

Fundamental Moral Principles of Marriage in the Friends Church: A Study of Christian Values and Secular Influences in Trans Nzoia County, Kenya

ANDREW MULOSSI SIRENGO¹, MARGARET MATISI², RISPAAH WEPUKHULU³

^{1, 2}Department of Social Sciences, Kibabii University

³Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy, Kibabii University

Abstract- *This study examines the fundamental moral principles of marriage as advanced by the Friends Church in Trans Nzoia County, Kenya, amid growing secular influences. Using a descriptive research design, data was collected from 334 respondents including pastors, church elders, married individuals, and community leaders through interviews, questionnaires, and focus group discussions. The findings reveal that marriage in the Friends Church is primarily understood as a sacred covenant before God between one man and one woman, emphasizing lifelong commitment, mutual love, and spiritual growth. Traditional moral principles include faithfulness, rejection of divorce, biblical submission, and Christian child-rearing. However, secular influences have significantly impacted these principles, leading to increased tolerance for diverse beliefs, declining emphasis on strict moral teachings, and changing attitudes toward marriage permanence. The study concludes that while the Friends Church maintains its theological foundation, it faces considerable challenges from secularism that threaten traditional marriage values. The church must strengthen its teachings, enhance youth engagement, and develop robust strategies to preserve Christian marriage principles while addressing contemporary challenges.*

Indexed Terms- *Christian Marriage, Friends Church, Secular Influences, Moral Principles*

I. INTRODUCTION

Marriage as an institution has undergone significant transformation globally, with religious communities grappling with the influence of secular ideologies on traditional values. The Friends Church, also known as

the Quaker Church, has historically upheld distinctive marriage principles rooted in biblical teachings and spiritual discernment. However, contemporary societal changes present challenges to these foundational beliefs.

Secularism, defined as the separation of religion from public life and the decline of religious authority, has increasingly influenced Christian communities worldwide. This phenomenon has particularly affected marriage institutions, where traditional values of lifelong commitment, faithfulness, and biblical gender roles are being questioned or redefined according to modern liberal ideologies.

The Friends Church in Kenya, established through American missionary efforts in the early 20th century, has maintained strong biblical foundations regarding marriage. However, like many religious institutions, it faces mounting pressure from secular influences including globalization, modern education, media exposure, and changing legal frameworks. These factors have contributed to shifting attitudes toward marriage permanence, moral standards, and family structures within the church community.

This study examines the fundamental moral principles of marriage as advanced by the Friends Church in Trans Nzoia County, Kenya, and analyzes how secular influences have impacted these principles. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for church leadership, policymakers, and scholars interested in the intersection of faith and modern society.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Christian marriage has historically been understood as a sacred covenant reflecting God's relationship with humanity. Block (2021) emphasizes that biblical

marriage represents God's unchanging commitment to His people, requiring fidelity, permanence, and mutual sacrifice. Ward (2024) argues that God's everlasting covenants provide the framework for human relationships, particularly marriage, which should mirror divine faithfulness and permanence.

The Friends Church has distinctive marriage practices rooted in spiritual discernment and community involvement. Historically, Quaker marriages emphasized equality between partners, simplicity in ceremonies, and the centrality of God's presence in the union (Barbour, 2019). Stolz (2020) notes that Quaker marriage practices often challenged conventional religious and social norms while maintaining core principles of faithfulness, spiritual unity, and lifelong commitment.

Secularization has significantly impacted Christian marriage institutions globally. Cherlin (2020) describes the "deinstitutionalization of marriage," where traditional norms governing marriage have weakened, leading to increased individualism and declining religious authority over marital relationships. Regnerus (2020) argues that contemporary Christian marriage faces unprecedented challenges from secular ideologies that prioritize personal fulfillment over sacrificial commitment.

African Christian communities face unique challenges in maintaining traditional marriage values amid rapid social change. Arinaitwe (2025) emphasizes the need for African churches to develop contextual responses to secularism while preserving biblical foundations. The integration of Western education, legal systems, and cultural values has created tension between traditional African Christian marriage practices and modern secular ideologies.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive research design to examine the fundamental moral principles of marriage in the Friends Church and assess the impact of secular influences. The research was conducted in Trans Nzoia County, western Kenya, which has a significant Friends Church presence established through early 20th-century missionary activities.

The study targeted pastors, church leaders, church elders, married individuals, youth, divorcees, and village leaders within the Friends Church community. A combination of purposive and simple random sampling was used, with purposive sampling selecting key informants and simple random sampling ensuring representativeness across different demographics.

The study targeted 393 respondents and achieved a response rate of 85%, with 334 participants completing the data collection instruments. Data was collected through interviews with pastors and presiding clerks, questionnaires administered to married individuals and church elders, and focus group discussions with various church member categories.

Qualitative data were analyzed thematically using systematic coding, while quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics including frequencies and percentages. The study received ethical approval from Kibabii University and NACOSTI, with informed consent obtained from all participants.

IV. RESULTS

4.1 Respondent Demographics

The study achieved an 85% response rate with 334 participants. The sample comprised 55.1% females and 44.9% males, with 47.9% being married. Educational levels varied from no formal education (18%) to postgraduate qualifications (2.7%), with secondary education being most common (35.9%). Position analysis showed 54% married persons, 20.9% church elders, 19.1% village leaders, and 6% divorcees.

