

TOWARDS THE COMMON IDENTITY: THE WASUBI CUSTOMARY MARRIAGE AND CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: The paper aimed to explore the coexistence and potential enrichment of the Wasubi customary marriage and Christian marriage to build a common identity. The study sought to understand how cultural practices, taboos, and expectations influenced marriage participants and impacted family life, particularly among African Christian couples in the context of the Wasubi community.

Research methodology: The study adopted a systematic approach, reviewing and critically analysing other empirical studies. It employed both qualitative and quantitative research methods, utilizing questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and document analysis as data collection instruments. The target population comprised the entire Wasubi community (323,486), with a sample size of 436 individuals determined using Yamene's formula of 1967. Various sampling techniques, including simple random sampling, stratified random sampling, snowball, and purposive sampling, were applied.

Findings: The research highlighted that African Christian couples, particularly among the Wasubi, experienced a conflict between traditional communal society and modern individualistic society. This conflict led to a gradual abandonment of the African traditional practices of marriage, impacting the marital well-being of the Wasubi families in Biharamulo District. The clash between communal and individualistic values posed challenges to maintaining traditional practices, leading to changes in the institution of marriage among the Wasubi.

Recommendations: The research recommends a deeper study of the marriage practices among the Wasubi to foster a harmonious coexistence of traditional and Christian marital values. Understanding the impact of cultural evolution, functionalism, and cultural diffusion theories on these practices could aid in developing strategies to preserve cultural heritage while embracing beneficial aspects of Christianity. Building a common identity between the two forms of marriage could contribute to the enrichment and stability of Wasubi marriages in a changing societal landscape.

Keywords: *Customary marriage, Christian marriage, Cultural practices, Wasubi.*

INTRODUCTION

This study involved a sample size of (436) participants, strategically divided into five distinct groups, hailing from six carefully selected wards as shown in figure 1. The first group comprised 126 couples, representing individuals currently engaged in marital relationships. The second group consisted of 94 youths who were not yet involved in marriage, providing a perspective from the younger generation. Additionally, the study included 48 participants who were either divorced or single parents, offering insights into the experiences of individuals navigating life after a significant relationship change. Furthermore, the research involved 12 adults who had never married, allowing for a comparison with those in committed relationships. Finally, 30 elders, well-versed in the rich history and traditions of the Wasubi life, contributed their valuable insights to the study. These five distinct groups ensured a diverse and comprehensive representation of the community. The distribution of the sample size can be visualized through the pie chart, which depicts the number and percentages of all respondents across the different groups. This method allowed for clearer understanding of the demographic distribution and the relative contributions of each group to the overall findings.

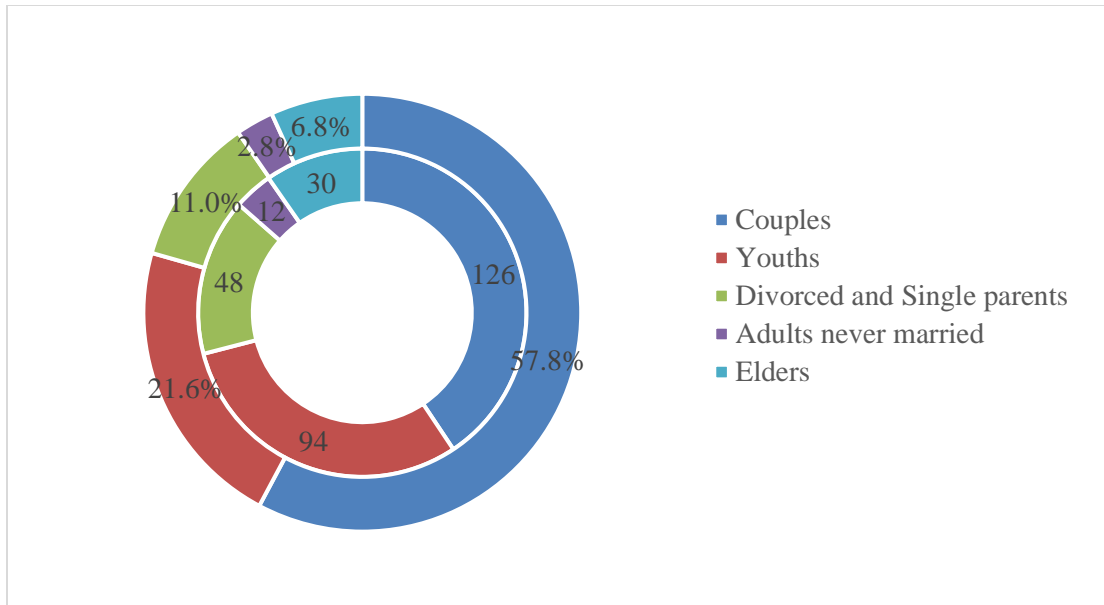


Figure 1: Sample Size

Source: Field data, July, 2022.

