

Bridal Ecclesiology and the African Church: Theological Reflections and Contextual Applications



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ABSTRACT

The metaphor of the Church as the “bride of Christ” holds profound theological significance, offering insights into the identity, purpose, and eschatological hope of the Christian community. Despite its richness, this metaphor has received limited scholarly engagement within African theological discourse, leading to a gap in its contextual application. This article addresses that gap by critically examining the implications of bridal ecclesiology for the African Church. Using conceptual analysis and a comprehensive review of existing literature, the study demonstrates that the bridal imagery not only illuminates the Church’s participatory role in Christ’s redemptive mission but also inspires a deeper communal spirituality, ethical commitment, and missional consciousness. The paper argues that integrating this metaphor into African ecclesiology can promote the church’s qualitative growth, enhance communal engagement, and invigorate its spiritual and missional vitality. In doing so, the article contributes to a more robust and contextually relevant African ecclesiological framework.

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INTRODUCTION

The Bible depicts the church with various metaphorical expression such as the “temple of God” (1 Cor. 3:16-17), “salt of the earth,” (Matt. 5:13), “light of the world” (Matt. 5:14), “a new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17), “the household of God” (Eph. 2:19), and “the bride of Christ” (Eph. 5:25-26) among others. Paul S. Minear compiled a list of ninety-six New Testament representations of the church.¹ These representations, which provide insights into its nature, identity, and mission, are referred to as ecclesiological metaphors. Collectively, ecclesiological metaphors offer a multifaceted understanding of the church as a sacred, transformative, unified, and beloved community, called to embody the presence and mission of Christ in the world.

Of the many ecclesiological metaphors, this paper focuses on the bridal representation of the church. The bridal metaphor of the church is a rich and multifaceted symbol that encapsulates the close and intimate relationship between Jesus Christ and the collective body of believers. In the African context—where marriage holds not only profound significance as an institution but also serves as a communal celebration and expression of shared values—an exploration of this metaphor offers an

¹ Paul S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004).

opportunity to enhance the qualitative growth of the church. Exploring the bride metaphor within the African context can foster a deeper understanding of the sacrificial love and commitment demonstrated by Christ towards his church. Just as marriage involves selflessness, devotion, and unwavering loyalty, so too does the relationship between Christ and his bride entail a profound sense of love and care that transcends individual interests.

Yet, the metaphor has not been adequately examined within African theological contexts, limiting its effective integration into local ecclesial thought and practice. The lack of adequate literature on the bridal representation of the church from an African perspective has prompted this paper, which seeks to examine this metaphor within the African context and to explore how it may enhance the qualitative growth, communal engagement of the church, and ultimately enrich its spiritual vitality and mission impact. The paper contributes to African Christian ecclesiology to enhance the qualitative growth of African believers.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The Nature of the Bride Metaphor

A metaphor is a figure of speech that compares two seemingly unrelated things or concepts, highlighting similarities to convey a deeper meaning.² Metaphors work by establishing comparisons between distinct ideas or objects without directly stating them.³ Through this comparison, metaphors suggest meaning indirectly and invite the audience to infer similarities and gain deeper insights. They stimulate the imagination, encouraging creativity and prompting listeners or readers to connect different ideas. The effectiveness of metaphors often relies on cultural and contextual relevance, as they can carry different meanings or evoke varied associations depending on the audience's background. It is important to consider the cultural, social, or religious context in which a metaphor originated to interpret it correctly.⁴

The bride metaphor is not merely an ordinary figure of speech. It is emblematic for at least three key reasons, which provide a framework for theological reflections on this metaphor. First, the ecclesial bridal imagery is not only rooted in Scripture but also pervasive in theological discourse and liturgical practices.⁵ While acknowledging its historical importance, it is essential to recognize the potential for misinterpretation or overextension of the metaphor.⁶ Thus, a balanced evaluation of its theological value should consider both its longstanding presence and the possibility of past deviations from its intended meaning. Second, beyond its established character, the bridal imagery possesses an extensive range of meanings and applications that enhance its ability to convey various insights and serve as a unifying element across different ecclesial and theological domains.⁷ Lastly, the bridal image stands out within ecclesial metaphors as it functions essentially as a proper and personal name for the Church, specifically as the Bride of Christ.⁸ When treated as a personal name, the bridal imagery powerfully conveys a sense of subjectivity and personhood attributed to the Church, emphasizing its identity as a living, relational, and responsive entity.⁹ Moreover, because the bridal image holds emblematic and proper significance, typical qualities of metaphor like surprise or deviation are somewhat displaced, varying based on the cultural familiarity with the image.¹⁰ Engaging the imagination with such an emblematic metaphor poses a unique challenge, often demanding significant effort.

The bride metaphor is difficult to interpret and apply, as rightly noted by Paschasius Radbertus, who asserts that "Few, and only with difficulty, have understood how Christ can be called spouse and

² John K McVay, "Biblical Metaphors for the Church and Adventist Ecclesiology," *Andrews University Seminary Studies (AUSS)* 44, no. 2 (2006): 7.

³ McVay, "Biblical Metaphors for the Church and Adventist Ecclesiology," 291.

⁴ McVay, "Biblical Metaphors for the Church and Adventist Ecclesiology," 291.

⁵ Andrew W Lichtenwalner, "The Church as the Bride of Christ in Magisterial Teaching from Leo XIII to John Paul II" (Catholic University of America, 2012).100.

⁶ John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (Notre Dame, IN:University of Notre Dame Press,1989), 41.

⁷ Lichtenwalner, *The Church as the Bride of Christ in Magisterial Teaching from Leo XIII to John Paul II*, 101.

⁸ Lichtenwalner, *The Church as the Bride of Christ in Magisterial Teaching from Leo XIII to John Paul II*, 101.

⁹ Lichtenwalner, *The Church as the Bride of Christ in Magisterial Teaching from Leo XIII to John Paul II*, 101.