4.2 Definition of Marriage in the Friends Church

A significant majority (82%) defined marriage as a sacred covenant before God between one man and one woman, emphasizing spiritual foundation and lifelong commitment. Many respondents (88%) viewed marriage as reflecting Christ's relationship with the Church, emphasizing sacrificial love and spiritual symbolism. Others (93%) emphasized marriage as a

commitment rooted in love, faith, and mutual support, while some (61%) defined marriage as a divine institution ordained for companionship, procreation, and spiritual growth.

4.3 Traditional Moral Principles

Faithfulness and exclusivity emerged as fundamental principles, with respondents describing marriage as "an exclusive partnership, honoring the sacred bond" and identifying faithfulness as "the cornerstone of our union." Lifelong commitment was overwhelmingly emphasized, with 91% viewing marriage as a lifelong journey and 78% specifically rejecting divorce.

Biblical teachings on love, respect, and mutual submission featured prominently, with marriages "thriving on principles of love and respect, deeply rooted in biblical teachings." Christian child-rearing appeared central, with strong emphasis on "creating a home environment that reflects Christian values" and "teaching children biblical principles."

4.4 Impact of Secular Influences

The study revealed significant secular influences affecting traditional marriage principles. A concerning shift from biblical principles to personal preferences was observed, with young couples prioritizing "personal happiness over traditional biblical teachings" and individuals "interpreting scriptures to align with their personal desires."

Increased acceptance of divorce and remarriage represented significant departure from traditional teachings, with respondents noting "growing acceptance of divorce and remarriage among church members" and that "the stigma surrounding divorce has lessened." Growing tolerance for cohabitation before marriage was identified, with "cohabitation becoming more common among church members" and some believing it "helps build a stronger foundation."

Decline in pre-marital counseling participation was concerning, with "fewer couples engaging with church programs" and "couples opting out of pre-marital counselling." Media and popular culture influences promoted materialism and self-centered relationships,

with "media glorifying materialistic lifestyles" and "popular culture depicting self-centered behaviors as normal."

4.5 Contemporary Challenges

Digital technology and social media emerged as major challenges, with couples "more engaged with their devices than with each other" and "social media presenting curated images of perfect lives." Financial stress significantly affected marriages, creating "constant shadows" and causing communication to suffer. Extended family dynamics, substance abuse, and infidelity represented persistent challenges requiring sophisticated pastoral responses.

4.6 Changes in Attitudes

Increasing tolerance of interfaith marriages despite doctrinal differences represented major attitudinal shift. Growing emphasis on personal happiness over duty and commitment reflected fundamental changes in marriage expectations. Delayed marriages due to career and educational pursuits became normalized. Greater involvement of women in decision-making evolved toward more egalitarian partnerships. Decreased reliance on church elders for marital guidance represented institutional challenges to traditional authority.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that while the Friends Church in Trans Nzoia County maintains strong theological foundations regarding marriage as a sacred covenant, it faces significant challenges from secular influences that are gradually reshaping both institutional practices and individual attitudes. The church's traditional emphasis on lifelong commitment, faithfulness, and biblical principles remains central to its teaching, but practical application is increasingly compromised by modern ideologies prioritizing individual fulfillment over covenantal commitment.

Secular influences have successfully penetrated the Friends Church through media exposure, modern education, economic pressures, and cultural shifts toward individualism and moral relativism. These

influences have contributed to increased acceptance of divorce and remarriage, tolerance for premarital cohabitation, declining participation in pre-marital counseling, and shifting expectations about marriage purposes and permanence.

The study reveals concerning gaps in church leadership's response to secular influences, with inconsistent engagement limiting the church's ability to provide clear guidance and maintain theological coherence. Contemporary challenges including technological disruption, financial stress, and relationship breakdown are exacerbated by secular cultural factors that provide alternative frameworks often conflicting with traditional Christian marriage principles.

Despite these challenges, the study reveals resilience within the church community, with many members maintaining strong personal commitment to Christian marriage principles. This resilience provides foundation for renewal efforts that could strengthen the church's ability to preserve authentic Christian marriage principles while engaging constructively with modern challenges.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the church should implement comprehensive biblical marriage education through systematic teaching programs, regular seminars, and intensive workshops that directly address secular ideologies. Leadership development requires specialized training for church leaders to effectively engage secular influences while maintaining theological integrity.

Youth engagement strategies must acknowledge contemporary realities while strengthening commitment to traditional principles through mentorship programs and interactive educational initiatives. The church should establish comprehensive family support systems including parenting workshops and counseling services.

Pre-marital counseling programs require significant strengthening and should become mandatory, addressing contemporary challenges while

maintaining biblical foundations. Clear disciplinary frameworks should balance pastoral sensitivity with theological consistency. Digital age ministry strategies are essential for engaging contemporary couples while maintaining biblical principles.

Community outreach programs should be expanded to engage broader society with Christian marriage principles while providing practical services. Research and evaluation systems should monitor the effectiveness of implemented strategies and adjust approaches based on outcomes.

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