A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THEORIES

The study was guided by the following theories.

The Cultural Evolutionism Theory by Edward Burnett Tylor (1832 – 1917)

This theory centers around the idea that culture undergoes evolution and change. It posits that culture progresses in a cumulative manner, with each generation contributing to a deeper level of understanding. Tylor outlines a series of stages that ultimately lead to a common end: savagery, barbarism, and civilization. Additionally, Tylor acknowledges that every culture contains various survivals which are inherited from one generation to another. These inherited cultural traits are considered earlier traditions that continue to endure to this day. This theory has proven invaluable in understanding the changes and transformations that the Wasubi marriage has experienced over time. By examining the effects of civilization, globalization, and the arrival of Christianity in Africa, it sheds light on the modifications and adaptations that have taken place within the marriage system. Moreover, it identifies what aspects have been discarded and what elements persist. As a result, this theory has provided valuable insights into the distinctions between the current Wasubi marriage and its traditional form. By examining the evolution of the marriage customs, it becomes

evident how societal changes have influenced the institution of marriage, and what aspects have stood the test of time. The study of this evolution allows us to appreciate how the Wasubi culture has adapted and maintained its identity amidst the shifting tides of history and globalization.

Functionalism Theory by Bronislaw Kaspar Malinowski (1884-1942)

Malinowski's theory posits that culture is composed of different functional units, each serving a specific purpose within the community. According to his perspective, every aspect of culture exists to fulfill the needs of individuals. This comprehensive view considers the functions of all cultural elements in a given society. Applying this theory to the study of the Wasubi culture has yielded valuable insights into various marital practices, including ceremonies, rituals, and the different stages of marriage. By understanding the roles these practices play in the society, the theory helps evaluate their efficacy in meeting the needs of individuals involved in the marriage process. This assessment allows for a deeper understanding of how these customs contribute to the overall social fabric.

Moreover, Malinowski's theory sheds light on the essential roles played by elders and the wider community in the context of marriage. It emphasizes the collective responsibility and involvement of the community in supporting and preserving these customs. Additionally, the theory facilitates a comparison between the traditional Wasubi customary marriage and the African Christian marriage. By exploring the functions of each tradition, it becomes evident how they can coexist harmoniously without conflict. Understanding the relevance of both customs in their respective contexts helps identify potential areas of convergence and compatibility. Thus, Malinowski's theory has been instrumental in unraveling the intricacies of Wasubi culture, particularly in the realm of marriage. By examining the functions of different cultural elements, the theory provides a comprehensive perspective on how these customs contribute to the well-being and harmony of the community. This deeper understanding fosters cultural appreciation and opens avenues for constructive dialogue between different traditions.

The Cultural Diffusion Innovation Theory by Everett Rogers (1962)

Rogers defines diffusion as the process by which an innovation is communicated over time among the members of a social system through various channels, such as religion, education, urbanization, and more. He highlights that when a society borrows features from another culture, it may lead to

changes, or the borrowed elements will be adapted to fit into their existing culture framework. However, any cultural features that do not align with the host culture should be rejected by its members. Only those cultural elements that prove useful and beneficial will be adopted or accepted. The relevance of the Rogers' theory lies in its ability to elucidate the channels through which cultural changes occur. In the context of the Wasubi culture and marriage, this theory has been instrumental in explaining the various channels of social and cultural change that might have influenced the alteration or neglect of some traditional marital values. By understanding how cultural diffusion can lead to both adaptation and rejection, it becomes clearer how certain custom evolve or fade away over time.

This theory also imparts the idea that cultural borrowing should be approached with discernment, only adopting elements that bring value to the community. This principle serves as a guide for the Wasubi society, promoting a thoughtful consideration of external influences and their potential impact on their cultural heritage. Through the application of the Rogers' diffusion theory, the study of Wasubi marriage values in relation to the Christian marriages has gained insight into how these cultural values have contributed to peaceful coexistence. By understanding the process of diffusion and the selective adoption of cultural elements, the Wasubi community can better appreciate the aspects of their traditional marriage that have remained relevant while embracing aspects of Christian marriage that enhance their cultural identity. Hence, Rogers' diffusion theory has been a valuable tool in exploring the dynamics of cultural change and the evolution of Wasubi marriage values. By recognizing the significance of cultural borrowing and the importance of selecting elements that align with their core values, the Wasubi society can maintain a harmonious coexistence of traditional and Christian marriage practices.