¹⁰ Lichtenwalner, *The Church as the Bride of Christ in Magisterial Teaching from Leo XIII to John Paul II*, 101.

the Church his wife and bride.”¹¹ The following outlines some of the difficulties one encounters in interpreting and applying this metaphor. First, the multiplicity of ecclesial images, coupled with the versatility of the bridal image, may give the impression of conflicting concepts and hence necessitate interpretation.¹² With metaphors like the Church as the body, temple, flock, or family, the addition of the bridal image introduces further complexity. Each metaphor highlights different dimensions of the Church’s identity and mission, but without careful theological integration, this variety may appear disjointed or even contradictory. The bridal metaphor, in particular, brings strong affective and eschatological connotations that can overshadow or seem inconsistent with more institutional or communal metaphors.

The second issue has to do with the apparent paradoxes or theological tensions raised by the simultaneous application of multiple metaphors—especially how collective identity (many people) can be expressed as a singular (the bride).¹³ The bridal metaphor raises questions like: How can the many be considered one? How can the Church be both the collective “body” and the individual “bride”? These questions highlight the limitations of human language in expressing divine realities. This metaphor, while rich, does not offer a complete or systematic portrayal of the Church. Instead, it functions analogically, pointing to mysteries that transcend literal categories, and requiring theological sensitivity to hold together its symbolic singularity with the Church’s corporate identity.

The third issue has to do with the multifaceted nature of ecclesial bridal imagery and its potential symbolic and analogical implications.¹⁴ The complex, layered symbolism of the bridal imagery and its deeper theological implications pose a challenge. One is confronted with questions about the extent of the bridal metaphor’s reach into the essence of the Church, human nature, and even the mystery of God. These inquiries underscore the complexity and various possibilities of ecclesial bridal imagery, especially in light of the sacramentality of marriage, which exemplifies the non-verbal symbolic implications inherent in the bridal image.¹⁵ The metaphor’s resonance with marriage endows it with profound theological and spiritual significance, offering insights that go beyond words and enriching the Church’s worship and devotional life. Yet, this very richness makes the bridal image resistant to simplistic readings, calling instead for careful theological reflection to prevent distortion or superficial interpretation.

Lastly, the diverse applications and contexts in which the bridal metaphor has been utilized can present a challenging, albeit intriguing, task for interpretation.¹⁶ Bridal imagery has been employed to represent various relationships. Theologically, it has been used to depict the relationships between the Church and Christ, the soul and Christ, the local Church and the bishop, Mary and God, and Mary and the Holy Spirit, Mary and Christ.¹⁷ Liturgically, it has been extended to the congregation’s relationship to the minister, and sacramentally to the bond of marriage reflecting the mystery of the Trinity.¹⁸

These diverse applications enrich the tradition but also risk blurring theological boundaries if not carefully interpreted. A contextual and critical approach is therefore necessary to discern the metaphor’s relevance and meaning in today’s African ecclesial context. To grasp the full theological weight and interpretive challenges of the bridal metaphor, it is essential to understand the cultural and historical context from which this imagery emerges. The next section throws further light on this.

MARRIAGE CUSTOMS IN ANCIENT ISRAEL

In ancient Israelite society, the family held paramount importance, with marriage serving as its cornerstone.¹⁹ The patriarchal structure of Israel, organized around clans, emphasized the necessity of

¹¹ Paschasius Radbertus, *Expositio in Matheo Vol. 56b of Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis*, ed. Bedae Paulus (Turnholt: Brepols, 1984), 25.

¹² Lichtenwalner, *The Church as the Bride of Christ in Magisterial Teaching from Leo XIII to John Paul II*, 102.

¹³ Lichtenwalner, *The Church as the Bride of Christ in Magisterial Teaching from Leo XIII to John Paul II*, 102.

¹⁴ Lichtenwalner, *The Church as the Bride of Christ in Magisterial Teaching from Leo XIII to John Paul II*, 103.

¹⁵ Lichtenwalner, *The Church as the Bride of Christ in Magisterial Teaching from Leo XIII to John Paul II*, 103.

¹⁶ Lichtenwalner, *The Church as the Bride of Christ in Magisterial Teaching from Leo XIII to John Paul II*, 103.

¹⁷ Lichtenwalner, *The Church as the Bride of Christ in Magisterial Teaching from Leo XIII to John Paul II*, 103-104.

¹⁸ Lichtenwalner, *The Church as the Bride of Christ in Magisterial Teaching from Leo XIII to John Paul II*, 103-104.

¹⁹ R.K. Bower and G.L. Knapp, “Marriage; Marry,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. G.W. Bromiley, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 262..

male heirs to perpetuate the family lineage, particularly the father's name.²⁰ Consequently, the fecundity of marriage held significant importance, with barrenness often regarded as a source of shame. While monogamy was generally favored, a woman's inability to conceive could lead to divorce or the addition of further wives or concubines.²¹ Barrenness was considered a profound disgrace, as a woman's honor and status as a wife and mother were deeply intertwined.²² The utmost fidelity on the part of the wife was imperative to ensure the legitimacy of paternity.

Marriage is predominantly portrayed within patriarchal structures. Yet, some exceptions deviate from this norm. One such example is seen in the story of Jacob, Leah, and Rachel, where Jacob agrees to work an additional seven years to marry Rachel after being deceived into marrying Leah (Gen. 29:16-30).²³ During this time, Jacob lives in Laban's household, and Rachel and Leah remain with their father, challenging the typical patriarchal expectation of the wife leaving her family to join her husband's household. Similarly, in the story of Moses, he marries Zipporah, the daughter of Jethro, and resides with her family, working as a shepherd for Jethro (Exod. 2:21, 3:1).²⁴ These instances suggest a departure from traditional patriarchal models of marriage within the biblical narrative.

