride to be sexually pure on the wedding day seems to suggest a skewed kind of expectation that does not make such kind of strict moral code prerequisite for the male gender. Churches in Africa need to be more aware of practices that they may have that perpetuate gender imbalances or gender specific injustices among adherents. Erlank (2014:32) explains how, in black weddings, there was a correlation between the white wedding dress and virginity. Depending on whether the bride was a virgin or not, the white church wedding could either elevate or diminish her status. The woman, and not the man, was exposed to a possibility of public embarrassment, exposing the gender imbalances that the church wedding perpetuated.

Together with an admission that church weddings only gained some traction in South Africa in the twentieth century, Erlank (2014:31 -32) also observes that, “By at least the 1930s, though likely around the turn of the century, church weddings had become the most common way for black Christians to marry, even if accompanied by so-called traditional rites. These marriages involved a plethora of material accoutrements including the white wedding gown.”

This article has drawn some attention to the fact that there is nothing in church weddings that make them inherently ‘Christian.’ Church weddings drew extensively from the Victorian culture. The insistence on mimicking the Anglo-American and European models meant that church weddings were costly and that many black folk were not financially equipped for such expenses, but they made sure that they got white dresses for their daughters and wedding cakes as well. In other words, black Christian families went beyond their means to finance some expensive church weddings (Erlank, 2014:31).

The teachings of Western missionaries were almost homogenous across the continent, especially as far as morality and family life was concerned. Erlank (2014:32) submits that “historic mission Christianity provided a common set of understandings about morality and family life which more or less cross-cut ethnic and also denominational differences.” These teachings were informed by the Western missionaries’ cultural views and understandings.



Indoctrination by Western missionaries caused some significant paradigm shift in thought and practice among African Christians. Consequently, African Christians in missionary-founded churches got to a point where they found simply conducting the customary marriage rites without conducting a white church wedding inconceivable and tantamount to going against God's will. In a South African context, Erlank (2014:35) observes that, beginning in the early nineteenth century, black South Africans, upon converting to Christianity, took up the Christian wedding, with the result that customary marriage, especially in the form of elopement became less common. Worth noting here, as mentioned earlier, is the fact that Africans had their own forms of weddings. African weddings involved a process in which the bride was taken to the grooms family by her aunts and other relatives, with pomp and festivities. The details of these African weddings will be provided in a separate article. In a sense, if it were not for the cultural imperialist tendencies of Western missionaries, these African marriages could still be very much extant. It is important though to remark that these African forms of weddings have remained intact in African Independent Churches' practice and in conservative African settings. It is a baffling historical fact that these forms of weddings refused to be buried completely as the Western missionaries would have longed them to.

Possibly due to the elevated social status that comes with holding an expensive church wedding, Erlank (2014:35-36) notes that: "Although a civil wedding in front of a magistrate was cheaper than a church wedding, more couples married in church than did not." There are, therefore, a variety of reasons why many African Christians would choose to conduct church weddings, among them the quest to have a higher social recognition. An examination of the different reasons for conducting church weddings reveals that the church weddings are preferred for non-religious and non-theological bases. In fact, there is neither a theological nor a biblical basis for conducting church weddings. Erlank (2014:36) stresses the point that most of the practices associated with the church wedding did not have much to do with Christianity but with Western cultural practices. The white gown for women, dark suits for men, wedding cakes, wedding rings, speeches, dances, honeymoons, and others, are all evidence to support this claim.

Colonialism, Westernization, Christianization and the Adaptation of Western Cultural Values

Part of being colonized involves mimicking the colonizers without critically thinking about why certain things are done the way that they are. It is famously reiterated that "the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed" (Biko, 2017 [1978]:101-102). African Christians have often perpetuated oppressive practices that the missionaries entrenched, without pausing to reflect on the efficacy and necessity of perpetuating foreign cultural practices over and against African cultural practices, that the missionaries sought to undermine and force to extinction. It is interesting though to see that irrespective of the barrage of attempts at burying African cultural practices, some have remained alive to date, which is what has caused the duplication of marriages that this article focuses on. Had the Western missionaries succeeded in burying the African marriage practices, for example, there would not have been any need to examine and reflect on the necessity of the current duplication of marriages in many African Christian contexts.

According to Fanon (1963:629-630), "colonialism is not simply content to impose its rule upon the present and the future of a dominated country, is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content ... by a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it." Westerners sought to create Africans in their own image. They wanted the African to lose his own identity and culture and to become a replica of themselves. About this, Thomas



(2005:180) maintains that: “To dismantle another people’s cultural story and heritage is an act of barbarism.” It is this barbarism that put African Christians in the quagmire in which they find themselves.

