

## The Seventh-Day Adventist Attitudes Towards Polygamy In Africa: A Nigerian Context

Emmanuel Orihentare Eregare, PhD. , Ndubuisi Martin Emereonye, PhD (Cand). ,  
Kingsley Chukwuemeka Anonaba, PhD. ,  
Chituru Udo Nwachukwu, PhD. , Olayiwola Enoch Oke, PhD. ,  
Alexander C. Ugwukah, PhD.

Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria, West Africa  
Corresponding author's email: dr.eregare@gmail.com

### Abstract

The attitudes of the foreign missionaries in converting the indigenous people into Christianity in Africa, especially in Nigeria, implied denying polygamists and household of their faith and salvation in Christ Jesus. The non-Seventh-day Adventist (non-SDA) Christian missionaries and the SDA missionaries put forward monogamy as the basis for conversion in their missiological enterprise which opposes polygamy. Though the SDA missionaries turned 'deaf ear' to people's queries on the church's official position and imposed their faith, there are still the presences of polygamists in the church. Based on this background, this paper therefore examines why the presence of polygamists in the church if not that the SDA missionaries' attitudes must have tilted toward another trend other than the official position using a qualitative method focalizing analytical approach. This paper finds, among others, that the attitudes of the SDA missionaries, having asked polygamists to drop other wives, appeared hard, harsh, and racial yet polygamists are in the church. This study, among others, suggests that the SDA missionaries' attitudes should rather be characterized by love as it would not only influence positively the faith of the wives, that would have been dropped, but of their children, particularly, by according them the opportunity to grow in Christ onto maturity with others in the church.

Keywords: Seventh-day Adventists, Polygamy, Protestantism, Nigeria, Africa.

## Introduction

The attitudes of the foreign missionaries in converting the indigenous people to Christianity in Africa implied denying polygamists of their faith and salvation in Christ Jesus. The non-Seventh-day Adventist (non-SDA) Christian missionaries and the SDA missionaries put forward monogamy as the basis for conversion in their missiological enterprise which opposes polygamy. In "Early Christian Mission in West Africa" Isaac Boaheng, notes that the polygamists have had hard times being admitted into the membership of SDA faith either through baptism or confession of faith which are the two major medium of becoming members and enjoy the immunity thereof (2022, NP: GICHABA & MANDUKU, 2016).

Isaac Boaheng, in his studies, further set out to unveil precisely the first origin of Christian missionaries in Nigeria and method of their missionary enterprise when he reports that the Roman Catholic foreign missionaries, who were the earliest in West Africa, during the interregnum between the Pre-colonial and Colonial periods, put forward monogamy as the basis for conversion in their missiological enterprise which was obnoxious to polygamy (2022, NP). In like manner, J.F.A. Ajayi, in "Christian Mission to Nigeria" states that monogamy was also obnoxious to the African traditional system, which makes conversion difficult for the indigenous people. Though, Polygamy is a legal and general belief in African tradition, it is a belief system of the African descent. However, the Catholic missionaries did not examine it nor subscribe to it. They rather imposed monogamy on the indigenous people (1966, 15-17). In light of this approach, Boaheng revealed that the establishment of Christianity failed in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (2022, NP).

After the coming of the Roman Catholic mission in establishing the Christian faith in Nigeria, J.F.A. Ajayi, in his studies, unveiled further the progression of the growth of Christianity in Nigeria when he asserts that the Evangelical Revival re-visited and established Christian faith in Nigeria during the 19th Century (1966, 1-26). J.F.A. Ajayi emphasized that the protestant, through the Evangelical, also took a clue from the Roman Catholic mission in making converts of the indigenous people through monogamy as a standard

belief system that qualifies the indigenous people in being members of the church. In addition to their methodology for mission, the Evangelical targeted the elite and ruling members of the Nigerian society and tried to convert them and also added their love for politics into it. They did not stop at that, they imposed their socio-cultural (education, craft training and printing) belief systems alongside Christian mission on the people. This multiplicity of approach consequently led to not only their failure but were tagged admitting indigenous people into the Christian church as racial and not biblical. They were also harsh and hasty in their missionary approach because the indigenous people were not given much time to study further on the truth about monogamy and stigmatizing them (1966, 26. See also Eregare 2018:3-6). According to EREGARE, E .O. "Seventh-day Adventist Missionary Enterprise in Africa (1914-1940): A Nigerian Narrative" states that amidst this socio-cultural and religious backdrops, particularly in the early twentieth century, the Nigerian Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDAC) was born in 1914. The SDA missionaries also came to Nigeria with the belief that monogamy is the basis to be a Christian or be a member of the SDA and enjoy all the rights and privileges accrued to it. But, it has been discovered that there were polygamists in the church who were baptized, held various positions in the church and also contributed immensely to the growth of the church through mission and selfishless giving (2018: 3-18).

This study, therefore, rather focuses its arguments on why the SDA missionaries' attitudes tilted towards admitting polygamists into the church, hold church positions and its implication to mission regardless of the church's position. It focuses, in addition, on the reasons and circumstances behind this phenomenon which had never been addressed. The evidence is shown in the dearth of literature on this subject matter which this study attempts to fill the gap. This study employed qualitative method using secondary materials and especially primary materials (oral interview of polygamist and monogamists in the SDA to create a balanced fact), memo, and focalizing analytical approach to this study.

The discussions on this study are subsumed under the following sub-headings: (1) General Thoughts and Essence

of Polygamy (2) Friction between Monogamy and Polygamy in Africa (3) The Missionaries Attitudes in Converting the African Indigenous people (4) General Seventh -day Adventist Philosophy on Marriage and Mission (5) An Insight on the Attitudes of the SDA Church toward Polygamists in Nigeria from 1914 to Present (6) Impacts of the Polygamists in the Church from 1914 till Present.