It was a common practice for parents to take the lead in arranging marriages for their children (Gen. 24:1-4; Josh. 15:16; Judg. 14:2-3; 1 Sam. 18:17, 19, 21, 27).²⁵ Once a suitable spouse was selected, an agreement for betrothal would be established. Betrothal (engagement or espousal) refers to the formal agreement or promise of marriage between two individuals. Betrothal typically involves the exchange of promises, vows, or tokens of commitment between the betrothed individuals and their families. This arrangement held legal weight, essentially consecrating the woman to her future husband from that moment onward, even though the marriage would not be finalized until the wedding ceremony.²⁶ As part of the betrothal process, key terms such as the *mohar* (bride price) and the woman's dowry were negotiated and established. The amount of the bride price could vary depending on various factors, including the social status and economic circumstances of the families involved, as well as the perceived value of the bride.²⁷ In some cases, the bride price might include livestock, jewellery, or currency.

The actual marriage ceremony typically took place sometime after the betrothal to formalize the union between the betrothed couple. The ceremony involved several significant rituals and customs. Firstly, the marriage ceremony often included the formal exchange of vows or promises between the bride and groom, symbolizing their commitment to each other. In the book of Ruth, an example is seen of vows being exchanged between Ruth and Boaz as they enter into marriage (4:9-10). Vows were undertaken, perhaps with the formulation, "She is my wife and I am her husband, from this day forever."²⁸ The ceremony also included the presentation of gifts or tokens of affection between the couple and their families (cf. Gen. 29:18-20). Furthermore, the ceremony likely involved the blessing and prayers of the community gathered to witness the union. In the book of Tobit (7:14-16), one finds Tobiah and Sarah being blessed by their families and the angel Raphael before their marriage.

The procession of the groom and the subsequent feasting were significant cultural and ceremonial events that formed a significant part of the celebration. The procession of the groom, often accompanied by friends, family, and sometimes musicians, was a joyful and festive occasion. The groom would make his way to the bride's home or her family's dwelling, where the marriage ceremony would take place. Upon arrival, the feasting would commence, serving as a communal celebration of the marriage covenant. The feast was typically a lavish and abundant affair, with ample food, drink,

²⁰ Daniel I Block and Ken M Campbell, "Marriage and Family in the Biblical World," in *Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel*, ed. K.M. Campbell (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), 33–102.

²¹ L.G. Perdue, et al., *Families in Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 185.

²² S.J. Dille, "Women and Female Imagery," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets*, ed. M.J. Boda and J.G. McConville (Nottingham: IVP, 2012), 851.

²³ H. W. Perkin, "Marriage, Marriage Customs in Bible Times," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 740.

²⁴ Perkin, "Marriage, Marriage customs in bible times," 740.

²⁵ Perkin, "Marriage, Marriage customs in bible times," 741.

²⁶ Perkin, "Marriage, Marriage customs in bible times," 741.

²⁷ Perkin, "Marriage, Marriage customs in bible times," 741.

²⁸ Perkin, "Marriage, Marriage customs in bible times," 741.

and entertainment provided for the guests. It was a time for rejoicing and merriment, as friends and family came together to honor the newlywed couple and bless their union. The festivities and rejoicing could extend for up to seven days (Gen. 29:27; Judg. 14:12).²⁹ It was customary for the marriage to be consummated on the first night (Gen. 29:23; Tob. 8:1), with the presence of the blood-stained linen serving as evidence of the woman's virginity.³⁰

The primary marriage customs observed during the Old Testament era appear to have continued into the New Testament period. These included the betrothal agreement involving the *mohar* (bride price) and dowry (cf. Gen. 34:12), the celebratory wedding feast (cf. Judg. 14:10–12; John 2:1–10), and the traditional entrance of the bride into the husband's family home (cf. Ps. 45:14–15; Matt. 25:1–10). However, additional customs emerged or became more formalized during the Second Temple and New Testament periods. These included a more solemn and sacramental understanding of the betrothal vow, marking the wife as consecrated to her husband (cf. Matt. 1:18–20), a prenuptial ritual bath (*mikveh*) for purification (linked with Jewish purity laws, cf. Lev. 15:19–24; also implied in Eph. 5:25–27), and a bridal procession from her home to the groom's residence for the wedding ceremony and consummation (cf. Matt. 25:6–10).

Another significant addition was the role of the *shoshebin*³¹—the friend of the bridegroom—who functioned like a best man or official representative, helping organize the festivities (cf. John 3:29). The *shoshebin* would stand at the entrance of the *chuppah* (bridal chamber), awaiting the bridegroom's announcement of consummation.³² Additionally, close companions of the groom, often called the “friends of the bridegroom,” would help guard and accompany the bride during the week-long celebration, ensuring her honor and the proper observance of marital customs (cf. Judg. 14:11; John 3:29). These developments illustrate the deepening symbolic and ceremonial richness of Jewish wedding practices during the New Testament period.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND TO THE BRIDE METAPHOR

The Old Testament is rich with bridal imagery and nuptial references dating back to its earliest traditions. References to a marital understanding of the covenant can be found in both Exodus and Leviticus, which are further elaborated upon by the prophets (34:15-16; Lev. 20:5-6). The heart of spousal imagery in the Old Testament lies in the prophetic tradition of Hosea, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and some sections of Isaiah (Deutero and Trito). Hosea, dating back to around 750-722 BC, was the first to employ such imagery extensively and explicitly. In Hosea's narrative, the prophet is instructed by God to marry a promiscuous woman, Gomer, symbolizing Israel's unfaithfulness to Yahweh through her idolatry and spiritual adultery (1:2-3). Despite Gomer's repeated infidelity, Hosea's love for her remains steadfast, mirroring Yahweh's unwavering commitment to Israel despite her unfaithfulness. God promised an everlasting husband and wife relationship between himself and Israel (2:6, 19-20).

Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah advanced the use of the spousal metaphor by emphasizing the positive fulfillment of the Lord's promises. The bride is promised new maternal fruitfulness by the Lord, who is depicted as both husband and redeemer (49:18, 54:1). Isaiah 54:5 says, “Your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is his name” (NIV). Jeremiah 2:2 refers to Israel in the wilderness as her youthful days when the nation loved and followed Yahweh, their husband. As Yahweh's wife, Israel was to remain faithful to her husband. Unfortunately, Israel was invariably unfaithful and adulterous (3:20).

