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Redeeming Christian Marriage and Family in Kenya



Edited by Dr. Rebecca Oladipo

REDEEMING CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE
AND FAMILY IN KENYA

Edited by Dr. Rebecca M. Oladipo

A DAYSTAR UNIVERSITY PUBLICATION

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FOREWORD

There is no one commonly agreed conception of family. Cultures and social contexts, including faith communities, in their complex and yet interconnected existence develop for themselves working definitions of family. For many African rural folks for instance, one is part of a stable community in which the family comprises parents, children, grandparents, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, in-laws and in some cases and for lack of proper nomenclature, even adopted and fostered children. In cases where polygamy is a factor, these relations spiral into further complexity. Two invincible cords run through this nuance of family: the cord of kinship (blood relationship) and the cord of affinity (relationships such as those between spouses and their in-laws). And so according to this configuration of family, whether one is a sister or a brother, a mother or a father, a grandparent or a grandchild is therefore not merely a matter of blood relationship within the nuclear family as guaranteed by kinship, but more importantly the relations such as sister, brother, mother, father and so on abound by extending and incorporating more people by reaching out spontaneously and in equal measure to both kinship and affinity. In this scheme of things for instance, the son of my brother is effectively my son and the daughter of my brother is my daughter and they individually have rights and privileges defined in culture that accompany the relations.

This way of defining family does not only preclude divorce but more importantly, guarantees everyone a title of honor and therefore it deflates unwarranted socio-cultural pressures and the rather sully expectations besmirching modern families; it equally ring-fences intangible assets such as permanence of marriage, values and standards that constitute the very essence of the family. You are a father and you carry yourself as one even if you don't have your own biological children, and you are a grandmother and rightly so even if the world of biology names you barren. To this end, the African adage 'a person is a person through other persons' finds its true grounding. Indeed, this saying is foundational to the African idea of the family as reflected in the words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu: "None of us comes into the world fully formed. We would not know how to think, or walk, or speak, or behave as human beings unless we learned it from other human beings. We need other human beings in

order to be human. I am because other people are. A person is entitled to a stable community life, and the first of these communities is the family.”

But there is a problem. Among African families, regardless of faith commitment, there appears to be an emerging sense of liberalism which is quickly gaining currency among our people. We see abandonment of dominant marriage narratives, including the African and Christian conceptions. Instead we hear messages which seek to annul the place for both the structure and character of marriage and family. For these newly-minted social liberals, the ground is level and no conception, no lifestyle regardless of its moral taste is better than the other. Indeed, they emphasize, that how individuals are to understand the family they prefer and the nature of marriage they wish for is their decision so long as they do no harm. This mind set has caused two serious problems: 1) people are beginning to forget the essence, expectations and roles in stable communities; and 2) there is blatant and outright rejection of the cords that have for many years bound marriage and families, and the result is beginning to manifest in unprecedented breakages of families and divorce rates.

Here then is the true essence of this book *Redeeming Christian marriage and family in Kenya*. For a people who are beginning to forget the character of marriage, this book points to a compass, even the word of God which alone offers the ‘true north’ for family and marriage; for a people who don’t appear to be alarmed at the incidences of divorce, separation and the general destruction of families happening in their midst, a strong voice is raised calling upon the society to straighten its ways; and for a people who no longer remember the place of children and the in-laws, an easy toolkit is provided raising the children and the in-laws to their true place in families. We trust that families, churches, communities and institutions who will use this book will not only find it generally valuable but, more importantly that a careful reading of this book will scuttle the lies that have been advanced in favor of broken families, divorce and separation. Indeed, we hope that through the prompting of this book the African Christian families in particular will evolve a critical and yet fresh new way of appreciating the African family—parents, children, grandparents, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, in-laws and in some cases even adopted and fostered children, knowing that we need other human beings, and in this case our family, in order to be human.

Rev. Prof. James Kombo,
DVC (Academic Affairs),
Daystar University,
Nairobi.

PREFACE

Coming hot on the heels of our recent publication, *A synopsis of the status of the Christian family in Kenya*, is this publication, *Redeeming Christian Family and Marriage in Kenya*.

Poul Alderson says, “I have yet to see any problem, however complicated, which when you looked at it the right way, did not become still more complicated” (as cited in Litosseliti, 2010, p. 1). How true this is of divorce in present-day Kenya. For, despite the fact that marriage is an age-old institution, it has been an intractable terrain. The grim statistics of the divorce and separation rate in the Church in Kenya prompted this latest publication. Our goal in this book was to take a cursory look at what we have identified from a recent nationwide survey as the major issues affecting marriage and family in Kenya. While we are not assuming expertise in the subject area, we believe that what we have put together would help demystify some of the complexities associated with the subject. God’s will for His children is that they should have a happy and fulfilling marriage and family life; anything short of this is unacceptable to Him.