### **General Thoughts and Essence of Polygamy in Nigeria**

Polygamy, according to T.A. Falaye, S. Wunderick and E. Boserup, in their studies, traced the history of polygamy that it had been legally in existence before human recorded history at both local and global levels (2006,18-28; 2009,17-18; 1990, 50-100). J.K. Kahiga, in his work "Polygamy: A Pastoral Challenge to the Church in Africa", establishing its level of acceptability, stated that polygamy is a global practice and predominant in Africa. (1970, 119-147). He further revealed that polygamy in African context is a legal way of life and a symbol of wealth (1970, 130-147). T.A. Falaye, S. Wunderick and E. Boserup revealed the classification, communication, and flexibility of practicing polygamy as they hypothesized that it is classified as predominant because of its robust concept and development. In the pre-colonial era, polygamy is handed down over from one generation to another regardless of ethnicity. Polygamy is a classless practice, which implies that it is for both the lower and upper classes of people. Some African settings view it as a sign of wealth. From the prehistory to the present generation, this view that polygamy is classless validates a situation whereby any man, regardless of his social or economic status can marry more than one wife. However, at the coming of Christianity on the soil of Africa, it became an issue of concern and discourse (2006, 18-28; 2009, 17-18; 1970, 50-100).

Kahiga adds that Polygamy, beyond being legal, classless and symbol of wealth, is a legal way of life without any contention or adulteration especially in the pre-colonial Nigeria. Polygamy is a two-eye concept, which enables polygamists to see broadly beyond the practice of monogamy. It is viewed also as an insightful marriage relationship which influences positively every area of a man's life: social,

economic, and religion. This philosophy influences Africans in accepting polygamy without reservation (1970, 119-147).

In contrast, S. Kramer declares that, to the Western world, polygamy is understood to be based on ethnicity and duplicitous. It is ethnocentric in the sense that the judgment on what polygamy means is based on what each ethnic group believes in as its value. The West submits that it is not accepted as a religious practice but as an Asiatic and African belief. Just as the Sub-Saharan Africa and people of the Middle East believe that polygamy is morally acceptable, the Westerners believe that it is immoral (2022, NP). According to MAZ Yohami, in his article, "Polygamy and Law in Contemporary Saudi Arabia", avows that though the Western world believes it is immoral, there are situations whereby a man in the Western world has many wives but one at a time, accompanied with legal divorce documentation at every stage. Though this may not be the perfect practice by everyone in the Western world, there would still be cases where a man has many surrogate women (2008, 20-64) In comparison with the African worldview, Douglas J Falen, in his work, "Polygyny and Christian Marriage in Africa: The Case of Benin" proclaims that polygamy is a marriage whereby a man is allowed to have more than one wife concomitantly. While the European missionaries to Nigeria still, in his view, further states that though polygamy is a pagan practice, the natives viewed it as a cultural norm. Africans considered it as an anathema to detach from polygamous beliefs and practice as it informed their love for their highly cherished traditional beliefs. While the European missionaries attested to polygamous marriage as the devaluation of women and involuntary usage of their women as pawns of victims, Africans found the luxury of having more wives as a generally acceptable means to improve their standard of living (2008, 51-74; 2004:73-81; 2009, 17-18).

Polygamy, in its broad sense, citing from the book of J. S. Mbiti, "African Religious and Philosophy" is a relationship that allows a man or a woman to marry more than one wife or husband, respectively. This definition is connected to the Greek philosophy of marriage. From the Greek perspective still, the usage of the term polygamy comprises of either/or combination of male polygyny and female polyandry. From this broad perspective, polygamy

is never limited to Africans but also to the Western world. It is a global phenomenon. Nonetheless, polygamy is only predominant in Africa based on its broad, distinctive and predominant practice as a way of life (1969, 142).

**Specific Thoughts on the Practice of Polygamy in Nigeria:  
An Economic Implication**

The primary purpose while the stronger men engaged in polygamy in the traditional Nigerian society was because of the economic advantages. The Nigerian communities believed that the larger the family unit, the stronger the productive labour forces to increase family wealth and economic security. The family unit was based on a kind of division of labour.

While the male members joined forces with their fathers in the cultivation of food and later cash crops, the female members were not only in charge of domestic fronts but were also available for other supportive roles in the family networking such as trading and marketing of farm produce. It must have been both fashionable and desirable to keep large families to justify productivity in a situation where there were diverse economic activities. While some tilled the land, others planted, some harvested and sold the goods in exchange for other necessities of the family. Family labor was convenient, not only because it was relatively readily available but also because it was easily disciplined. The welfare of the family was at stake as such evolved motivation instincts by the stronger members. There were inherent sanctions for lazy family members which compelled cooperation with the family head, if not obedience (OYEMAKINDE, 2013).

In addition, it was the responsibility of the wives of the Farmer to ensure that her children worked enthusiastically for the father to earn her as well as them, his favor for which the other wives were competing. Competition bred excellent devotion to family fulfilment. While it was not a perfect situation as there were conflicts at times, it was a well-managed system especially when the husband had a domineering influence, wealth and discipline. Labour shortage was probably a reflection of the prevalent low life expectancy. For one thing, infant mortality rate was high and

life span generally short. For another health care was so poor that labour productivity in general could not be high.

Apart from the need, for this purpose, to keep women longer in child bearing, or in fact, the practice by women and their husbands to continue child rearing till it would be impossible for them to produce, there was the vogue, among men, for polygamy apparently to have many children as possible and indeed to use both the labour of the wives and their children particularly in the busy periods of planting and harvesting. That seemed to be their solution to the problem of labour shortage which featured forcefully in the traditional Nigerian economy and even till now. Although the greater need these days is for middle level and highly skilled manpower, employers have also been heard complaining about inadequate labour supply even at the unskilled level. Besides, since the old man's legacy would, in the end, be shared by his children according to their maternal groupings, children's labour force quite often bedeviled by constant industrial relations crisis, family based labour tended to operate with relative harmony (OYEMAKINDE, 2013).