Ezekiel carries this nuptial imagery further by depicting the Yahweh-Israel covenant as a marriage covenant (16:8). In this covenant relationship, Yahweh was supposed to offer protection and

²⁹ Perkin, “Marriage, Marriage customs in bible times,” 742.

³⁰ Perkin, “Marriage, Marriage customs in bible times,” 742.

³¹ According to Freiberg, in Judges 14:20, Samson's Philistine bride is handed over to the *shoshebin*, a term mentioned uniquely in this verse in the Old Testament. While the concept of a “best man” is found in ancient Near Eastern literature, the specific origin and prevalence of the *shoshebin* tradition in Israel are uncertain cf. Diane Freiberg, “Jesus the Bridegroom: A Metaphor of Fidelity in the New Covenant” (Middlesex University/London School of Theology (LST), 2016). 35.

³² L.J. Archer, *Her Price Is Beyond Rubies* (Sheffield: SAP, 1990).203-205.

provision for Israel, who was to obey and remain faithful to Yahweh.³³ In Ezekiel 16, Israel is depicted as an unfaithful bride who frequently forms alliances with foreign nations, worships foreign deities, and continually turns away from Yahweh. As a result of her harlotry, Yahweh expresses his anger toward Israel. In spite of Israel's unfaithfulness to Yahweh, Yahweh always loved Israel, and promised her of great future. Other books in the Old Testament, such as Psalms, Proverbs, and Wisdom literature, as well as various women considered types of the Church (such as Eve and Sarah), also contribute to subsequent ecclesial bridal imagery through their use of spousal or feminine imagery and symbolism (Psalm 45:10-15; Prov. 2:16-19).

In all the Old Testament significantly contributes to ecclesial bridal imagery in two key ways. Firstly, it portrays the people of Israel and God as bride and bridegroom, respectively, framing the covenant relationship through the lens of betrothal or marriage.³⁴ This intertwining of covenant and marriage enhances the understanding of both concepts: spousal imagery illuminates the covenant relationship, while the covenant enriches the depth of human marriage. Secondly, the Old Testament, particularly the prophetic writings, presents a bridal image characterized by vulnerability and promise.³⁵ Israel's experience of the covenant is marked by a tension between fidelity and infidelity, yet amidst continual failings, the Lord's promise of restoration—a renewed marriage—endures.

NEW TESTAMENT DEVELOPMENT OF THE BRIDE METAPHOR

The husband imagery of God continues in the New Testament. In the synoptic gospels, Jesus refers to himself as the bridegroom to differentiate his disciples from those of John the Baptist and the Pharisees (Mark 2:19-20; Matt. 9:14-15; Luke 5:33-35). Jesus' explanation for why the disciples weren't fasting underscores the joyous nature of being in his presence, likened to a festive wedding celebration. While fasting traditionally serves as a means of spiritual discipline and drawing nearer to God, Jesus' companionship with the disciples fulfills that purpose. Jesus' statement also serves to make a significant claim about his own identity, specifically his divinity.³⁶ In John 3:29, John declares, "The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete" (NIV). Here, the friend of the bridegroom is John himself, who became the forerunner to make preparations for the symbolic marriage between Christ (the bridegroom) and the church (the bride). The bride represents the community of disciples around Jesus, which later became the church. Putting together the imageries used by the four Gospels, Jesus is seen as the bridegroom, the disciples are the attendants (the bride) and John, the groomsman.

Jesus develops the nuptial metaphor further in his parable about the wedding feast (Matt. 22:1-14). According to this parable, a king prepared a wedding banquet for his son and invited people to join in the celebration. After all the people he first invited declined the invitation, he invited people from the street to feast with him. In this parable, the king is God the Father, the king's son is Jesus, the wedding guests first invited are the Jews who failed to accept the Messiah, and the people called from the street are Jesus' disciples who came to join his wedding party. That Christ is the bridegroom and the disciples are a wedding group is obvious from the above parable. Here, the imagery of the disciples as the bride of Christ is not explicit but implied.

The parable of the wise and foolish virgins (in Matt. 25:1-13; cf. Luke 12:35-38) also draws on the husband-wife imagery of the church. In this parable, ten virgins attended a wedding; five of them (the wise ones) took extra oil with their lamps, but the other five (the foolish ones) took no extra oil with their lamps. When the bridegroom finally arrived, he met the wise virgins ready with their lamps full of oil, whereas the foolish virgins had gone out to buy oil for their lamps. He went in with the wise virgins and shut the door. Here, the virgins are more than mere bridesmaids or other female participants

³³ Julie Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel: The City as Yahweh's Wife*, SBL Dissertation Series (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1992).³⁴

³⁴ Lichtenwalner, *The Church as the Bride of Christ in Magisterial Teaching from Leo XIII to John Paul II*, 10.

³⁵ Lichtenwalner, *The Church as the Bride of Christ in Magisterial Teaching from Leo XIII to John Paul II*, 10.

³⁶ For more on Jesus' claim of divine identity, consult Roch Kereszty, *Jesus Christ: Fundamentals of Christology, Rev. and Updated* (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 2002), 142 - 143.

at the party. The closing remarks in verse 13 that they (the disciples) should, therefore, keep watch because they do not know the day or the hour suggest that the virgins represent the followers of Christ who later became the church. Obviously, Christ represents the bridegroom, though he did not explicitly represent his followers as the bride. Jesus' (implicit) reference to himself as the bridegroom also extends to the imagery of the wedding banquet or feast, which he uses to depict the Kingdom of God (Matt. 22:1-14; Luke 13:29, 14:7-24). Here, Jesus unites these concepts of God's kingdom and the wedding, concepts which the Old Testament separates.

Paul frequently employs the metaphor of the bride to illustrate the relationship between Christ and the church. In doing so, Paul draws on the Old Testament imagery of God as the husband of Israel and Israel as his bride. In his letter to the Romans, Paul employs the relationship between husband and wife to illustrate the profound spiritual union between the believing community and Christ (Rom. 7:4). To appreciate this text, one has to read it in context.