This book is organized into eight chapters. Each chapter is grounded in related literature on the subject in order to provide a critical link between the survey and current thinking in the subject area. The book also provides practical illustrative examples and makes suggestions that would go a long way in redeeming the situation.

In Chapter One entitled “Divorce: Theology and Practice”, Bishop Oginde argues that marriage is an absolute which was instituted by God, and is supposed to last until death separates a couple. The chapter is aptly referred to as the introductory chapter, for without a clear understanding of what marriage entails, it would be foolhardy to enter into it. Bishop Oginde likens marriage to a contract which must not be entered into without understanding the terms, but must be done “reverently, discreetly, advisedly and in the fear of God”.

In Chapter Two, Rev Stephen Nduto presents divorce and separation in the Church as present-day realities in the Church in Kenya and that the victims are often ostracized by the Church. He urges the Church to assume its responsibility to its members whose marriage and family lives are troubled.

Prof. Mike Kuria discusses “Causes of Divorce” in Chapter Three. One would hardly imagine that infidelity would be one of the causes of divorce in the Church of God, but regrettably, it is. Other causes discussed in the chapter include emotional incompatibility, religious and cultural differences, and lack of money or too much of it. According to the writer, these challenges are not insurmountable, if only couples would learn to appreciate each other and continue their courtship warmth.

It also comes out clearly that many couples do not reflect on the effect which their decision to divorce or separate could have on their children. In Chapter Four on the “Effects of Divorce and Separation on Children”, Dr. Abraham Waithima and Charity Waithima provide ample evidence that indicates that children are at the receiving end of marital conflict, and can manifest guilt feeling, poor performance in school, rebellion and negative attitude to marriage, among others. The chapter is a caution to those contemplating leaving each other to give serious consideration to their children.

In Chapter Five titled “Handling Vulnerable Periods in Marriage”, Prof Peter Ngure tackles the need to address some periods in marriage. According to him, the critical periods include the early years of marriage when couples are settling in to each other, and the midlife crisis years when couples are going through physiological and psychological crises in their individual lives, which can contribute to the wear and tear of marriage. Prof. Ngure suggests that these critical periods need to be handled with understanding by couples.

Chapter Six by Prof Michael Bowen and Titus Mutua on “Parents Modeling Their Children’s Marriage by Their Own Marriage” argues that parents can be role models to their children in the way they shape their marriage. Couples therefore need to be aware that they are being watched by their children and that what children take from their parents’ marriage can have lasting impact on the children’s own marriage, and influence their decision to marry or not to.

Chapter Seven by Dr. Rebecca Oladipo deals with “Handling Relatives in Marriage”. As the writer notes, relatives can be an asset to married couples, but

if care is not taken, different family members such as mothers-in-law can be the source of conflict in married couples' lives. Her conclusion is that all parties in a marriage relationship need to work harmoniously instead of treating each other as sworn enemies.

In Chapter Eight on "The Role of Counseling in Marital Stability", Dr. Alice Munene underscores the place of counseling in marital stability. Apart from providing evidence that suggests that those who go through premarital counseling have low rates of divorce, she also emphasizes the need for counseling at different phases of couples' married lives, and that the assumption that married couples can manage their lives on their own should be discounted.

It is our belief that couples would find this book invaluable in handling their marital and family problems, as the book contains a lot of practical guide to successful Christian family life. The book would also be a good resource for Churches, marriage counselors, the clergy, theological institutions, organisations that deal with marital issues, governmental organisations, and young people preparing for marriage.

Dr. Rebecca Oladipo,
Director,
Centre for Research, Publications and Consultancy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Several people have been instrumental in the compilation of this book.

To begin with, special thanks go to Daystar University, and in particular, to the Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Timothy Wachira, for the provision of the funding for this publication. We also acknowledge the DVC (Academic Affairs), Rev. Prof. James Kombo, for giving his encouragement to this book project and for the insight the team has drawn from him.

Secondly, I would like to appreciate the contributors who worked as a team to bring about this publication. Bishop David Oginde agreed to write the introductory chapter to this book despite his busy schedule. On behalf of Daystar University, I wish to express profound gratitude to him for being a model of a true servant-leader. Many thanks to Rev. Stephen Nduto for stepping in at short notice. I would also like to express gratitude to Charity Waithima for being a joint contributor.

Apart from these three, all the other contributors were part of the ‘Family Survey’ team that produced *A synopsis of the status of the Christian family in Kenya*. I would like to thank them all for their decision to go a notch higher by publishing this book which is based on the findings of their joint nation-wide survey. The team is comprised of Prof. Mike Kuria, Dr. Alice Munene, Prof. Peter Ngure, Dr Abraham Waithima, Prof. Michael Bowen and Titus Mutua.