### **Friction between Monogamy and Polygamy in Africa**

According to J.F.A Ajayi and E.A Ayandele, in their studies, agree that the Europeans came to Africa with the notion that polygamy is immoral while Africans have always viewed polygamy as the best foundational custom on marriage, thereby morally acceptable(1966, 12-68: 1969, 31-100). In the pre-colonial era, E.O. Egboh, in his paper, "Polygamy in Iboland" notes that every grown-up man marries as many wives as possible to enable him have as many children (particularly male children) as possible. African men prayed to their gods for the means to get wealth and take care of many wives. It is believed that if a man marries more than one wife, it is an indication of wealth, prosperity and power (1970, 431-444).

At the arrival of Christianity, E.O. Eregare, in his book, *An African Christian Church History: Seventh-day Adventist Cosmology in Edo/Delta (1948- 2012) & Ecumenical Initiatives*" states that monogamy was introduced to Africans as a prerequisite for conversion into Christianity. The natives viewed this contrasting idea as oppression. This

restrictive position was also perceived as a means to overrule the traditional belief of the Africans on polygamy (2021: 1-211). In M.A. Popoola's work, "British Conquest: Colonialism and Its Impact" affirms that despite the views of the natives on the mission work of the Europeans, the missionaries went ahead to establish Christianity because they were preoccupied with the fact that Africans were people without civilization or religion and even custom (2011, 30-34). Despite the beliefs of the Europeans about Africans that polygamy is heathenish, the C.M.S. Archival document, "Report of Station of the Archdeaconry in the Upper Niger for the Year Ending", states that the natives still upheld polygamy as a legal form of marriage. The document states further that polygamy was morally acceptable before the arrival of the Europeans or Christianity, the Europeans jettisoned the laid down traditional form of marriage. They forced the natives to make difficult choices especially the polygamists to abandon polygamy and embrace christianity by accepting monogamy as a prerequisite for the new religion. To the African mind, polygamy had ever been passed on from one generation to another as legal and contextual to their society.

In the colonial era still, the attitudes of the natives, in major cultural settings of Nigeria, towards Christianity became positive and developed enviably (1902, NP). Taking a cursory look at an archival material published in December, 1902 "C.M.S. Archives, G3/A3/0: Niger Mission. 'Report of Station of the Archdeaconry in the Upper Niger for the Year Ending" it states the reasons for the enviable attitudes of the natives towards Christianity. The material avows that the reasons were simple and attractive. If any indigenous joined Christian missions during the period under consideration, the indigenous people would receive superior treatment by the government officials and invulnerability from the government expeditions as forced labour and portorage (carrier services). Regardless of the issues surrounding polygamy, many young natives joined the Christian missions based on the immunity for converts. This implied that there was a slight shift in the conversion of the natives from the older married ones to the young and probably married ones as well (1981, NP).



The attitudes of the foreign missionaries varied in the sense that they were hasty, forceful, and in addition, the missionaries projected racial factor in their quest for Africans to adopt monogamy as a practice in Africa. They put forward polygamy as immoral rather than understanding the culture of the people and creating a platform to enable them to view Christianity as a superior and beneficial religion. They further used politics to advance their mission work. The socio-cultural and political factors made the Africans to view the Europeans' missiological enterprise as a racial issue rather than an immoral issue. The European opposition to polygamy, indigenous people resistance to change and acceptance of biblical truth, especially when it is coming from the White people, made the mission work of the early missionaries weak.

Examining further the strength of the foreign missionaries, Emmanuel Orihantare Eregare, in his book, "An African Christian Church History: Seventh-day Adventist Cosmology in Edo/Delta (1948- 2012) & Ecumenical Initiatives" avows that the coming of the foreign European missionaries, generally with Christianity to Africa, can be likened to the conversion of Africans from village to urban-life, from illiteracy to literacy, from superstition to medicine, from paganism to Christianity, from traditional institutions to Lutheran, Anglican, Methodists, Presbyterian, Baptist and even the Seventh-day Adventist faith. Besides, these missionaries used a restrictive position in converting many Africans (2021, 10-202). Also, E.M. Baloye, in his paper, "Critical reflection on polygamy in the African Christian context" states that this restrictive attitude made the Africans to view the approach as racial because the foreign missionaries did not put forward the position of the Bible in making converts. They claimed that monogamous relationship conforms to Christianity while polygamy was heathenish. This restrictive attitude brought a major conflict with African belief on polygamy which had ever been their legal and traditional way of life (2003, 20-30).

While the issue of monogamy served as a medium through which their conversion to Christianity would be based, E.M. Baloye, put forward the missionaries' harsh approach by further compounding the hope of the polygamists on their salvation in Christ that the polygamists would not

partake in baptism and holy communion, to mention a few. This, by implication, with respect to the natives, was harsh and hasty, as well as a denial of the rights and privileges of the ignorant to salvation. This European missionaries' restrictive attitude portrayed an attempt not to understand indigenous people African culture nor believe they ever amounted to anything but barbaric. They put forward without restrictions their monogamy view. This forceful approach thereby stampedes the African traditions (2003, 20-31).

### **The Missionaries Attitudes in Converting the African Natives**

J.K Kahiga, in his paper, "Polygamy: A Pastoral Challenge to the Church in Africa; Specific Challenges to the Evangelization in Africa" states further that the attitudes of the European missionaries generated some arguments in the process of converting the natives to Christianity; however, studies have shown that many natives accepted Christianity willingly. The challenges encountered by the natives due to the attitudes of the Europeans towards polygamists were very disturbing and impeded the rate of conversion of the natives (2007, 125).