Do you not know, brothers and sisters—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law has authority over someone only as long as that person lives? ²For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law that binds her to him. ³So then, if she has sexual relations with another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress if she marries another man. ⁴So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. (7:1-4 NIV).

Just as a woman is bound to her husband through the covenant of marriage but is released from that bond upon his death, Paul argues that believers, through the death of Christ, have died to the law and are now free to belong to another—namely, to Christ, who was raised from the dead. This marital analogy not only underscores the exclusivity and covenantal nature of the believer's relationship with Christ but also emphasizes the transformative purpose of this union: that the community might bear fruit for God. Through this metaphor, Paul invites the audience to see their new identity in Christ as one of intimate belonging, spiritual renewal, and fruitful living, made possible by grace rather than the demands of the law. Still in the book of Romans, spousal undertones may be discerned in other instances of Paul's teachings, such as his citation of Hosea in 9:25-26 regarding the beloved people.

Paul also employs the bride metaphor in his second letter to the Corinthians. In 2 Corinthians 11:2, Paul identifies the church as the bride, Christ as the husband (the bridegroom), and he (Paul) as the groomsman who has implemented the betrothal between Christ and the Corinthian church. He then expresses his concern for the spiritual purity and fidelity of the Corinthian believers, whom he regards as being betrothed to Christ. Proceeding to verse 3, Paul establishes a negative comparison between Eve, who was deceived by the serpent, and the community at risk of being tempted away from Christ. This comparison possibly implies a reference to the Church as a "second Eve."

In Ephesians 5:22-33, Paul uses the analogy of marriage to illustrate the relationship between Christ and the church. He urges husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church, sacrificially giving Himself for her. He then compares this sacrificial love to Christ's love for the church. Paul also states that, just as a husband and wife become one flesh in marriage, Christ and the church are united as one body. In verse 25, Paul extends this analogy from the local church to the universal church by asserting that Christ loved the (universal) church so much that He gave His life for it. Here, Paul considers Christ's marital love for His bride (the church) as the motivation for His atoning death on the cross. For Paul, Christ's total and sacrificial love for His bride (the church) should serve as a model for a husband's love for his wife (v. 25).

The Book of Revelation climaxes the spousal imagery in Scripture. Revelation 17 and 18 metaphorically depict Babylon as a harlot, symbolizing a powerful entity that exploits the innocent for its own gain. Babylon's condemnation as a prostitute stems from its self-glorification (18:7) through

the pursuit and accumulation of wealth across social, political, and legal domains.³⁷ The political and social elites, who have benefited from Babylon's systems at the expense of others, mourn her downfall and the loss of their luxurious lifestyles.³⁸ This judgment echoes the condemnation of Tyre in Ezekiel 26-27 and hence suggests a fulfillment of earlier prophecy.

John's visionary narrative in Revelation 19 includes the depiction of the marriage between the Lamb and his bride, along with the invitation to the wedding feast of the Lamb (19:6-9). In the face of Babylon's temptations and oppression, the "bride has prepared herself" (19:7). The contrast between the harlot and the bride is evident throughout the apocalyptic narrative. While the harlot acquiesces to every temptation, the bride resists. Like the brides in Jewish tradition, she adorns herself in fine, white garments (19:8).³⁹ Importantly, these garments are not of her own provision but are bestowed upon her (19:8). Those invited to the feast in verse 9 are warmly welcomed, contrasting with those who gather to be consumed by birds in verse 17.⁴⁰ Among those consumed are the militant, political, and social elites, similar to those who lamented Babylon's destruction. Yet, this group also includes the "small" and "slaves," indicating that even those considered insignificant or oppressed by societal standards are not exempt from judgment. Revelation 19:17-18 also begs further reflection of Ezekiel 39:4, 17-20, which foretells events leading to the final judgment of the powerful and oppressors. The word "supper" (19:17) stands for both hospitality and judgment for those who failed to practice righteousness.⁴¹ The wedding feast is scheduled to commence upon the arrival of the bride, adorned and ready for celebration. Jerusalem is depicted as the metaphorical "bride, the wife of the Lamb," descending from heaven, her bridal chamber (21:1-2, 9-10), adorned with splendor reminiscent of precious jewels.⁴²

The covenantal phrase of God is reiterated here once more: "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God" (21:3). This reminisces similar phrases in the Old Testament (Lev. 26:11-12; Ezek. 37:27; 43:7, 9) and hence reinforce the overarching theme of the metaphor within the historical narrative.⁴³ From this, it can be inferred that the city of Jerusalem symbolizes the collective people of God. Not long after that, an angel speaks, "Come, and I will show you the bride, the wife of the lamb" (Rev. 21: 9 NIV). The imagery then shifts to the holy city that radiates God's glory and is adorned with a precious jewel (v. 11), echoing Isaiah 61:10, where the bride adorned with jewels signifies the events of salvation. The restoration promised in the prophets (Hos. 2:16-23; Ezek. 16:59-63; Isa. 62:3-5) is now realized in the form of the New Jerusalem, representing the Church in her perfected state.⁴⁴ Finally, the Book of Revelation closes with an invitation from "The Spirit and the bride" to the thirsty and those who desire the water of life (Rev. 22:17 NIV). Revelation makes a significant contribution to ecclesial bridal imagery by transferring the language of marriage covenants found in the prophets to the new ecclesial reality established by Jesus.⁴⁵

KEY THEOLOGICAL THEMES ON THE BRIDE METAPHOR

The expression "bridal ecclesiology" is used in the context of this paper in reference to the nature, purpose and function of the church embedded in the metaphorical representation of the church as the bride of Christ. At its core, bridal ecclesiology explores the intimate and covenantal bond between Christ and the collective body of believers, emphasizing themes of love, unity, and fidelity. In this section of the paper, reflects on the meaning of the bridal metaphor and what it reveals about the nature of the church.

³⁷ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, The Anchor Yale Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).716.

³⁸ Gregory Beale, *The Book of Revelation (New International Greek Testament Commentary)*. (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013). 905.

³⁹ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 935.

⁴⁰ Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, The Anchor Yale Bible*.731.

⁴¹ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 965.