THE CONCEPT OF THE WASUBI MARRIAGE

It was found out that the way Wasubi understand marriage is different from the Westerners. While the westerners' marriage is "individualized," for Wasubi, it is an institution which unites two or more individuals of opposite sex. This union goes further to include the families and the clan members of the married individuals: a communal affair. One respondent said "*Wasubi marriage creates series of relationships which include parents of the couple and other relatives. It is a place where all the community members meet, thus a public event*" (Source: Respondent PE02). It is thus not an individual matter, but the entire community's concern. The Wasubi consider marriage

to be an obligatory passage of life, communal based covenant and a blessed institution carrying the great value of procreation. Generally, according to Twene Abraham, “Africans perceive marriage as a social duty, and it is the duty of all members in society to preserve the family, clan and culture through childbearing” (p. 19).

For Wasubi marriage to be valid, there were customary observances as most respondents reported.

One of the respondents reported:

Marriage was legalized after the two were joined together by following all the customs procedures which were established by our fore fathers. At a free consent union of the couple and the consent of both families, the witness of the whole community and the bride wealth payment was of vital importance. Then they were spiritually blessed. The girl who went for marriage was submitted to the spirits of her husband before entering to his husband’s house. Thus, the spirits from the girl’s parents had to agree with the spirits from the parents of the husband. From there they had to begin living together harmoniously respecting one another (Source: Respondent PE05, 2022).

The custom procedures were commonly reported by the interviewed elders considered to ensure the stability of marriage.

The Traditional Practice of Marriage

The Wasubi marriage institution proceeds by stages which are characterized by performance of pre/marriage teachings, rituals and ceremonies. Thus, it was not one day event, but a gradual celebration realized in a long processes. An elder narrated the Wasubi marriage stages:

Marriage among the Wasubi was realized in a long process which were defined in thirteen major stages namely: the capacity and suitable age to marry; the choice and consent; the qualities sought in a mate; courtship; payment of bride wealth; cutting of banana ceremony; take-off ceremony and marriage ceremony, kwiza ahakasika ceremony; taking out a bride; the bride having her own kitchen; Kwiha aha mhanda ceremony; the bride’s parents entering in the couple’s home and lastly is the congratulation ceremony to their first born. All the processes were marked by different rituals. The practices (ceremonies and rituals) accompanying marriage were found to seal marriage (Source: Respondent PE07, 2022).

All those who were interviewed regarding the Wasubi marriage processes, their responses reflected the above processes.

The processes/stages were vital to make sure what was agreed since the tradition should be followed by the entire community members of the tribe so that to make uniformity and were believed to create a way to stable marriage (Source: Respondent PE16, 2022).

There was also elders' committee whose role was to make sure all steps were fulfilled timely and solve marital challenges when arise. *“Marriage procedures were accompanied by traditional dances with hilarious drumming “Amalunda, akasimbo and mulekule” and rituals like worship, atonement, purification and initiations” (Source: Respondent PE06, PE12, 2022).*

Marital lessons were significant to mold the expected couple. The following are the contents:

The marital lessons were for lifetime. Young men were taught on how to handle and provide basic needs to the family, to defend the family rights and to link their family with other families. Young women were taught how to take care, respect and live with the husband. Moreover they were taught how to relate with the entire family, relatives and the entire society and how to entertain visitors and to care for children. They were initiated to be faithful to all good conducts (Source: Respondent PE07, PE25, 2022).

For the Wasubi, the family was a starting point one could receive marital lessons (initiation) and customs. An elder proved this by saying,

The family is the school of one's marriage life. Parents had timeless roles towards their children of inculcating traditional values. One could still receive teachings from parents or community even when is already married. It is from the family where we get couple and elders who are experienced in marriage life (Source: Respondent PE10, 2022).

Respondents therefore understood themselves that they are still being part of the large family unit. This idea concurs with Venter (2004) view that, an individual is never an isolated, independent entity but is from and will always be part of the community (p. 151). There is no individualism among the Wasubi.

Wasubi marriage was a communal affair, and the approval of all members was compulsory before they could be declared husband and wife.

Involvement of the family members was significant for Wasubi marriage to take part, since it was a communal affair and it brought two families together. Their consent therefore was necessary. The community had a power to stop marriage formalities by withdrawing their consent. This happened when they had reasonable motives behind the existence of such marriage especially if its existence could destroy the goodwill of the entire community. The partner's characters were the main factor for withholding or giving consent (Source: Respondent PE18, PE19, 2022).

The communal aspect of marriage was very much considered whereby we can say the Wasubi marriage was less private and individualized. The initiation for marriage was for life, accompanied by the organized structure to deal with marriage challenges when arise. The partner was expected to possess good character or behaviors for the consent to be given. More over payment of bride wealth was compulsory. An elder reported saying *Dowry payment was an acknowledgment to the girl's family from the part of the boy's family. It was also a sign of acceptance of each other's family. It was given in terms of materials, animals-goats and traditional money known as 'amazinge' which were in form of wire* (Source: Respondent PE26, 2022).