J.K Muthengi, in his article, Polygamy and the Church in Africa: Biblical, Historical, and Practical Perspectives. Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology" tries to express the response to the attitudes of the European missionaries when he claims that the European missionaries actually looked down on all about the natives which generated also a harsh response to the Gospel they presented to them. This opposing response influenced the natives to putting up the attitude of resistance. This attitude of judging the natives at the point of conversion became a 'stumbling block' in converting them to Christianity. This happened especially in the sub-Sahara region, though the people were reported to have been with great willingness to support and be part of Christianity. The 'stumbling block' involved the idea that the natives must be converted through monogamous form of marriage. This attitude was not limited to the fact that natives must not remain as polygamist at conversion, they must also be restricted from taken water baptism and Holy Communion.

The attitudes of the European missionaries toward the African natives limited the conversion of both polygamists and natives thereby promoting fragmentation of the Christian faith. This attitude, on the other hand, led to the establishment of African indigenous (independent/culturally based) churches as the Aladura, Celestial Church of Christ, to mention a few (1979, 103).

A.A. Kyomo, and S.G. Selvan, in their studies, "Marriage and Family in African Christianity", point out the other sensitive aspects of the European missionary harsh attitudes towards the culture of polygamy. He claims that it, in addition, gave birth to gender issues on conversion of polygamists. The contention was based on "who should be qualified to be member after conversion?" Should the man and the first wife or should the women be accepted into the church without their husband's conversion? The attitudes on who should be accepted into the church membership rendered many women unmarried or left men miserable of being accepted as members of the body of Christ, if they preferred to be polygamists and at the same time be church members (2004, 10-57).

D.M. Majeed, W.R. Stent, and William R Stent, in their studies, avow that the European missionaries rarely put forward the Bible study on the Theology of monogamy per se as gleaned and this made the natives believe that the reason for their attitudes towards polygamy was merely a racial or ethnic bias (2004, 73-81: 2021:NP). R.N. Hunt and A. Phillips notes that the attitudes of European missionaries, in this regard, showed that there was a shallow level of study that could convince the natives on why monogamy was the biblical model and should be accepted by every convert of Christianity. For example, in Central Africa, the Portuguese' attitudes towards the natives in this region went as far stopping polygamy through tax payment. The tax was paid by both the polygamists and the single women. This was in a bid to enforce monogamy as a form of right marriage relationship on African culture, and probably with no recourse to biblical conviction on why they put on the restrictive measure, and the belief that monogamy is the Christian culture for every convert.

Ikechi Ekpendu, in his paper, "A Biblical Response to the Practice of Polygamy in Eastern Nigeria" implies the

biblical position of polygamy as sinful. Hence, there are two major schools of thought on the attitudes of Christians over the ages on the soil of Africa – the Restrictive and the Pessimists’ schools of thought. The position of the restrictive school of thought is that polygamy is sinful and pagan oriented (2015, 81-96), while the pessimists hold that polygamy is never sinful as long as it is permissible in the custom of the host community. Better still, the pessimists hold that polygamy is less sinful and not justifiable by Christian beliefs. The belief further states that individuals could still go into polygamy, if the man deems it right to adopt. The pessimists add that the polygamists’ wives and children could be baptized into the church because the church has no power to judge polygamous practices. According to D.T. Ejebobo, in his article, “An Attitude Critique of the Nigerian Churches to the Practice of Polygamy in Nigeria” shares an opposing view to that of the restrictive approach that polygamists should be treated with care and love because polygamy is an acceptable custom in the Old Testament. Therefore, since there are no justifiable texts in the New Testaments that warrant the total abhorrent attitudes towards polygamy, polygamy is not totally wrong (2021: 1-18).

### **General Seventh -day Adventist Philosophy on Marriage and Mission**

The divine mandate for marriage as deciphered by the General Conference of the SDA (ADCOM) states that monogamy is the foundation and divine injunction on marriage for family and it must be heterosexual as the case of Adam and Eve. The SDA church believes that monogamy is the ordained and perfect marriage relationship made by God in the Garden of Eden as a lifelong relationship. Monogamy is a bonded relationship that comprises the physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of the couple. The coming together of a man and a woman, consequently, is described as the theory of ‘one flesh’. The SDA church believes that the union between the two different genders (heterosexual) raises higher the bond between God and man. It is a witness of God’s self-giving love and covenant with His people. It decodes the sense of unity that should exist in every society.

Monogamy thereby reveals that human society should be exemplified with the sense of social unity and

stability (2021, 2013, 12-70: OLIELLO, 2005). Based on this backdrop, the SDA church submits that monogamy is the perfect and divinely approved marriage system without reservation. The SDA church believes that any lowering of this high view is like lowering the heavenly ideal (1996: 2013, 12-70). The position of the church is hinged on God's injunction in Genesis 2:24 – "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." (Emphasis supplied). By this, it is clear that God's plan for marriage is one man, one wife.

### **Attitudes of the SDA Church toward Polygamists in Nigeria from 1914 to Present**

Generally, from 1914, the indigenous people were gradually becoming conscious of the derogatory influence of the missionaries on polygamy that accompanied the establishment of Christianity particularly in Nigeria before the coming of the SDA Church. This, consequently, became a subject of discourse by scholars and non-scholars in Africa from 1960s in the bid to address the attitudes of the missionaries towards the polygamists while this work takes it further to address not of polygamists only but of their household.

