

**THE DIFFERING WORLDVIEWS ON CHILDLISSNESS BETWEEN THE  
CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE LUO COMMUNITY IN KISUMU DIOCESE-KENYA**

**BY**

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## Declaration

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## **Dedication**

This research is dedicated to my mother Consolata who shared with me the gift of motherhood voluntarily and nurtured me to be the man I am.

## ABSTRACT

Infertility in marriage is generally viewed as something unfortunate. Each community desires to have itself perpetuated through the birth of children. The traditional Luo society strived toward its perpetuation and in cases of infecundity, solutions such as polygamy and sororate marriages were employed. Such solutions are however incompatible with the teachings of the Catholic Church. This incompatibility of cultures leaves the childless Catholic Luo couples in a dilemma since the Church condemns cultural practices such as polygamy. The general objective of this study was to explore the difference that exists in the understanding of childlessness between the Luo Community and the Catholic Church in Kisumu diocese. The study intended to: establish the contextual meaning of childlessness and its causes among the Luo; assess how the teachings of the Catholic Church on childlessness differ with the traditional Luo worldview; examine the socio-religious challenges that the Luo childless couples face and how they affect their lives; and, investigate the influence of childlessness to the pastoral work of the Catholic Church in Kisumu diocese. This study was guided by the theory of Functionalism of Emile Durkheim (1915) which propounds on the role of religion in the society. A cross sectional research design was adopted which provided a snapshot of the cases in Kisumu diocese. The study was carried out within the Catholic Church in Kisumu diocese since it is a mainstream Church that stands its ground on the views about most traditional cultural practices. The study targeted the childless couples from the 36 parishes of Kisumu diocese. Four parishes were purposively sampled. Four Parish Priests and four Chief Catechists were expertly sampled. 271 Small Christian Community leaders were purposively sampled. The childless couples were sampled using snowball up to a point of saturation. Through this, a total of 28 couples were interviewed. Both primary and secondary data were used in the study. The primary data was collected using in-depth oral interviews, Focus Group Discussions and observation. The secondary data was obtained from the published articles, textbooks, Church records, diocesan archives, pastoral letters and papal encyclicals. The data was coded and analyzed thematically and presented in a descriptive form using narratives. The findings of this study were that: First, involuntary childlessness among the Luo is more than lack of children in a marriage. It could mean having only female children or only one male child. Secondly, the teachings of the Catholic Church differ with the traditional Luo worldview on involuntary childlessness. Whereas the Catholic Church does not see any problem with involuntary childlessness, the Luo cannot withstand this since children are important for the cementing of the marriage. Thirdly, the childless couples face many socio-religious challenges like social alienation, stigmatization, loneliness, being despised among others; such challenges may interfere with their participation in the Church. Fourthly, childlessness influence the pastoral work of the Church as some members will join NRMs and others will avoid Church marriages. Through the findings of this research, the Church theologians could find an avenue to undertake more research on Luo values necessary for inculturation. The study could help scholars to understand the challenges of integrating Luo beliefs and practices into the Church's worldview and the way forward for enhanced evangelization.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration.....	ii
Acknowledgement .....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Abstract.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vi
Abbreviations and Acronyms.....	ix
Operational Definitions.....	x
<b>CHAPTER ONE .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Background to the Study.....	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem.....	8
1.3 Research Questions.....	9
1.4 Objectives of the Study.....	9
1.5 Justification of the Study.....	9
1.6 Scope and Delimitations of the Study.....	10
1.7 Theoretical Framework.....	11
<b>CHAPTER TWO .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>14</b>
2.1 Introduction.....	14
2.2 The Meaning and Causes of Childlessness among the Luo.....	14
2.3 The Teachings of the Catholic Church on Childlessness.....	17
2.3.1 The Teachings of the Catholic Church on Assisted Reproductive Technologies.....	17
2.3.2 The Church’s Teachings on Childlessness and the Luo Worldview .....	23
2.4 The Challenges of Childlessness.....	28
<b>CHAPTER THREE.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>34</b>
3.1 Introduction.....	34