The Marriage Ritual

Marriage ritual was done in two ways and different days. The first ritual was done during the “*kusutura*” or *taking-off* ceremony conducted at the girl’s family one day before the bride moves to her groom’s house. A marriage ritual accompanying the send-off ceremony was the expected groom and bride to have their hair shaved. By cutting their hair, they were now officially united as husband and wife. The whole community had to witness the event. This was the seal of their marriage. One of an elder said, “*The union was done by a certain old man who was chosen from the bride’s clan. The conclusion of the send-off ceremony was by uniting the two through shaving their (bride and groom) hair. The significance of shaving their hair was to allow them to officially begin new life together*” (Source: Respondent PE30, 2022).

The second marriage ritual was conducted on the second day after the bride arrived at the groom’s home and it was after supper. A researcher had an opportunity to observe the processes. Furthermore, an elder reported the process as follows:

The father of the groom asked the bride’s aunt (bride’s adviser) to let the couple to perform the marital act. The bride’s aunt called the bride and invited her to sit on her thighs. After that, she invited the groom and told him that, “take your wife, go and marry”. This meant that the aunt has united the two, and they were now officially married “amewafungisha ndoa” (Source: Respondent PE12, 2022).

To this point the act of uniting the couple was repeated after that of shaving their hair at the bride’s home. After this act of uniting the couple, the researcher found out that the aunt left the house. They had to remain the two in order to practice the marital act.

In between marriage ceremony, “*there was a moment called “kulya embibho” translated as “to eat the seeds”*”. “*This food was a mixture of all kinds of edible seeds together with banana. This food was eaten by the bride and groom. The significance was the expected couple to be blessed with more generations as the different kinds of seeds found in such food*” (Source: Respondent PE20, 2022).”

Before the newly married become united for the second time, the groom’s father or mother or both were to approach them and practice a ritual before entering the groom’s home. The groom’s mother wears on her head a traditional décor known as “*eshisha*” which carries the sign of authority. A ritual is conducted to welcome her son’s wife and reconciling the two gods from the groom’s and bride’s so that they may not fight with the gods found in grooms home. This could be the sign of happy marriage.

In connection to such act there was a blood staining. The elders chosen slaughtered the goat and practice a ritual in honour of the daughter who was now married. An elder reported, “*there was an act of blood staining on the couples fore heads before entering a new residence. This blood staining was a blessing for the new couple*” (Source: Respondent PE15, 2022). The staining of the blood during the wedding ceremonies holds symbolic significance, often signifying the blending of the couple’s life forces and their transition into a new chapter together. This ritual is accompanied by heartfelt words favour and blessings, bestowed upon the newly couple by elders, family members, or religious figure. These words carry deep meaning, symbolizing well-wishes for a harmonious and prosperous marriage. The blessings invoke positive energies and divine guidance, fostering love, unity, and support for the couple as they embark on their shared journey. This ancient practice not only binds the couple but also reinforces the importance of communal support and the preservation of cultural traditions in celebrating love and unity.

Girl’s Virginity

It is marriage that legalizes procreation for the Wasubi. In regard to this matter, one elder said, “*giving birth outside marriage was considered unlawful and disordered events which threaten the appropriate order set by our forefathers*” (Source: Respondent PE01, 2022). Marriage was thus the only way through which intimacy and conjugal feelings could be expressed. Virginity was to

be removed by the husband on the first day the couple shared sexual intercourse. Furthermore, the elders narrated on how the girl was discovered to have been virgin:

The girl was discovered to be virgin when the tree leaves or soft glasses or ebhibhugu (tree barks) used by the couple to sleep in and conduct a sexual intercourse were found with blood which had dropped from the girl's sexual organ resulted from virginity breakage. In case the blood was not found means that the girl was not virgin (Source: Respondents PE21 & PE22, 2022).

When the girl was found virgin, the groom's mother received many gifts and respect from the groom and the groom's family through the aunt who united the couple. It was because their girl has shown respect and faithfulness as well has maintained her beauty in and out. In case was not found virgin it was a shame to the bride's mother and the entire bride's family. On another part, if the groom was found impotent, the groom was advised to hold on while the groom's parents were looking for psycho-spiritual and/or medical solutions. If the problem was not solved, then the bride was advised to be back to her parents where the dowry had to be returned except the drinks. If the sexual intercourse was successful, celebrations and shouts of victory and happiness were heard (Source: Respondent PE19, 2022).

All the processes to marriage are centered on the value of procreation. That is why the birth of a child concludes all the processes to marriage: "congratulation ceremony to the couple for their first-born child "Okwihucha". Having children for the Wasubi was the goal of marriage and marriage contract was fulfilled by the birth of a child. This concurs with Moler's (1982) idea that, having children in a marriage indicates the contract has been fulfilled. That is why for the Wasubi marriage was more meaningful when a baby was born.