The attitudes of the European missionaries were heightened as a result of the issues associated with the conversion of polygamists. The issues were: Should the polygamists be allowed to serve as church workers or not? Should the husband or wives or children be admitted into the Christian faith? What would happen if a man chooses, probably, the first wife? What would be the fate of the other women, if the later becomes the case? What were the dangers of asking polygamists to take one out of his wives and leave others? Would the other women not chosen by the polygamist be admitted into the church as members or not, among other pressing issues? (1999, 312, 22). In contrast, Zoaka, Josiah and Amagbaekhen, in their studies, "The Mission of the Church and Membership Plight of African Polygamy: A Reflection" queried in their recent study if the polygamists would need to break up with their multiple wives whom they had had legal traditional conjugal relationships in their times of ignorance? Why is there negligence in the application of the policy of the 1940 on polygamy through the contemporary local missionaries? (2021: 12-190).

Based on this socio-cultural and religious atmosphere, Eregare confirmed that the issue of converting polygamists became alarming (2013, 12-200. See also OMOTOSHO, 2020: EREGARE, 2022: EREGARE, 2018).

As Russel Staples points out, “polygamy is probably the most complex issue with which [Seventh-day] Adventism has had to deal [with] in its missionary enterprise (1982, 44; 1993, 13).” In her effort to find a lasting solution to this problem confronting SDA church, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Church decided to set up committees to look into this problem and proffer solution thereto. This committee set up at different times, “have produced three basically different policies” as tools for the SDA missionaries (1999, 13). They were the Policy of 1926, the Policy of 1930, and the Policy of 1941. The policy of 1926 states: (a) That in no case should a man living in polygamy be admitted into the fellowship of the church. (b) That preceding his entrance into the church a sufficient time of probation be given him to test out his sincerity in separating himself from this practice (1926, 132).

In 1930, there was an amendment of the 1926 position of the church on polygamy, thus:  
When polygamists at the time of conversion discover that polygamy is not biblical, the men may be probationer members by the recommendation of the field committee. They shall not have the status of full membership until they choose one and leave other women.  
This action cannot but bring injustice to innocent persons and should not be construed as endorsing polygamy in any way.

However, any one going into polygamous relationship after knowing and consenting to the truth of monogamy commits adultery. It is apostasy. The persons will be dealt with by the church until they repent (1930, 74-5; 1981:136).

However, according to Du Preez, Ron, the General Conference of 1941 “moved away from the more accommodating approach of 1930 to the following somewhat ambivalent policy:

1. That a man found living in a state of polygamy when the gospel reaches him, shall upon conversion be required to change his status by putting away all his wives save one, before he shall be considered eligible for baptism and church membership.
2. That men thus putting away their wives shall be expected to make proper provision for their future support, and that of their children, just as far as it is within their power to do so.
3. That wives of a polygamist, who have entered into marriage in their heathen state, and who upon accepting Christianity are still not permitted to leave their husbands, because of tribal custom, may upon approval of the local and union committees become baptized members of the church. However should a woman who is a member of the church enter into marriage as a secondary wife, she shall be disfellowshipped and shall not be readmitted to the church unless or until she separates from the polygamous husband (1981, 141-2).

This study focused specifically on why there are polygamists in the SDA church despite the church's position and its cause and effect to mission. There are various attitudes exhibited by the SDA missionaries. Ten missionaries with differing accounts were chosen to share their knowledge as either primary or secondary participants because of dearth of literature that addressed the accounts between the missionaries and the polygamists. Primary participants were those who had hands-on encounter with polygamists when they received the Gospel to be SDA members. Secondary participants were those who received the story of the SDA attitudes towards polygamists from the primary participants.

Ayuba Mavalla revealed that the SDA missionaries in the North tolerated the polygamists because the region is rooted in Islamic religion where polygamy is legal, moral and

generally acceptable. They were tolerated by allowing them to attend services, take the favourite among their wives but were not allowed to occupy church positions. Those who accepted to join the faith and stick to monogamy were granted rights to membership and the privileges thereof. Based on this narration, it implies that the missionaries, in this age, partly employed item No. 1 of the 1941 policy which states that one of the wives should be retained. By implication, this policy did not state which of the wives is legitimate or not (2022, personal Interview).

Onolapo Ajibade claims that the SDA missionaries never accepted polygamists in the church but that polygamist takes their first wives and drops the rest. In addition, he added that a man who once had five wives had to take his first wife and drops the rest because it is against the tenet of the church. He further added that the Bible had records of God conducting a monogamy marriage and instructed that a man should join a woman and not the contrary (Genesis 2). Jesus Christ attended a monogamy marriage (Matthew 19) (2022, personal Interview). Hence the punishment for offenders is dis-fellowship of any SDA baptized member that goes into polygamy and in addition, they are forced to divorce other wives (2022, Personal Interview).

Ajibade further reiterated that in the Western part of Nigeria, if the wives of the polygamists decide to join the church, they are baptized because they have one husband. By implication, this missionaries under this era were likely using the policies of 1926 (item 1) and 1941 (item 3). It appears that there might have been a gap of information dissemination on the particular policy for a particular period or no readily documents in the hands of every missionary, hence, the variance in their applications (2022, Personal Interview)..

In contrast to the submission of Onolapo Ajibade, Christopher Ogah, opines that the SDA missionaries from the present-day Niger Delta region particularly the former Mid-Western region in Edo region, back in its earliest age, were purpose driven and accepted all natives who were ready to accept Jesus as their Lord and personal Saviour. Ogah adds that the sole aim of the missionaries in the region was to raise followers for Christ. They simply accepted and



baptized all that accepted the Sabbath message and shown repentance, without necessarily going into the nitty-gritty of the day-to-day ethics and principles of the scripture or SDA policies on polygamists. The reason behind this was because the missionaries were number driven. They were concerned about report that would challenge others to accept Christ. Ogah opines further that a few of those missionaries were concerned about the “event of salvation” and not necessarily the quality and the content of those they accepted. No one was sent out of the church. What would have made anyone to be sent out were the cultural norms and not necessarily doctrinal norms in relation to polygamy. Like the Old Testament followers, polygamy was not really an issue to them (2022, Personal Interview).