3.2	Research Design.....	34
3.3	Study Area .....	34
3.4	Study Population .....	37
3.5	Sample Size and Sample Frame.....	37
3.6	Sampling Procedures .....	37
3.7	Data Collection Methods .....	39
3.7.1	Oral in-depth Interview .....	39
3.7.2	Focus Group Discussions.....	40
3.7.3	Observation.....	40
3.7.4	Validity .....	40
3.7.5	Reliability.....	41
3.8	Data Analysis and Presentation.....	41
3.9	Ethical Considerations in the Study .....	42
<b>CHAPTER FOUR.....</b>		<b>43</b>
<b>THE BACKGROUND OF THE LUO AND MEANING OF CHILDLESSNESS.....</b>		<b>43</b>
4.1	Introduction.....	43
4.2	Background Information of the Luo People.....	43
4.2.1	The Historical Origin of the Luo.....	43
4.2.2	The Religion of the Luo .....	44
4.2.3	The Economic Activities of the Luo Community .....	46
4.2.4	The Social Lives of the Luo .....	47
4.3	The Meaning of Childlessness among the Luo .....	49
4.3.1	The Importance of Children in the Luo Community .....	52
4.3.2	Causes of Childlessness according to the Luo .....	58
<b>CHAPTER FIVE .....</b>		<b>66</b>
<b>THE CATHOLIC CHURCH’S TEACHINGS AND THE LUO WORLD VIEW ON CHILDLESSNESS.....</b>		<b>66</b>
5.1	Introduction.....	66
5.2	The Teachings of the Catholic Church on Childlessness .....	66
5.3	The Church’s Teachings on Divorce and Illegitimate Unions.....	70
5.4	Childless Couples’ Response to the Church’s Teachings on Childlessness .....	72
5.5	The Traditional Luo Remedies to Childlessness.....	75

5.6	The Difference between the Teachings of the Catholic Church and the Traditional Luo Remedies to Childlessness .....	83
<b>CHAPTER SIX .....</b>		<b>88</b>
<b>THE CHALLENGES OF CHILDLESSNESS .....</b>		<b>88</b>
6.1	Introduction.....	88
6.1.1	The Social Challenges of Childlessness.....	88
6.1.2	The Religious Challenges of Childlessness .....	101
6.2	Coping with the Challenges of Childlessness .....	104
6.2.1	Acceptance.....	104
6.2.2	Adoption .....	108
6.3	Challenges of Childlessness to the Pastoral Ministry of the Catholic Church.....	111
6.4	The Church’s Response to the Problem of Childlessness .....	119
6.4.1	Guidance and Counselling .....	119
6.4.2	Inculturation.....	125
<b>CHAPTER SEVEN.....</b>		<b>137</b>
<b>SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION .....</b>		<b>137</b>
7.1	Introduction.....	137
7.2	Summary .....	137
7.3	Conclusion .....	141
7.4	Recommendations.....	142
7.5	Suggestions for Further Research .....	143
REFERENCE.....		145
APPENDICES.....		153
APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM .....		153
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PRIESTS AND CATECHISTS .....		154
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR CHILDLESS COUPLES.....		155
APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR SCC LEADERS .....		157
APPENDIX E: OBSERVATION GUIDE.....		158



## **Abbreviations and Acronyms**

AMECEA	Association of Member Episcopal Conference of Eastern Africa
AIDS	Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome
ART	Assisted Reproductive Technologies
CSM	Christian Society Missionary
HIV	Human Immuno Deficiency Virus
IC	Independent Churches
NRM	New Religious Movements
SECAM	Symposium of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar
SCC	Small Christian Community
TBA	Traditional Birth Attendants
ZAOGA	Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa

N/B All the Luo terminologies are translated within the text.

## Operational Definitions

Childlessness	This refers to involuntary childlessness which is the state in which couples who desire to have children do not beget children in their union. This study assumed that couples who have been married for more than six years are childless.
A Childless couple	This refers to a couple who lack a biological child.
Luo marriage	This study assumed that Luo marriages are those unions between a Luo man and a Luo woman or a Luo man and a woman from a different community.
Luo couples	Given that the Luo community is patrilineal, Luo couples constitute couples who are both from the Luo community or where the man is from the Luo community and the woman from a different community.
Catholic couples	These are couples who adhere to the Catholic faith or have solemnized their marriage in the Catholic Church.
Traditional Luo	The traditional Luo are those members of the Luo Community who still hold on to and practice the traditional cultural practices.
Catholic Church	This is the Roman Catholic Church.
Christians	Christians mean the adherents of the Catholic Church.
Small Christian Community	This is the smallest unit of the structures of the Catholic Church. It consists of a group of Christian families who live in the neighbourhood. According to the legislation of their formation, the number should be between ten to fifteen Catholic families.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Background to the Study

Childlessness is the state of being without an offspring. It results from infertility/impotence of either of the couples. It is the expectation of every couple to reproduce. When they do so it becomes a sign of fecundity. Freedman (1968, p.371) defines fecundity as: *“the capacity for reproduction while fertility as the actual reproduction”*. Fecundity is actualized in giving birth. According to Banzikiza (1985), fecundity is broader in meaning than fertility, but in most cases the two may be used synonymously. For this reason, the study will use the two terms interchangeably.