Considering the fact that these historic injustices were effected way back in the 19th into the 20th centuries, one would have expected that corrections would have been done long ago. Unfortunately, a colonized mind is not quite in itself in a position to extricate itself. Ngugi wa Thiong’o (2006:390) argues that when the mind has been colonized, a colonized people do not need any police to control them. In fact, a colonized people perpetuates its own colonization by shying away from its own languages, cultures, and in a sense, from itself. This is precisely why African Christians in particular have not been able to free themselves from the burden of the duplication of marriages that this article focuses on.

Colonialism, therefore, is not just about subjugation and exploitation of resources, it affects the minds of the oppressed in a peculiar way. It affects the way that they view themselves and their relationship with others. Colonization, therefore, is more about controlling the minds of the colonized, controlling their culture and how they think of themselves and their relationship to the world around them (Ngugi wa Thiong’o, 1986:654). Colonization was part of the imperial project that sought to subjugate the colonized to the powers and ‘superiority’ of the colonizers. In a lot of cases, it was meant to make the colonized have self-doubt and to seek to mimic the colonizers. Although decolonization is a virtue that all Africans have to embrace, Chitando, Adogame and Bateye (2012:2) hold that, decolonization is not an easy process for it aims to undo the self-doubt and inferiority complex that colonialism entrenches on the colonial subject. Perhaps the greatest challenge confronting African Christians is the fact that they themselves have come to believe that their own customary marriages are not good enough for church purposes.

Africans need to consider intently issues that relate to their own identity as Africans. Although African marriages can be misconstrued to have been all polygynous in nature, in practice there were many monogamous marriages as well. African Christian marriages would have to follow what is acceptable from a Biblical perspective, without necessarily compelling Africans to have ‘white church weddings.’ For Chitando, Adogame and Bateye (2012:2, 6), at the root of the Africanization process is the African seeking to reassert his/her African identity and revitalizing that which constitutes this African identity. Just as Dube (2022:86), notes that, “... missionaries were unapologetically intolerant of ways of life that stood opposed to their own ones,” Africans ought to be unapologetic about claiming back that which speaks to their own identities. It is ironic that the missionaries that were supposed to have been vehicles to show God’s love to those that they evangelized to are themselves found wanting. They presented themselves across the continent as people devoid of love and as intolerant people who thought only their ways of doing things were the godly ways of doing anything and everything. Shaw (2006:275) and Dube (2022:96) both emphasize the fact that missionaries were arrogant, intolerant, paternalistic and lacking respect for African traditional practices and cultures. It ought to be qualified, however, that not all missionaries were arrogant, intolerant, and paternalistic. Along the same lines, not all of them were antagonistic towards African practices and cultures.

Social stratification

This article has already briefly treated the issue of social stratification earlier. African Christians in many different countries across the continent still have to conduct church weddings after getting married customarily placing a huge burden on these African Christians who do not have the required financial and material resources to foot the two ‘marriages’. Unfortunately, the Church has not rethought its position on the necessity for having this duplication of marriage (Dube, 2017).



A close examination of the reasons proffered for African Christians' having church weddings after getting married customarily reveal a fundamental lack of understanding of the fact that there is nothing inherently Christian about church weddings. Christian missionaries, in their bid to eradicate African culture, perpetrated some teaching that demonized African marriages in their different forms (Masuku, 2023; Sepota, 1998). For the Western missionaries, the African ways of getting married were not acceptable for church purposes. The African Christian had to conduct church weddings to be duly accepted as married for church purposes. Otherwise, irrespective of the customary marriage that they would have had, the church would continue to treat them as unmarried and effectively as people living in sin because they apparently had not been married before God.

This raises some pertinent questions. What does it mean to be married before God? Is God only present within church walls and nowhere else? Does God only recognize church weddings or Western weddings and not African marriages? These questions and other issues regarding the duplication of marriages among African Christians demonstrate that Western missionaries were to a great extent cultural imperialists who sought to perpetuate their own cultural practices to the detriment of African cultural practices, including those of marriage.

Ngundu (2010) details how the Western missionaries 'copied and pasted' solutions to their European challenges, in an African context that did not require those solutions. He traces the history of church weddings in the West and shows that church weddings were not always part of the Western cultural milieu. The Western culture evolved to include and embrace church weddings. It is in this light that the Western missionaries then carried what was obtained in their own contexts abroad and planted such cultural practices in the guise of Christianity. In other words, what they transposed onto the African ground was misunderstood and mistaken to be the 'Christian' ways of doing things. It is no wonder that many African Christians today think that church weddings are sanctioned in the Bible, and are the Christian way of getting married and are a sign of marrying in God's presence.