It is essential to note the following, for the Wasubi with the public witness of the union, the approval of the sexual act and the woman's virginity; to this point marriage was legalized. All the processes to marriage were mandatory to be adhered to ensure stability and permanence of marriage. After union the couple will no longer be called in their own names: their identity changes completely. A response from one elder was:

Marriage changes one's identity by being identified with names which carry respect, authority and responsibility. When the two individuals are married: the girl is identified as "Nyinenzu", that is "the mother of the house". Moreover, the boy is identified as "nyineka", that is, the father of the house; and "mwenekili" which means "the one who owns authority" (Source: Respondent PE27, 2022).

Therefore, marriage brings respect, responsibility and authority to an individual involved in. The challenge is if one is married and no children are born! Mostly the groom will opt for polygamous life in order to have children from the second wife or else marriage may break

EVALUATIONS AND SUMMARY OF THE WASUBI CUSTOMARY MARRIAGE

The form of marriage discussed above represents the original Wasubi marriage, known as customary marriage. This process involved various steps, teachings, ceremonies, and rituals, all aimed at fulfilling specific purposes and duties with the ultimate goal of ensuring marriage stability. The involvement of the elders committee and the surrounding community was crucial in providing guidance, teaching, and witnessing the couple-to-be, even extending their support after marriage. Shortcuts were not permitted and each ceremony was accompanied by the drinking beer, signifying friendship, unity, and mutual acceptance. Beer also served as a source of entertainment for the invited guests (*Source: Respondent PE17, 2022*).

In contemporary times, there has been a significant shift in the traditional approach to marriage among young people. Nowadays, many disregard the direct involvement and consent of their parents and the community in arranging their marriages. Instead, they often choose to marry while attending higher education institutions or when they are already working. In such cases, they only inform their parents after the marriage has taken place. These changes in the marriage institution have led to a decline in the number of arranged marriages among the younger generations. As societal norms evolve and individual autonomy gains prominence, the practice of parental and communal involvement in marriage arrangements has diminished, giving way to more independent and autonomous approach to marital decisions.

Something to note is that, the couple who had their marriage arranged appreciated it and believed that arranged marriage was the way of creating a stable and permanent marriage life. Ignoring the tradition has led to marriage breakages. Most of the divorced who reported the reasons of their marital divorce; their reasons were centered on ignoring the traditions. Their marriages were thus not accompanied by rituals, ceremonies and did not follow the proper Wasubi marriage procedure to marriage. For example, one respondent said:

Our marriage did not follow the proper procedures of the Wasubi marriage. I got married in a different community (exogamy); the Nyambo community. The difference in attitudes, traditions and customs of Wasubi and Nyambo and subsequent changes in religious ideology are major

contributing factors to the instability of our marriage. There was no mutual respect, appreciations and cooperation which in turn led to total separation of our marriage. This was after inappropriate marriage life lived for 8 consecutive years (Source: Respondent DE01, 2022).

Thus, not following the proper procedures to marriage was one of the causes to marriage disintegration. The following table explains:

Table 1: Percentage of The Couple and The Divorced Whose Marriage Passed Through the Customary Wasubi Marriage and Those Not Passed

S/N	Respondents	YES	NOT	Total percentage
1.	Couple	50.91%	49.09%	100%
2.	Divorced	1%	99%	100%

Source: Field data, July, 2022.

Based on the data presented in Table 1, it is evident that the traditional stages of marriage among the Wasubi are not being followed in a significant number of cases. Nearly half of the couples interviewed did not pass through the proper customary marriage processes, indicating a departure from the traditional practices. This observation highlights the changes and challenges that the Wasubi marriage institution is currently facing. Moreover, the table reveals a striking trend among divorced individuals, with 99% of them having marriages that did not undergo the Wasubi marriage preparatory ceremonies. This finding suggests a potential correlation between following the proper marriage stages and the stability of the union. It implies that adhering to the traditional Wasubi marriage customs might contribute to the establishment of more enduring and stable marriage.

The data in Table 1 serves as an important indicator of the ongoing evolution and complexities within the Wasubi marriage system. It underscores the need for further research and consideration of how these changes impact the overall well-being and longevity of marital unions within the Wasubi community. By understanding these trends, efforts can be made to preserve and adapt the valuable aspects of their cultural heritage while addressing the challenges that arise in modern times. To restore marriage thus, it is essential to incorporate the traditional and Christian practice of marriage so as to have a common identity. An elder said:

Marriages are breaking down at the rate that raises concern because the advices from the elders are not being appreciated, instead they are overlooked. They just take our ideas for granted, and they consider us that we are old and therefore our ideas are outdated or passed out of time (Source: Respondent PE03, 2022).