In most cultures of the world, children are highly valued. Morell (1994) corroborates this view and explains that motherhood is celebrated while childlessness is viewed as a sorry state. In as much as children are highly appreciated, in some parts of the world some people choose to be childless. Morell (1994) calls this voluntary or intentional childlessness. However, this could be due to some socio-economic factors as some people perceive children as burdensome and too expensive to take care of. Some look at children as a disturbance to their marriage and peace. This is affirmed by Kimani (2001, p.65) who says that: *“today’s families, modern or otherwise, have as their primary concern the gratification of sexual needs, with other consequences as a necessary or unnecessary bother”*. Thus, such couples would see the birth of a child as a problem.

Chamie and Mirkin (2012) in support of this argue that around the globe, many couples opt to delay childbirth or may decide not to have children due to economic reasons, high unemployment rates, education and career ambition. They further indicate that in developed nations, one in ten women in their 40’s have no children, while in some countries like Italy and Switzerland, it is one in four women. Steinhauer (2013) confirms that in Switzerland, the

German-speaking women who are working and educated tend to choose to be childless. Mariette (2012) supports the same for Canadians. She says that the 2011 census showed that nearly half of the Canadian couples that, is 44.5% are not having children. This is mainly voluntary which is due to the current trend, economic and social reasons.

Morell (1994) points out that some couples may look at parenthood as burdensome and choose to be childless; however, the society still expects them to have children. She challenges the societal expectation which considers women to be mothers who are to be seen working within their families. Morell (1994, p.2) further notes that: *“those women who do not give birth, the society looks at them as selfish and irresponsible”*. She substantiates that women without children are ignored unless they are desperately seeking motherhood. This could be because they seem not to be adding any value in the society. Rosenblatt (2008) in his study among the childless couples of Korea supports the above argument when he found out that even voluntary childlessness is not viewed positively by the society. One of his respondents had these to say:

When a couple remains childless although they are fertile, they seem selfish, self-oriented, and workaholic. They seem to dislike children, and only to want a comfortable life without any responsibility. I have a prejudice that they might have some problems with their marital life. They could get divorced more easily than couples who have responsibility for children (p. 577)

Inhorn (2007) in his study among the Muslims found that childlessness is equally viewed as a problem. Given that the Muslims are pronatalists, they highly value children and parenthood is desired and culturally mandatory. Thus infertility is an issue that is looked at with a lot of concern and among Muslims it must be remedied. Rabia (2013) in support of this says that Islamic tradition does not object to medical interventions on infertility. He continues to say that in the Middle East, they resort to polygamy, if it is the man who is infertile he can delegate a kinsman to procreate with his wife and the wife is to submit and lastly one can also take a brother's son and fulfill paternal obligations to that boy. This could be seen as a form of adoption. Rabia further says that the childless couple also prays to Allah to give them children and also can seek traditional medicine.

Among the traditional African communities, marriage was cemented by the birth of a child. According to Kimani (2001) in some African communities, marriage was nullified under two conditions, when either the woman failed to conceive or she was not a virgin. The African communities had a lot of value for children. Mbiti (1969) argues that for an African to die without getting married and without children is to be completely cut off from the human society, to become disconnected, to become an outcast and to lose all links with humankind. Marriage and sex were held sacred because the future of the community depended on them. This explains why there were many taboos attached to marriage and sex.

Kimani (2001) continues to argue that sexual activity in the African communities was restricted within marriage because it was the only way of perpetuating the community. He observes that to African people, sex was more than sexual intercourse. Apart from procreation, it was also the means of sustaining, maintaining and extending the clan and the society. In many African communities, sexual activity was not geared for pleasure but was done because of the desire to have children. Kenyatta (1970) emphasizes that for the Kikuyu of Kenya, the desire to have children is deeply rooted in the hearts of men and women so that on entering marital union, they regard the procreation of children as their first and most sacred duty.

Among the Luo of Kenya, marriage and begetting of children is equally important. Everyone is expected to marry and those who are not married are despised and ridiculed. Mboya (2001) explains that a virgin who died would be buried outside their homestead; and before the burial after the grave had been dug, an old woman came to break the hymen. Then the wedding songs were sung as if she was still alive and was getting married. This was to avert the possibility of her spirit coming to disturb those still alive. In the same vein, Mboya (2001) argues that every young man or woman growing would be looking forward to the day he/she would be married. The father would even urge his son who had attained the age of marriage to look for a wife. He would advise the son on which family to marry from. An unmarried man would be despised and referred to as *misumba* which literally translates to a servant or slave, meaning that one who did not marry had no status within the familial or societal matrix and would only be compared to an outsider-a servant.