Klauss Fiedler (1998) advocates for the abolishment of church marriages altogether (Dube, 2017). Writing from the perspective of a Christian pastor, Fiedler argues from his research conducted in Zaire (North-Eastern Zaire) and Kenya that a new process of inculturation is needed to preserve Christian marriage. For various social and cultural reasons, the practice of holding a church wedding, as is done in the West, works against the basic concept beneath a Christian marriage. He establishes this on the concept that what a people do in a society bears more theological weight than what they say. Fiedler deduced that the traditional ways of becoming married still prevail with or without church weddings (Cox, 1998:xv; Dube, 2017:73).

The African church has unconsciously caused a lot of strain on its own people. Fiedler (1998:52) asserts that, in North East Zaire and in Kenya, very few can afford a church wedding, but for those who can do so, it is a major status symbol. Church weddings have become even more a problem for Christian marriage because of another process of change in African society: the growing social stratification (Fiedler, 1998:52). For Fiedler (1998:52) the wedding ceremony is the case of a naïve transfer of Western customs to Africa under the guise of a Christian ceremony. The problem is that the church did not take the wedding ceremony as the blessing of an existing marriage, but as the real thing. Therefore, a marriage without a church ceremony cannot be a real marriage, or at least not a Christian one (Fiedler, 1998:52).

My research among the Ndau revealed that they have a rich and complex web of marriage practices. There existed before colonialism and Christianization different forms of traditional marriage practices to meet some different needs. Even those who could not raise bride-wealth were accommodated in this mix. They could work for the bride's family for a stipulated period



of time in order to earn the rights to have the woman that they wanted. This is reminiscent of the biblical Jacob, Rachel and Leah story (Genesis 29). Regrettably, the missionaries' uncompromising quest to erase the cultural practices and heritage of the African people caused Africans across the continent to believe that their own cultural marriage practices were not Christian enough and that they needed to be followed by church weddings before they could be accepted for church purposes (Dube, 2017).

It is worrisome though that Africans themselves have not necessarily questioned the rationale behind the duplication of marriages that they have been subjected to for centuries now. In conversations with South African women that are married customarily or traditionally, there is a sense that their marriages are inadequate because they have not subsequently held some white (church) weddings. This article seeks to rebut such an understanding and reiterate the point that African traditional marriages are adequate in and of themselves and that they do not need to be complemented by church weddings for them to be Christian marriages. For the author, what makes a marriage Christian is the fact that the two people who are getting married are Christian. It is not the church building walls, the white wedding dress, the cake, or the officiating Christian pastor or priest, that make any marriage involving Africans as Christian.

Reasons for conducting church weddings among African Christians

This article makes a bold assertion that many African people who have church weddings have them for the wrong reasons (Dube, 2017). The author found in his research among the Ndaus that Africans marry in church for, among others, the fact that they think church weddings have a superior status compared to African traditional marriages. There is also the fact that Africans are convinced that church weddings have more social recognition than African traditional marriages. In other words, church weddings are a status symbol to many and some of those who conduct such weddings do so for associated material benefits. Logically, biblically and theologically, nothing makes church weddings more Christian than customary or traditional marriages (Dube, 2017).

In the doctoral thesis, the author concluded that:

Ndaus Christians conduct church weddings for several reasons. These are because they:

- want to celebrate their marriages
- desire God's blessings when they convert to Christianity. It is regarded as God's biblical requirement
- understand it as a church requirement/rule
- get church teaching that encourage church weddings
- need recognition and acceptance in the church as well as general social recognition
- associate Christianity with Westernization
- regard it as a deterrent to unfaithfulness and polygyny
- regard church weddings as having wider official recognition than traditional marriages and
- want associated material advantages (Dube, 2017:v-vi).

In the ethnographic study that the author conducted, most of the reasons for conducting church weddings after traditional marriages were based on a lack of understanding of the history of marriages in Europe, from where the missionaries came. There were many other reasons that were based on flawed understandings of bible teachings. As such it is significant to emphasize the point that church weddings neither have a biblical nor a theological basis. Therefore, black clergy in African Christian Churches, especially missionary-founded



churches, need to rethink their theology on church weddings and the place of traditional marriages and weddings (Dube, 2017:355).