From the above statement, it can be concluded that, it is significant to learn from the traditions and fit in the Christian way of marriage in order to heal marriage and protect it. The question here remains how can the Wasubi stages of marriage relate with the Christian preparations of marriage so as the two traditions can co-exist without any conflicts.

THE CHRISTIAN PREPARATIONS FOR THE MARRIAGE SACRAMENT

In the quest to understand how the two traditions of Wasubi and Christian marriages can coexist, the researcher deemed it essential to begin by exploring the stages of Christian marriage. To gather the necessary data, document analysis was employed, critically examining Christian documents that shed light on the stages of marriage within this tradition. This understanding proved instrumental in illustrating the correlation between the two traditions concerning marriage stages. While the Wasubi marriage is traditionally arranged with active community involvement, Christian marriages contrastingly involve partners who willingly choose to marry without significant external pressure. They choose to marry of their own accord with no much external pressure. Their shared intentions include remaining faithful to each other, building a family with children, and committing to a lifelong partnership. Similar to the Wasubi tradition, Christian marriage is also exclusively heterosexual, constituting a monogamous union that elevates the couple to a sacred status of matrimony. The belief that what God has united should not be separated underscores the sanctity and permanence of the marital bond (cf. Mark 10:9).

Through this comparative analysis, the researcher sought to identify commonalities and differences between the two marriage traditions, striving to find avenues for peaceful coexistence and mutual enrichment. The study recognizes that understanding and respecting each tradition's unique values and practices are essential in fostering harmonious relationships and embracing the richness of both cultural and religious heritages.

The Christian marriage specifically the Catholic denomination, "The essential properties of marriage are unity and indissolubility, which in Christian marriage obtain a special firmness by

reason of the sacrament” (Can. 1056; Noller, 2004). “A valid marriage between the baptized... is called *ratum et consummatum* if the spouses have performed between themselves in a human fashion a conjugal act ...” (can. 1061 §1). And for the Christians, “A marriage that is *ratum et consummatum* can be dissolved by no human power and by no cause, except death” (Can.1141; Akin 2008). Thus, the Christian marriage has the following characteristics, namely: “exclusivity, indissolubility and openness to life” (Pope Francis (2016), Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 53).

The above Christian marriage characteristics are found on love which is a married love. Pope Paul VI (1968) describes the married love in four characteristics which are a full human love (husband and wife become in a way one heart and one soul); a love which is total (loving a partner for the partner’s own sake), a love which is faithful and exclusive of all other, this until death and finally it is fecund (bring new life into being) (no. 9). The document further calls for the responsible parenthood by observing the natural law which leads to union and procreation while being faithfully to God’s design. The document also calls for the means which are lawful to regulate the number of children in marriage (the Church is against unlawful birth control methods) (no. 10-14). Pope Francis invites “Christian families to value the gifts of family and marriage and to persevere in a love strengthened by the virtue of generosity, commitment, fidelity and patience.” (Pope Francis (2016), Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 5). Thus, the Christian marriage is fundamentally centered on love. “Love always has an aspect of deep compassion that leads to accepting the other person as part of this world, even when he or she acts differently than I would like” (Pope Francis (2016), Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 92). Christian marriage is therefore planned for the exclusive, faithful, and lifelong union of a man and woman. The couple is completely committed to each other.

The Christian Stages of Marriage

John Paul II, one of the Catholic Pope wrote about the stages of marriage preparation in his encyclical letter *Familiaris Consortio* (1982). He suggested that marriage preparation has to be seen and put into practice as a gradual and continuous process. It includes three main stages: remote, proximate and immediate preparation (no. 66; Fier 2018).

Remote Preparation Stages

Remote preparation includes infancy, childhood and adolescence and takes place first of all in the family (Pontifical Council For the Family, 1996). Pope John Paul II wrote;

Remote preparation begins in early childhood...in the family... It is the period when esteem for all authentic human values is instilled, both in interpersonal and in social relationships, with all that this signifies for the formation of character, for the control and right use of one's inclinations, for the manner of regarding and meeting people of the opposite sex, and so on (John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Familiaris Consortio* (1982), no. 66).

Thus, it is in family where children learn to respect all human values. It is in this stage they are formed in character to respect the persons of the same and other sex. Parents are the primary formatters of their children in Christian spirituality and catechesis, including education in chastity and self-giving love (cf. Pontifical Council for the Family (1996), no. 24). Parents have, therefore a role to equip children with the knowledge to defend God's plan for human sexuality.

The Catholic Church recognizes that secularism has brought effects in terms of people's beliefs. The Vatican Council II's *Gaudium et spes* declares that

As a matter of fact, a secularized atmosphere has been spreading in different parts of the world which especially affects young people and subjects them to the pressure of a secularized environment in which one ends up losing the meaning of God and consequently the deep meaning of spousal love and the family as well (Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et spes*, no. 22; Pontifical Council For the Family, 1996).