⁴² David E. Aune, "Revelation 17-22." *Word Biblical Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998).

⁴³ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 965.

⁴⁴ Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Apocalypse," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (London: Burns and Oates, 2011), 996–1016.

⁴⁵ Lichtenwalner, *The Church as the Bride of Christ in Magisterial Teaching from Leo XIII to John Paul II*, 15.

Unity in Love

The nuptial imagery of the church signifies the church's unity in love.⁴⁶ Described as the bride of Christ, the church embodies a sacred union with Christ characterized by profound intimacy, unwavering devotion, and eternal fidelity. From a Pauline perspective, the marriage union depicted in Genesis 2 typifies the union between Christ and the church. This is the reason why Paul, having talked about Christ's love for the church that led to his death in Ephesians 5:25, continues to quote in verse 31 that "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh" (NASB).⁴⁷ For Paul, this passage from Genesis 2 is a great mystery about the marriage union between Christ and the church (Eph. 5:32). The unity between Christ and the church, which is patterned after the human relationship in marriage, is essentially not corporeal but spiritual. The unity of the church emanates from her union with Jesus, her singular spouse, and this unity constitutes an element of the Church's beauty. This unity, achieved through love, transcends an organic unity of the head and the body into a relational unity.⁴⁸ The authority of Christ as the head of the church is established through his relationship with another, where unity is freely given and reciprocated. This covenantal love forms a deeply connected bond between Christ and his church, uniting them as one. The covenantal love between Christ and the church is founded on the reality of his sacrificial death on the cross.

While the analogy of the love between an earthly husband and wife can be utilized to illustrate the relationship between Christ and his church, theologians have expounded on the unique nature of Christ's love for the church. Unlike human marital love, Christ's love is characterized by its redemptive and sanctifying power. Paul emphasizes that Christ's love for the church is sacrificial, manifested through his selfless act of giving himself up for her redemption and sanctification (Eph. 5:25-27). Through the cleansing of water and the word, Christ purifies his bride, presenting her to himself as a radiant and holy bride, free from any imperfection. This ongoing process of sanctification underscores the continuous need for the church's spiritual renewal and growth in holiness. This is espoused further in the next section.

Spiritual Faithfulness and Purity

The theme is spiritual faithfulness and purity of the bride. Just as God emphasized the faithfulness of Israel in the Old Testament, Jesus similarly emphasizes the spiritual fidelity and purity of his church. In his unity with the church, Christ, in an act reminiscent of a profound exchange, assumes the unworthiness of the bride—echoing the imagery of the harlot portrayed in prophetic literature—imparts his righteousness upon her.⁴⁹ This transformative exchange, often described as a "joyful exchange" in Martin Luther's theology of justification, symbolizes the profound grace of God in reconciling believers to himself.⁵⁰ As recipients of this grace, the church is called to respond with unwavering faithfulness and purity, remaining steadfast in its commitment to Christ.

Such faithfulness and purity have the following aspect. First, the church must have a single-minded devotion to her husband, Christ.⁵¹ In so doing, the church acknowledges the lordship of Christ and her dependence upon him. Indeed, the bridal metaphor is predominantly "a symbol of the lordship of Christ over the Church,"⁵² emphasizing "the necessary dependence of the Church upon Christ."⁵³ Christ, as Lord, exercises authority over the Church, and the Church, inherently subject to Christ's lordship, relies on him. The church cannot have a diluted loyalty, serve another husband, and be acceptable to Christ. Therefore, the local church ought to show more commitment to a leader or a

⁴⁶ Williams, J. Rodman, *Renewal Theology: Systematic Theology from a Charismatic Perspective*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI, 1996), 74-75.

⁴⁷ Williams, *Renewal Theology*, 75.

⁴⁸ Williams, *Renewal Theology*, 75.

⁴⁹ Stetson Glass, *The Metaphorical Use of Marriage in Scripture: A Pentecostal Exploration* (Southeastern University: Masters of Theological Studies, 2017), 48.

⁵⁰ Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1989), 604.

⁵¹ Williams, *Renewal Theology*, 76.

⁵² Richard A. Batey, *New Testament Nuptial Imagery* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), 68.

⁵³ Brian P Flanagan, "The Limits of Ecclesial Metaphors in Systematic Ecclesiology1," *Horizons* 35, no. 1 (2008): 75.

concern than to Christ.⁵⁴ The tendency to follow church leaders rather than Christ is common in churches built around charismatic individuals. Even though it is God's spirit who gives ministerial *charisma* to people, it is important for the individual to guard against beginning a distraction to his/her followers' focus on Christ.

Second, faithfulness and purity require holding fast to the truth in Christ.⁵⁵ Just as a bride is expected to be faithful and devoted to her bridegroom, so are believers called to remain steadfast in their faith and devotion to Christ. This image is a reminder that the Church is betrothed to Christ, and her ultimate purpose and fulfillment are achieved through devotion to her bridegroom. Batey argues that Christ exemplifies the masculine qualities of active love; he has initiated the betrothal and provided for the Church's life.⁵⁶ His electing love continues to safeguard the Church from meaninglessness and despair. Therefore, as the Bride of Christ, the Church must respond with submission, loyalty, and dedication, seeking from Him the strength to comprehend her origin, define her purpose, and secure her future.⁵⁷ This means that the church's status as Christ's bride is definitive of who she is and how she ought to live.

Third, bridal ecclesiology signifies the church's responsibility of presenting every believer to Christ as a pure and blameless bride, free from spiritual blemishes.⁵⁸ The church must be characterized by holiness and righteousness, just as Christ himself is holy and righteous. This expectation stems from the spiritual union between the bride and the bridegroom, wherein the church is united with Christ in one spirit. Therefore, it is imperative for the bride to lead a life characterized by holiness and righteousness, as this prepares her for the eventual union with the bridegroom upon Christ's return. In Revelations 19:8, the righteousness of the deeds and actions of the bride in the present life is symbolized as fine, bright and clean linen. Rodman rightly emphasizes that just as Christ continually works to sanctify his church, cleansing her by the washing of water with the word (cf. Eph. 5:26–27), the church must likewise actively participate in this sanctifying process.⁵⁹ She must remain steadfast in her pursuit of righteousness and holiness, cooperating with the Holy Spirit in spiritual formation and resisting any corruption or compromise. The bride's commitment to holiness is not passive but intentional—a daily act of faithfulness, repentance, and renewal. Her desire to be found blameless before her bridegroom motivates her to live in a way that honors the covenantal bond with Christ, reflecting his glory until the day of the final consummation.