In line with Ogah’s submission, Michael Omolewa, attested that his father was baptized with three wives when the first official missionaries visited the Western region of Nigeria. The first official missionaries, according to Omolewa, did not focus on the nitty-gritty of the cultural practices of the people during their mission work. This might have been one of the reasons why his father and their wives got baptized as members of the church (2022, Personal Interview).

Emmanuel Omileye claimed that some SDA members marry secretly after baptism without the knowledge of the church. This attitude is mostly discovered after the demise of the man. At another instance, the second and/or the third wife might appear after the demise of the man. While in a few of other cases, the polygamists often keep the knowledge of their polygamous relationships away from their immediate family members, missionaries and the church (2022, Personal Interview). Akinpelu, A. adds that some polygamists are actually being baptized into the church unknowingly without background checks (2022, Personal Interview).

### **Impacts of the Polygamists in the Church from 1914 to the Present**

The issue of polygamists becoming members of the SDA faith has both negative and positive impacts. Adeniji, A.A.A narrates that records show that polygamists who were admitted under the policy of 1930 were very useful instrument

to the church in mission. They established churches in different villages such as the Igbonini, Owheologbo and Okitipupa villages in the Western and Mid-Western regions of Nigeria, when they migrated to trade in those respective regions even though they were restricted from certain membership rights or the other. Michael Popoola adds that some polygamists under this section contributed meaningfully to the communication of the SDA message and mission (2022, Personal Interview). Even though J.J. Zoaka maintains that polygamists should not be tolerated under any circumstances especially in this generation because it is not biblical and it does not represent God's ideal in mission. Zoaka assumes that knowledge has so much increased that the awareness should be enough to recognize its negativity (2022, Personal Interview). Polygamy is not all about negativity, it also has a side. In the ancient time, polygamy promotes procreation as each of the wives of the polygamist will want to have her own children and the fact that too many children help in farming and other agricultural purposes (See also, EKUNDARE, R.O & OYEMAKINDE, W.). Polygamy also helped to replenish the human beings that were taken away as slaves for the periods of slave trade

In a polygamous family especially in the ancient and modern times, children are not given equal opportunity with regards to education. Some children do not receive formal education or allowed to go to school because of the large number of children of the polygamist competing for the small income of the polygamist. This was the case in some families as children did not attend formal education beyond secondary school level due to lack of adequate finance, coupled with the father's attitude of pushing the responsibility of training his children to his wives who had no strong means of income (2022, Personal Interview).

Also, Masfar Gabriel revealed that when a polygamist is asked to leave his other wives abruptly, it affects the women and their children negatively (2022, Personal Interview). Polygamy does not always bring joy and happiness. In the support of the later view, Bonhanna, submit that "many men in polygamous societies look forward with only dread to the polygamous state (1963, 10)." John Kisaka proclaims that Polygamous family experiences rivalry, hatred, envy and jealousy as could be seen in the families of

Abraham, Jacob and Elkanah. It is more serious when one of the wives of the man suffers delay in child bearing or is barren (1979:29). Sometimes, there is infighting, oppression and suppression among the children of a polygamist. According to Emereonye, Ndubuisi M., his experience, as one of the sons of a polygamist, lays credence to these facts. His late father was a polygamist with three wives. There was relative peace and harmony during his life time. Some years after his death, these issues became prevalent and have not abated, despite frantic efforts. The eldest son of his father tried to gather everything to himself to the neglect of the rights and existence of the sons from the other wives of his father. This has always caused disunity (2022, Personal Interview).

There was a case of a polygamist who carried out the leadership assignments in the old Mid-west region, now Edo field of the SDA Church. He was not baptized but took up the responsibility of the church leadership unofficially because it was a church with mainly women and children. He usually prepared people for baptisms and, each time baptism takes place; he would be present but would never be baptized. The sense of rejection, humiliation, and unworthiness he wore when this happened made it appear as if there was no sympathy for their salvation (2022, Personal Observation).

From this study so far, it is clear that the SDA church upholds monogamy because it was the foundational divine injunction on marriage and was instituted at the beginning on earth, especially when everything made by God on the earth was in its perfect order. Otherwise, if polygamy was in God's purpose, He would have ordained polygamy as a model for Adam right from the Garden of Eden. This is believed to be God's ideal standard.

### **Missionaries Attitudes towards Polygamists and Polygamists in the SDA Church**

The missionaries' attitudes in reaching out to the polygamists in Nigeria range from racial or ethnic bias, political, doctrinal restrictive positions, forceful or oppositional concept, and labeling or judgmental approaches have achieved little or no success or growth in the context of converting polygamists and developing Christianity in Nigeria with the

goals of saving polygamists and their households. Taking a cursory look at the attitudes of the European, non-European missionaries and, particularly, the SDA missionary in Nigeria, it is imperative to take a stand which this paper tries to attempt. This paper does not stand to address whether polygamists should be jettisoned or accepted into the SDA Church. It rather tries to situate how polygamists' salvation would be protected through morally right attitudes in bringing them onto salvation, the salvation of their children, and good standing members who have had such background. It also rather establishes reasons polygamists are present in the SDA despite the church positions.

Though the SDA put forward monogamy, with policies in place for its practice, yet have had battles in solving most of the issues because there are still presences of polygamists in the SDA church and the policies made has not adequately addressed the protection of the children's faith and salvation, which also covers the members in good standing whose parents are polygamists. Addressing the later would also address the aggression of the SDA members whose parents were polygamists because they find it hard to see their church preaching that practicing polygamy is sinful and immoral. At the same time, this paper suggests how they can understand that the SDA church is neither harsh, nor racial, nor judgmental in relations to polygamists and those affiliated because every African descent have same polygamous ancestors. In the foregoing, if these are not addressed, the approach would be barbaric, which is not a Christian virtue.