Thus in recognition of this fact, the marriage preparations needs to begin early in children hood so that to develop a generation which is stable in terms of faith and marital life.

Proximate Preparation Stage

The Pontifical Council for the Family (1996) declares that the "proximate preparation takes place during the period of engagement" and should offer the couple the opportunity to "deepen the life of faith, especially regarding knowledge of the sacramentality of the Church... Evangelization is an important part of this stage" (no. 32). Thus, "...It involves a more specific preparation for the sacraments..." (John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (1982), no. 66).

The engaged couples should be made aware of the natural requirements of God's plan for marriage: freedom of consent, the exclusivity, unity and indissolubility of their marriage the correct concept of responsible parenthood, the human aspects of conjugal sexuality, the openness to life of every act of marital union, and the proper education of children (Pontifical Council For the Family, (1996), no. 35; St. John Paul II, 2017). Pope Paul VI (1968), in his Encyclical Letter *Humanae Vitae*, added: "However, especially with regard to total self-giving and responsible procreation, the theological and moral formation will have to be given in a special way. In fact, conjugal love is total, exclusive, faithful and fruitful (Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Humanae Vitae*, no. 9).

Moreover, "this preparation will present marriage as an interpersonal relationship of man and a woman that has to be continually developed, and it will encourage those concerned to study the nature of conjugal sexuality and responsible parenthood..." (John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (1982), no. 66). The goal of this preparation is that "the sacrament may be celebrated and lived with the right moral and spiritual dispositions" (John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (1982), no. 66). It is also a period for "theological study as well for formation during which the engaged, with the help of grace and by avoiding all forms of sin, will prepare to give themselves as a couple to Christ who sustains, purifies, and ennoble the engagement and married life...making love grow" (Pontifical Council for the Family (1996), no. 37).

Immediate Preparation Stage

The immediate preparation stage consists of the following components: a synthesis of previous preparation based on doctrinal, moral and spiritual exercise. Experiences of prayer like retreats and spiritual exercises in which the encounter with the Lord can make them discover the depth and beauty of the supernatural life (St. John Paul II, (2017). It also includes the liturgical preparation with the active participation of the engaged with special attention to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Lastly, it consists in the canonical discussions between the priest and engaged couples (Pontifical Council For the Family (1996), no. 50). The engaged couples have to know that "they are uniting themselves in marriage as persons baptized in Christ, and they should behave in conformity to the Holy Spirit in the family life" (Pontifical Council For the Family (1996), no. 53). Therefore, in the context of the preparation stages of marriage mentioned above, Christian

marriage procedures/processes are gradual and continuous processes from the birth of the child through adolescence to young adulthood. The family is the institution where the primary work of marriage preparation takes place. The parents of the child play a critical role in modeling godly Christian marriage for their children.

CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE BETWEEN THE WASUBI AND CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE PROCESSES

Christians are not distinguished from the rest of mankind by country, speech, or customs. Christianity is a universal religious tradition which is to be inserted in cultures of the world. Sarpong (1990) proves the same idea saying, “Christianity’s claim to universality is validated, only when it can be expressed in any cultural form” (p. 108.) Thus, in order for Christianity to reach to the people of the world, it is necessary to understand people’s way of life (culture). Still, the people of this world in order to understand Christianity, they need guidelines which are not foreign to their own way of life: blending of the cultural values and Christian values. The Africa traditional values and Christian values should therefore enrich one another harmoniously for human wellbeing.

Culture is a vital aspect of Christian practice, as Mugambi (2002: 516) emphasizes, as it serves as the medium through which Christianity is expressed and communicated. The universality of Christianity enables it to find resonance in diverse cultural contexts, making it adaptable and relevant to people from all backgrounds. To connect with African communities, it is essential to contextualize and inculturate the Christian faith, addressing specific needs and values while preserving cultural heritage. By embracing and integrating Christianity within the cultural framework of African societies, believers can experience a deeper spiritual connection and a more meaningful expression of their faith, fostering unity and understanding within the global Christian community.

To both traditions, the family is the place where the primary marriage preparation takes place. In appreciation of the Pope ideas’ that preparations begins at childhood by parents, it is related to the African processes of marriage. Being the role of parents, it is therefore important to incorporate the traditional values with the Christian values here so as the child acquires both the Christian and tradition customs values, and ultimately fit well in the contemporary society. The child growing

with such kind of formation will be enabled an ability to create a happy marriage since will not be unfamiliar to his/her culture and beliefs. He or she will not be confused between the tradition and the Christian way of conducting marriage.