Living in Anticipation

The bride metaphor also brings an eschatological perspective to ecclesiology, placing the church beyond temporal constraints to embrace eternity itself.⁶⁰ Describing the Church as the bride of Christ portrays her in her eschatological state, urging ecclesiology to contemplate in terms of the future rather than merely the present.⁶¹ In various cultures, it is customary for the bride to await the arrival of the groom at her home during the wedding ceremony. The groom, accompanied by his family members, arrives at the bride's house, where guests exchange greetings with the hosts before the marriage ceremony proceeds. It would be unfortunate for the groom to find the bride unprepared for the occasion. Hence, thorough preparation, anticipation, vigilance, and readiness to receive the groom are essential.

In the case of the Christ-church relationship, there is a theological tension between the “already/not yet” reality of the Church, existing between earthly imperfection and heavenly perfection. While the Church is sanctified and cleansed by the word, she also struggles with spiritual shortcomings, necessitating continual purification by her bridegroom, Christ. Until Christ's return,

⁵⁴ Williams, *Renewal Theology*, 76.

⁵⁵ Williams, *Renewal Theology*, 76.

⁵⁶ Batey, *New Testament Nuptial Imagery*, 67.

⁵⁷ Batey, *New Testament Nuptial Imagery*, 68.

⁵⁸ Williams, *Renewal Theology*, 76.

⁵⁹ Rodman, *Renewal Theology*, 76.

⁶⁰ Wayne Shealy, “The Church as Bride and Mother: Two Neglected Theological Metaphors,” *Journal of Discipleship & Family Ministry* 2 (2012): 22–32.

⁶¹ Glass, *The Metaphorical Use of Marriage in Scripture: A Pentecostal Exploration*, 46.

these challenges will continue to exist. Therefore, the bride, existing in this world, eagerly awaits the return of Christ and the revelation of the Word of God.⁶² Her longing for the bridegroom's presence signifies the anticipation of the imminent arrival of the living Christ for the consummation of their marriage union.

The imagery of the wedding of the Lamb in Revelation 19 symbolizes the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan and the eternal union between Christ and his Church. Despite the metaphorical depiction of the church's past unfaithfulness, believers find hope in their purified status through Christ's sacrifice. Hence, the bride imagery serves as a reminder of the Church's cherished status and collective identity in Christ.

REFLECTIONS FROM AN AFRICAN CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

The Church and Mission

This eschatological vision of the Church as the bride not only shapes her identity and hope but also informs her mission. Many scholars support the depiction of the Church as a bride, emphasizing her role in serving God through the ministry of the gospel while eagerly awaiting the Parousia.⁶³ While the Church eagerly awaits the return of her bridegroom, she does so actively—by embodying Christ's love, proclaiming the gospel, and preparing others for the coming wedding feast. In other words, in a state of expectancy, the Church heralds Christ's imminent return (the *Parousia*). When he comes again, he will manifest as the glorious Son of God, fulfilling His promises to renew and regenerate the Church. Presently, even though the fact that the church is espouse to Christ is a source of joy in the spiritual presence, all of these is just a foretaste of the kind of joy that the bride will experience at the return of the bridegroom (Rev. 19:7). The Church, as a witness of God, is called to wholeheartedly engage in evangelism and serving lives for God in every context imaginable. Beyond merely proclaiming the Gospel, she demonstrates God's love through acts of service and fosters deep fellowship among believers.

As the bride metaphor reminds the church of love for God and for the neighbor, the church's mission in Africa must involve social action at least for the following three reasons. Firstly, Africa faces numerous social, economic, and environmental challenges, including poverty, inequality, disease, and environmental degradation. These issues profoundly impact the lives of millions of Africans, often exacerbating existing vulnerabilities and hindering development efforts. In this context, the church, as a prominent institution with widespread influence and resources, has a moral imperative to address these pressing social issues.

Secondly, the Christian message must emphasize love, compassion, and justice. Jesus Christ himself demonstrated a commitment to social justice by ministering to the marginalized, advocating for the oppressed, and challenging systems of injustice. This is evident in passages such as Luke 4:18-19, where Jesus declares his mission to bring good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners, sight for the blind, and to set the oppressed free. Additionally, Jesus emphasizes the importance of caring for the least of these, highlighting the significance of compassion and justice in his teachings (Matt. 5:31-46). Therefore, the African church, as the embodiment of Christ's teachings, is called to follow his example by actively engaging in social action to alleviate suffering and promote human flourishing.

Thirdly, the African church's involvement in social action is not only consistent with biblical principles but also aligns with its historical role as a catalyst for social change on the continent. Throughout African history, churches and religious leaders have played pivotal roles in advocating for liberation, justice, and human rights, contributing to the downfall of colonialism and apartheid in various African countries. By engaging in social action, the African church can enhance its relevance and credibility in society, attract new members, and strengthen its influence as a moral voice in the public sphere. Social action provides an opportunity for the church to demonstrate its commitment to

⁶² Pieter Verster, "Perspectives on Church and Mission: The Missional Church and Metaphors for the Church," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 43, no. 1 (2022): 6.

⁶³ Shealy, "The Church as Bride and Mother: Two Neglected Theological Metaphors"; R. H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 340; D. A. DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament Contexts, Methods, and Ministry Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 901.

the holistic well-being of individuals and communities, thereby fostering trust and goodwill among diverse populations. In order to effectively carry out this vital mission, the Church must address its pressing need for economic sustainability.