One major problem associated with church weddings in the manner in which they are conducted in many African Christian societies is their expensive nature. The study conducted in 2016 (Dube, 2017:359) found that:

- Church weddings are (too) expensive
- Church weddings favour the rich and are a burden for and discriminate against the poor
- Expenses of a church wedding have various negative consequences
- Expenses of a church wedding also have positive effects
(It ought to be stated that both the positive and the negative effects were given by the participants)
- Various explanations/reasons/causes are given for having expensive weddings
- Certain things that are included in church weddings cause them to be expensive
- Participants had experiences and suggestions on countering of church wedding expenses

Over the centuries, church weddings have become more and more expensive putting them out of reach for many not so well-to-do African Christians. All the negative effects of expensive church weddings are regrettable. People focus on the less important elements of the wedding, the material aspects, and in the process miss the important aspects, even the spiritual essence, of it (Dube, 2017:359). In the light of this, Fiedler (1998:52), emphasizes that “Church weddings have become even more a problem for Christian marriage.”

Contextualization has been a major theme in studies of African Christianity. Phiri (2012:255) mentions that “African theologians have been calling for the Church to be rooted in African culture.” Okonkwo (2003:214-218) suggests a simultaneous carrying of the traditional and Christian marriage celebration as a solution to this problem. Madumere (1995:50-51) and Hastings (1973:72) advocate three possibilities in which the harmonized function can take place. The first is that Christian formulas and a blessing be inserted within the customary ceremony at the bride’s home (or bridegroom’s home), while the second is that the customary marriage be fused with a Church service in Church. The third is that the couple is given a blessing in church or at home (without any form of marriage ceremony) after the customary or traditional marriage has taken place (Dube, 2017:360).

There needs to be a postcolonial hybrid solution to the problem of duplication of marriages among African Christians. A combination of the traditional and the Christian ceremonies suggested below may be a helpful solution to this complex issue (Dube, 2017:361-2).

This article makes several recommendations to African missionary founded churches so that they may be able to deal with the challenge of the duplication of marriages. It recommends that:

- African Christian Churches should combine the traditional marriage with the church wedding into one ceremony;
- apart from combining the traditional marriage function with the church marriage into one, these churches should teach that an expensive church wedding ceremony is an optional extra;
- these churches should also teach that God’s blessings are not only obtained through a church wedding or only within ‘church walls’;



- the churches should stop uncritically accepting European Christian marriage traditions. They should at the same time recognize customary marriages for church purposes;
- Christian theologians and pastors should do more to educate African Christians about the fact that weddings are not God's requirement and that they are not sanctioned by the Bible;
- these Churches should stop making church marriage a requirement for members' acceptance in the church;
- they should be actively involved in seeking solutions to 'social-stratification' that is caused by 'church weddings' in the church;
- Churches should stop calling those who only marry traditionally sinners;
- should anyone still feel like having church weddings, the church ought to teach and encourage such a person to have a simple inexpensive wedding;
- Churches should offer teachings, seminars, counselling, and sermons, among others, to help married couples live Christian lives; and
- Churches should emphasize the complementary nature of traditional marriages and church weddings instead of a hierarchical understanding of the relationship between the two (Dube, 2017:361-365).

It would be important as well for Christian pastors and leaders to encourage their members to have their marriages registered so that they get marriage certificates, irrespective of whether they only married customarily, combined the two ceremonies into one, or had both the customary marriage and the church marriage (Dube, 2017:366-367).

Conclusion

In line with prevailing Africanization and Decolonization discourses, the African should be enthused to go back to doing things the African way. Of course, this is not calling for Africans to ignore the developments of the past few centuries. In a lot of cases, recovering the uncorrupted African ways that used to be extant before the advent of colonization and/or Westernization, as well as Christianization may be impossible. Calling for indigeneity, one strand of postcolonialism, may not be realistic. Inversely, the other strand of postcolonialism called hybridity, is a much more realistic and easily attainable outcome. While acknowledging the importance that has come to be ascribed to the church wedding, African Christians should understand that their own customary marriages and weddings are in themselves sufficient and good enough even for church purposes. Using critical phenomenology and postcolonialism, the article calls for a hybrid form of marriage in which both the customary marriage is concurrently practiced with the church marriage. If this may not be feasible, the African Christian couple can seek a church marriage blessing shortly after the customary marriage, and this can be attained without any form of festivities and/or expenses. The African church has regrettably caused church weddings to be a basis for some social-stratification in the church. The lines have been drawn clearly between those that can afford expensive church weddings and those who cannot. It ought to be understood that there is no theological nor biblical basis for church weddings.

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