The involvement of the elders, as regard to marriage life preparations, is of much important to both. For example, for the Christians; the Holy Bible acknowledges the role of elders. As we read from the Book of Proverb: “The life of the aging helps to clarify a scale of human values; it shows the continuity of generations and marvelously demonstrates the interdependence of God’s people. The elderly often have the charism to bridge generation gaps before they are made” (Proverb 17:6). Moreover, Pope John Paul II suggested, “the pastoral activity of the Church must help everyone to discover and to make good use of the role of the elderly within the civil and ecclesial community, in particular within the family” (John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (1982), no. 27).

Thus, the elders’ roles are appreciated by the Church as far as marriage life is concerned. The processes of marriage differ between these two traditions in what regards the time taken to initiate and who initiates the young ones into a marital life. For Christians the initiation is supposed to begin in the family from birth of the child after a while the Church takes over by forming the initiate through adolescence to young adulthood; therefore, to marriage day. While for the Wasubi, it is first of all the family which is responsible. Then the elders and almost the whole community do involve in forming the initiates from birth throughout one’s life. Thus, for the Wasubi, marital initiation is a gradual and continuous process in one’s life time which happens in the community. The Wasubi marriage process differs significantly from Christianity in various aspects. These differences are evident in the time taken to conduct the marriage, the steps involved, the participation of individuals, and the directives given to fortify the marriage. The Wasubi marriage encompasses numerous teachings, both before and after the marriage, which distinguish it from Christian practices. The extensive teachings before and after the marriage ceremony add immense value to the Wasubi marriage and set it apart from other communities, including Christianity.

The time spent to prepare or initiate the expected couple is very important. Christian marriage preparation ends at wedding day. There is no much follow-up after the couples have gotten married either to help strengthen their marriage life through more marriage teachings. One of the divorcee lamented saying that,

The Church failed to help my marriage survival. I married with the Church wedding, when my marriage faced the challenges, the Church did not give any hand to solve the marital challenges we were passing through, finally my marriage broke. To such reason I fail to attend the Church services no more (Source: Respondent DE20, 2022).

The communal aspect is another difference to note. Marriage among the Wasubi is not just between two individuals, but between two families. Baloyi (2013) says, when an African woman marries, she does not just marry her husband, but marries into an entire family and clan (p. 9), where as in Christianity, marriage is perceived as a personal affair and mutual agreement of the spouses. Marriage in Africa is strictly controlled by a tradition which stands to satisfy the demands and desires of the society rather than the desires of those getting married (Welch 1933:21).

African marriage, as in the Wasubi tradition, is therefore much less private than the Christian marriage and for that reason experiences more intervention from family and extended family members. As Mbiti (1991) has put it: “Unlike the Christian marriage that brings together a husband and wife, traditional African marriage was viewed as a covenant between two communities” (p. 30). One of the interviewed said “*the community members and relatives have the role towards the marriage practice; example the role of aunts, uncle and grandparents are to be appreciated and respected*” (Source: Respondent PE30, 2022).

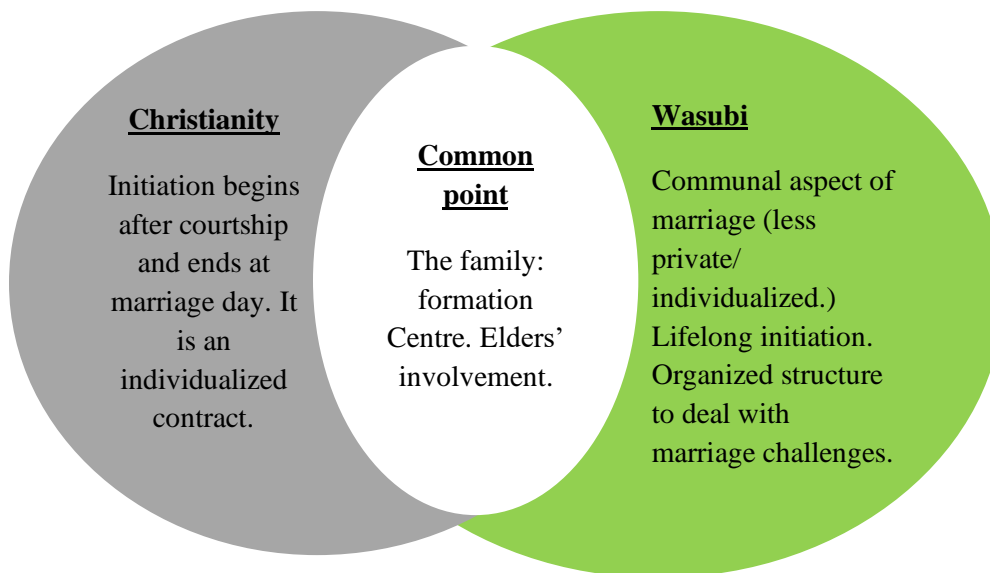


Figure 2: Wasubi Marriage Differs and Relates with Christian Marriage in Terms of Marriage Preparations

Source: Own conceptualization, 2022

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