Biblically Sound and Effective Teaching

Earlier, the purity of the church was emphasized. To maintain her purity, the church must adhere to the teachings and the directions of Christ, the head of the church. The church must always hold firm to the truth about Christ, reject spirits other than the Holy Spirit, and any other message that is purported to be the Gospel. False teaching in the African church often manifests in various forms, including the prosperity gospel, syncretism, excessive spiritual warfare, and miracle-mongering.⁶⁴ These teachings can distort biblical truth, lead believers astray, and hinder spiritual growth. The prosperity gospel, for example, promotes materialism and personal gain as signs of God's favor, while syncretism compromises the uniqueness of Christ by blending Christian beliefs with traditional African religious practices. Excessive emphasis on spiritual warfare and sensationalized miracles can foster fear, superstition, and a shallow understanding of faith. Paul talks about another gospel in Galatians 1:8. Here, he is not saying that there are different gospels but that some people go around preaching messages that they consider and present as the Gospel, which in reality is not. Paul warns believers about such messages. The core of the gospel includes (but is not limited to) human sinfulness and the need for repentance, the incarnation, the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the presence of the Holy Spirit, and the promise of the Second Advent.

To combat false teaching, the African church must prioritize robust biblical teaching, theological education, and discipleship. Pastors and church leaders should emphasize sound doctrine, critical thinking, and spiritual discernment in their preaching and teaching. Investing in theological education and training for pastors can equip them to accurately interpret Scripture, recognize false teaching, and effectively refute it. By implementing these strategies, the African church can promote biblical truth, nurture spiritual growth, and guard against the influence of false teaching.

Atonement

The bride metaphor in Christianity holds profound significance, particularly in its connection to the atoning blood of Jesus. In ancient Judaism, blood served as the binding agent in marriage contracts, covenants, and oaths.⁶⁵ The verification of virginity was a requirement. For many African Christians, the mention of blood often evokes thoughts of the cross because of the traditional association of blood with atonement. Across various African societies, blood is often viewed as a symbol of life, vitality, and spiritual energy.⁶⁶ African traditional sacrificial rituals involving the shedding of blood are performed to appease ancestral spirits, seek protection, or cleanse the community of impurities. The act of sacrificing blood is seen as a profound gesture of reverence and communication with the spiritual realm, embodying the interconnectedness between the physical and spiritual worlds.

At the core of the doctrine of atonement is the belief that Jesus, through his death on the cross, made amends for humanity's sins, reconciling them with God and restoring the broken relationship between God and humanity. This act of atonement is often symbolized by Jesus' shedding of blood, which serves as the ultimate sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. The New Testament draws parallels between Jesus' sacrificial death and the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, where the shedding of blood was necessary for the remission of sins. (Heb. 9:22). Given the foregoing, it is important not to misconstrue Jesus' shedding of blood as a purely mystical concept or one that overly sexualizes his

⁶⁴ Sunday Jide Komolafe, *The Transformation of African Christianity: Development and Change in the Nigerian Church* (Carlisle: Langham Publishers, 2013); Matthews A. Ojo, "The Prosperity Gospel among Neo-Pentecostals in Africa," in *The Abandoned Gospel: Confronting Neo-Pentecostalism and the Prosperity Gospel in Sub-Saharan Africa*, ed. Philip W. Barnes (AB316, 2021), 29–40.

⁶⁵ Glass, *The Metaphorical use of Marriage in Scripture*, 51.

⁶⁶ Schadrack Mvunabandi, "The Communicative Power Of Blood Sacrifices: A Predominantly South African Perspective With Special Reference To The Epistle To The Hebrews" (University of Pretoria, 2008).

relationship with the church.⁶⁷ Rather, Jesus' blood symbolized divine purity and innocence, unattainable by humanity.

Through his incarnation, Jesus bridges the gap between divinity and humanity, offering his blood as the divine symbol of purity and atonement. Just as a bridegroom willingly gives himself up for the sake of his bride, so too did Jesus willingly lay down his life for the salvation of humanity (John 10:1-18). This sacrificial act serves as the sealing of the new covenant, wherein believers are cleansed of sin and reconciled with God. In Revelation, the purification and redemption of the bride (church) is associated with the atoning blood (cf. 1:5). Revelation 7:14 presents a multitude of people standing before the throne of God, clothed in white robes, and it is said that they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Given the foregoing, the bridal imagery underscores the transformative effect of Jesus' blood, which purifies believers and makes them worthy to stand in the presence of God.

The imagery of Jesus as the sacrificial bridegroom, offering his blood for the purification and redemption of the church, holds profound significance for African Christians. It embodies themes of selflessness, love, and spiritual transformation deeply rooted in African cultural values. Through this lens, the bride metaphor serves as a powerful symbol of salvation and reconciliation with God, resonating with the rich African traditions and beliefs.

CONCLUSION

The bride metaphor offers a rich and multifaceted theological lens for understanding the Church's identity, mission, and eschatological hope. It emphasizes the Church's spiritual union with Christ, calling her to a life marked by holiness, righteousness, and unwavering devotion. The metaphor also invites deep theological reflection on the Church's communal nature, the paradox of singular and collective identity, and the symbolic richness of marriage within a biblical framework. Moreover, it frames the Church's present struggles within the tension of the "already" and "not yet," urging believers to live in anticipation of Christ's return with readiness and purity. This imagery resonates deeply within African communities. Within the African Christian context, the metaphor gains renewed depth, resonating with familiar cultural practices around marriage, preparation, and communal celebration, while also reinforcing the Church's missional responsibility to embody and proclaim the hope of eternal union with Christ. Based on the theological depth and cultural resonance of the bride metaphor, African churches and Christian scholars are encouraged to engage this imagery more intentionally in ecclesial teaching, discipleship, and theological reflection. Churches should emphasize holiness, communal identity, and eschatological hope as essential marks of the bride of Christ, while scholars are urged to explore the metaphor's contextual relevance within African marriage customs, enriching both academic discourse and pastoral praxis. This will deepen the Church's self-understanding and enhance its witness in African societies marked by spiritual longing and relational values.

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⁶⁷ Glass, *The Metaphorical use of Marriage in Scripture*, 51.

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