From the origin of the SDA missionary enterprise in Nigeria to the present days polygamists have been found in the SDA church despite the church positions. The reasons can be categorized into five factors and they are: (1) the idea of baptizing without background checks, (2) Members entering polygamous relationship after baptism clandestinely, (3) Missionaries with number driven baptisms nature, (4) Missionaries' concerns in the event of salvation, and (5) Lack of special education on dealing with cultural issue. The first factor describes how the SDA missionaries baptized those that are willing for baptism without finding out or aware of their marital status. The second factor refers to members who go into polygamy either secretly or tilted towards the

practice by circumstances beyond the missionaries' control. The third factor labels the missionaries as those basing their successes on the number of those baptized thereby baptized amidst all odds. The fourth factor pronounces the salvation driven concepts whereby missionaries decide to receive all through baptism into Christ basing their judgment on the fact that Christ came to save all. The fifth factor describes the lack of adequate education of the missionaries on cultural practices of the host communities before launching the mission and message of the SDA church.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the fact that Christianity has been introduced to the African descent through a barbaric means, this paper tilts towards developing and addressing strategies or attitudes through which Christianity, particularly, SDA in reaching out with their mission to the African descent, particularly, Nigerians. Having examined critically the reasons that brought the presence of polygamists, which use has been prominent in the economic survival of an African family, into the SDA Church, this study submits that the SDA missionaries did not move away from the church positions but were caught up by situations beyond their control. The researchers therefore suggest that: (1) Polygamists and their household should be admitted into the church with the intention to give them time to study more about the need to practice monogamy with the goal of changing over time if they insist to hold on to their belief in polygamous relationship until they are otherwise convinced. This attitude will show that the church loves and gives room for them to make well informed decision. Considerable time should be given without limit to avoid being harsh, forceful, judgmental and barbaric in attitudes. But this suggestion does not by any means construe endorsing polygamy in any way or the idea of not disciplining the erring, (2) Scholars or experts in Mission Studies or Religion and Society should be sponsored to research on the best attitudes that are morally right towards reaching out to the polygamists in Africa, more so, every African genealogy has his or her root from parents that practiced polygamy, (3) The SDA should not limit the provision of studies on African Tradition and the SDA beliefs in their University Theological curriculum to equip their missionaries for mission but it should be made available

to all African converts, (4) The SDA church in Nigeria should raise their local concerns and gaps especially in cultural phenomenon in the various Nigerian communities through their presiding regional officers (conference or mission or union designated officers) for further studies at the Biblical Research Institute of the SDA where biblical issues are being addressed in proposing policy matters, (5) The policy on polygamy should be constantly reviewed as there are so many issues emanating from the issue of polygamy that are yet to be cleared, (6) Scholars should replicate this study on the attitudes of the SDA missionaries in other African nations creating rooms for comparison.

### Relevant Literature

1. AJAYI, J.F.A. [Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841–1891]. 1966. Longman. London. Paperback.
2. AJAYI, J.F.A. and AYANDELE, E.A. "Writing African Church History", In the [Church Crossing Frontlines: Essays on the Nature of Mission in Honour of Bengt Sundkler].pp. 5-16. 1969. Boktryckeri Aktiebolag. Uppsala, Sweden. Paperback.
3. AGBOOLA, D. [The Seventh-day Adventist in Yoruba Land 1914-1964]. 1987. Ibadan: Day Star Press. Paperback.
5. AYANDELE, E.A. [The missionary impact on modern Nigeria 1842-1914: A political and social analysis]. 1966. Longman. London. Paperback.
5. BABALOLA, D.O. [On Becoming a Conference]. 2002. OSB Design. Ibadan. Paperback.
6. BALOYE, E.M. "Critical reflection on polygamy in the African Christian context", [Southern African Journal of Missiology] pp. 1-17. 2013. Vol. 41.No 2. Paperback.
7. BOAHENG, Isaac, "Early Christian Mission in West Africa: Implication for Rethinking the Great Commission". <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341550469>. February, 2023. Web.
8. BOSERUP, E. [Woman's Role in Economic Development]. 1970. George Allen and Unwin. London. Paperback.
9. BOUIT, Jean-Jacques, "A Christian Consideration of Polygamy". [Dissertation Projects D.Min]. p. 136. 1981. <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/dmin/626>. March, 2023. Web.
10. C.M.S Archives, G3/A3/0: "Niger Mission". [Report of Station of the Archdeaconry in the upper Niger for the year ending] np. December, 1881. Web.
11. C.M.S., G3/A3/o [Elm to Baylis].p. 12. 7 Dec. 1902. Web.
12. C.M.S., G3/A3/o. [Minutes of Executive Committee], 1 Sept, 1903. Web.