Special thanks also go to Paul Ruto who joined the Centre during the preparation of this book, for his input.

We would also like to appreciate Nation Media Group for allowing us to use the picture on page 27 of this book.

Thank you all,
Dr. Rebecca Oladipo.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Rev. David Oginde, PhD, is the Presiding Bishop of Christ is the Answer Ministries (CITAM), a Church ministry with over 45,000 members, focused on reaching the urban communities in Kenya, Africa, and the rest of the world. Dr. Oginde holds a PhD in Organisational Leadership and an MA in Leadership. He was one of the contributors to the seminal publication, *Africa Bible commentary*.

Prof. Michael Bowen is Associate Professor of Environmental Economics in the Department of Economics at Daystar University. He holds a PhD in Environmental Economics and an MSc and a BSc in Agricultural Economics. He is currently the Deputy Director of Quality Assurance at Daystar University. His research interests are in the areas of environmental economics, agricultural economics, risk analysis, and small-scale businesses. He has presented several papers in international conferences and published them as journal articles or book chapters, and is a guest editor for a number of international journals.

Rev. Stephen Nduto is the current Senior Chaplain at Daystar University. He is a graduate of Scott Theological College from where he obtained a BTh and completed his MA in Religious Studies from University of Nairobi. He is currently undergoing an MA programme in Armed Conflict and Peace Studies in University of Nairobi. He is married to Bancy Nguthi and they are blessed with three sons: Eden, Zurishaddai, and Raviz.

Dr. Abraham K. Waithima holds a PhD in Economics from the University of Cape Town. He has authored papers in peer reviewed journals, and a book. He is a member of a research team conducting a research project on a three-pronged approach for the control of leishmaniasis in Marigat, Baringo County, Kenya. He is a member of the Nairobi Hospital Ethical Review Board, and chairman of Daystar University Ethics Review Board. Dr. Waithima is the Director of the Institute of Leadership and Professional Development (ILPD) at Daystar University. He is married to Charity.

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Dr. Alice Munene is a senior lecturer at Daystar University. She holds a Clinical Psychology Doctorate degree from Rosemead School of Psychology in the USA and two Master of Arts degrees in Counseling Psychology (USIU) and Clinical Psychology (Rosemead School of Psychology USA) and an undergraduate degree in Education from the University of Nairobi, Kenya. She is actively involved in curriculum development ranging from undergraduate to PhD programs. Her research interests are on marital therapy, childhood attachment, religion, and family. She is an experienced therapist who has practiced in Kenya and California, USA. Dr. Munene has several book and journal publications.

Peter Ngure is an Associate Professor in the Department of Applied and Technical Biology at the Technical University of Kenya, and formerly at Daystar University. He holds a PhD in parasitology and entomology from Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology. He is published in several reputable peer-reviewed journals and has presented papers in international conferences. He has won the Star of Excellence Award in teaching and was the Researcher of the Year (2010) at Daystar University, and the Outstanding Young Scientist Award by the African Academy of Sciences and the IAP (2009). He is a beneficiary of research grants from the Bill and Melinda Gates and Hickey Family Foundations. Peter has undertaken consultancies with many organisations including the Save the Children UK, the Ministry of Public Health and Sanitation, Aquinas High School and World Vision- Kenya.

Mike Kuria is the Director, Centre for Quality Assurance at Daystar University, Nairobi Kenya, where he is also a Professor of Literature. His research interests are wide and include quality assurance in higher education, language and gender politics in African fiction and oral literature. His publications include *Talking gender: Conversations with Kenya women writers* and a DVD titled *Going down memory lane through oral literature*. He holds a PhD in English from the University of Leeds, UK.

Titus Mutua is the Program Manager, Communications and Documentation at Farm Concern International where he coordinates the communications portfolios of over 10 programmes in Kenya, Tanzania and Malawi. He was previously the Senior Publications Officer at the Centre for Research, Publications & Consultancy at Daystar University where he was a core member of the consultancy team which drafted proposals to the National Authority for Campaigns against Alcohol and Drug Abuse (NACADA), and the Higher Education Loans Board (HELB). Titus holds an MA degree in Communication, with a major in Development Studies from Daystar University, Nairobi, and a BA (Double Major) in Linguistics (English) and Sociology from Egerton University, Njoro.

Dr. Rebecca Oladipo is a senior lecturer and Director, Research, Publications, Consultancy & Postgraduate Bureau at Daystar University. She holds an MA in Modern English and a PhD in Linguistics from Leeds University, UK. Her research interests include syntax, student writing and reading, and research. One of her recent publications is *Longhorn essentials of English grammar*. She has a lot of experience in curriculum development and proposal writing.