13. CRAMPTON, E.P.T. [Christianity in Northern Nigeria]. 1979. Geoffrey Chapman. London. Paperback
14. EGBOH, O.E. "Polygamy in Iboland (South-Eastern Nigeria) with special reference to polygamy practice among Christian Ibos". [Institut de Sociologie de l'Université de Bruxelles], pp. 431-444. 2002. Vol. 22, No. 3. Paperback.
15. EJENOBO, D.T. [An Attitude critique of the Nigerian churches to the practice of polygamy in Nigeria]. [https://academicexcellencesociety.com/a\\_attitude\\_critique\\_of\\_the\\_of\\_nigerian\\_churches.pdf](https://academicexcellencesociety.com/a_attitude_critique_of_the_of_nigerian_churches.pdf). November, 2021. Web.
16. EKPENDU, Ikechi. "A Biblical Response to the Practice of Polygamy in Eastern Nigeria". [Asia-Africa Journal of Mission and Ministry]. pp. 81-96. 2015.11.04. Paperback.
17. EKUNDARE, R.O, An Economic History of West Africa (NP). Methuen & Co LTD, 1973.
18. EREGARE, E.O. [An African Christian Church History: Seventh-day Adventist Cosmology in Edo/Delta (1948- 2012) & Ecumenical Initiatives]. Pp. 1-199. <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Books/ACCH2013.pdf>. 2013. Web.
19. \_\_\_\_\_." A Reflection of the Forgotten Nigerian Culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Generation". [Kaduna Journal of Historical Studies: A Publication of the Department of History, Kaduna State University, Nigeria] pp. 200-214. 2022. Vol 13, Number 1. Paperback.
20. \_\_\_\_\_. "Seventh-day Adventist Missionary Enterprise in Africa (1914-1940): A Nigerian Narrative" [Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary] pp. 3-18. 2018. Vol. 21, Number 12. Paperback.
21. FALAYE, T.A [Global Journal of Arts Humanities and Social Science]. Pp. 18-28. 2016 Vol. 4, No.10. Paperback.
22. FALEN, Douglas J. "Polygyny and Christian Marriage in Africa: The Case of Benin." [African Studies Review], pp. 51-74. Vol. 51, no. 2. [www.jstor.org/stable/27667340](http://www.jstor.org/stable/27667340). March, 2008. Web.
23. GICHABA, A. and MANDUKU, J. "Factors Affecting the Integration of polygamous Converts into SDA Churches, Eldoret Municipality, Uasin Gishu County" [Proceedings of ADVED 2016 2nd International Conference on Advances in Education and Social Sciences] pp. 10-12. Istanbul, Turkey. 2016. Web.
24. GENERAL CONFERENCE OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE (ADCOM). [SDA Statement on Marriage]. <https://www.adventist.org/official-statements/marriage>. 1996. Web.
25. GITARI, David. "The Church and Polygamy". [Transformation], vol. 1, no. 1. pp. 3-10. [www.jstor.org/stable/43052879](http://www.jstor.org/stable/43052879). 2021. Web.

26. HUNT, R.N. "Noise over Camouflaged, Colonial Morality Taxation and a Woman-named Crisis in Belgian Africa". [The Journal of African History], pp.471-494. 1991.Vol.32, No.3. Paperback.
27. KAHIGA, J.K. "Polygamy: A Pastoral challenge to the church in Africa." [African Ecclesial Review], pp. 119-147. March-June, 2007. 49 (1&2). Paperback.
28. KRAMER, S. [Polygamy is rare around the World and is confined to a few regions] np. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/12/07>. March, 2022. Web.
29. KYOMO, A.A & Selvan, S.G. [Marriage and Family in African Christianity]. 2004. Action, Nairobi. Paperback.
30. MAJEED, D. M. "The battle has been joined. Gay and polygamy marriages are out of the closet and in-search of legitimacy".[Crosscurrent]. Pp. 3-27. Summer, 2004: 73-81. Paperback.
31. MBITI, J.S.[ African Religions and Philosophy].1969. Heinemann, London. Paperback.
32. MUTHENGI, J.K. (1995). "Polygamy and the Church in Africa: Biblical, Historical, and Practical Perspectives". [Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology], 14 (2), 55-78. Paperback.
33. OLIJELLO, K. J. [The Gospel and African Culture: Polygamy as a Challenge to the Anglican Church of Tanzania-Diocese of Mara]. <https://ukzn-dspace.ukzn.ac.za>. March, 2023. E-book.
34. OMOTOSHO, O.J. "Polygamous Marriage in the Contemporary Seventh-day Adventist Church: The Responses of Some Members" [Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies (IJOURNELS)] pp.31-42. 2020. Vol.10 No.1. Paperback.
35. OYEMAKINDE, W, Essays in Economic History (Ibadan: Sunlight Ventures, Stabiliz), 16-20, 2013. Paperback
36. PHILLIPS, A. "Marriage laws in Africa" in PHILLIPS (ed), [Survey of African Marriage and Family Life] Pp. 190-2. 1953. Np. London. Paperback.
37. POPOOLA, M.A. "British Conquest: Colonialism and Its Impact". ADEYEMI, B. (ed). [Nigeria People and Global Culture]. Pp. 2-150. 2011. Babcock University Press, Nigeria. Paperback.
38. RON Du Preez, "Polygamy in the Bible with Implications for Seventh-day Adventist Missiology". [Project Documents]. P.164. <http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/dmin/164>. 1993. Web.
39. STENT, W.R. "Polygamy and the Missionary Church". Pp. 1-34. 2021 ; STENT, W.R (Ed.) [Polygamy and the Missionary Church] - Academia.edu. 2022. Web
40. TURNER, H.W. "Monogamy, A mark of the Church?" [International Review of Mission], pp. 313-21; 55.1966. Paperback.
41. \_\_\_\_\_. "A Typology for African Religious Movement" [Journal of Religion in Africa], 1(1), pp. 1-34. 1967. Paperback.
42. \_\_\_\_\_. "My Pilgrimage in Mission" [International Bulletin of Missionary Research]. 13 (2) pp. 71--74. 1989. Paperback.



43. UCHENDU, V.C [The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria]. 1965. NP. New York. Paperback.
44. WUNDERICK, S. "What to do about polygamy?: African churches seek a better response than in the years past" [Christianity Today], July: 17-18. 2009. Paperback.
45. YAMANI, MAZ. [Polygamy and law in contemporary Saudi Arabia]. Ithaca. London. 2008. Paperback.
46. ZOAKA, J.J. et al. "The Mission of the Church and Membership Plight of African Polygamy: A Reflection" [Igwebuiké]. Vol. 7, No 5. 2021. Paperback.