The importance the Luo attached to children made barrenness to be considered an evil. Childlessness affected the very existence of the community since it was perceived as interfering with the normal flow of life (extinguishing the fire of life). The whole community was disturbed when a couple did not have children. In traditional Luo community the couple would be helped through a diviner. In most cases, polygamy would be recommended. Nwoye (2007) supports this argument that, polygamy was connected with barrenness of the first wife or with her one-dimensional reproduction of only female children in marriage. The above literature indicates that there is need to explore the meaning of childlessness among the Luo.

The traditional Luo also resorted to sororate union. Ayayo (1975) describes how a woman who was barren would go and bring another woman from her clan. She would be called *nyar ot* (daughter of the house) or *siweho* (a girl brought by a married woman to her husband because she was either too old or she could not give birth to a son). Luo men feared to be childless since the status of *buoch* (impotence) was that of loathe. If it was proved beyond reasonable doubt that it was the man who was impotent, then it was organized under oath that his brother or a cousin sires for him children with his wife. Mbiti (1969) concurs with this and points out that, such arrangement would also happen with absent husbands or when the husband was too young.

In the Old Testament the Jewish world view was similar to that of the traditional Luo community. The gift of fecundity was God given from the moment of creation. The book of Genesis 1:27-28 records that God created human beings both male and female and ordered them to go and multiply and fill the earth. Marriage and sex therefore are considered holy and good. Among the Deutero-canonical books in the book of Tobit 8:6-9, Tobias prays to God before having sexual intercourse with his wife Sarah, in pursuit for children. This means sexual intercourse carried with it the actuality of having children.

The Old Testament depicts childlessness as a misfortune and a reproach; childless couples are displayed as a miserable lot. The childlessness of Abraham was his major concern that made him question God's promises (Genesis 15:2). In the Jewish set up, barren women were despised just like in the Luo community. The barren women in the Bible relied on God through prayer. There are examples where God heard their prayers and intervened. In Genesis 16:4-6, Sarah, the wife of Abraham is despised by her slave girl Hagar after the latter conceived a child with Abraham.

In Genesis 21:1ff, the Lord remembered Sarah as he had promised and Sarah gave birth to Isaac. In Genesis 25:21-26, Rebekah the wife of Isaac was barren and Isaac prayed to the Lord and she conceived. She then gave birth to twins Esau and Jacob. In Genesis 30:22, Rachel the wife of Jacob was remembered by God and her womb was opened, she conceived and bore a son whom she named Joseph. In the book of Judges 13:1ff, Manoa's wife was barren and the angel of the Lord appeared to her and told her that she would conceive and bear a son. She indeed conceived and gave birth to Samson. In the first book of Samuel 1:1-8, Hannah is despised and she has great bitterness within her heart. She prayed to God in tears and she conceived and gave birth to Samuel. The above shows the challenges these Old Testament personalities faced due to childlessness.

Most of these Old Testament childless women acted like a Luo barren woman. Sarah for instance, gave her slave girl to Abraham. Rachel too, in Genesis 30:1-8, gave Jacob her maid Bilhah and she bore children for her, Dan and Naphtali. Leah also gave her maid Zilpah to Jacob and she gave birth to a son whom she named Asher (Genesis 30:9-13). This may be a proof that the Jewish culture is not contrary to the traditional Luo beliefs of solving the problem of childlessness.

In the New Testament, childlessness is a great source of sorrow. Both Zechariah and Elizabeth are presented to be unhappy with their state of childlessness. They continuously prayed to God until their prayers were heard when they had given up on getting a child. After conceiving John, the sorrow and humiliation that Elizabeth suffered while barren is turned into gladness. (Luke 1:25). The suffering that the childless couples undergo which is depicted in both the Old and the New Testaments indicate how childlessness is challenging to the couples involved. Flynn (2012) substantiates that childlessness whether voluntary or involuntary have challenges. Some of these challenges the couple have to live with throughout their lifetime. Given that these couples are Christians, the challenges are socio-religious and affect their lives in the society and in the Church. Jones (2014) in the same line describes how her childless state impacted on her faith in God. The literature here indicates the need to investigate the challenges the Luo Catholic childless couples undergo.

Banzikiza (1995) observes that the Catholic Church traditionally taught that marriage is for begetting and the education of children. Mutual love and support as well as remedy against concupiscence were regarded secondary. The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) shifted from the original position of the Church and stressed that marriage is for mutual love and companionship. Banzikiza (1995) justifies that begetting progeny is not a component of the marital covenant since bearing of children cannot be determined by either husband or wife. The begetting of offspring is not conferred upon the couple by virtue of their marriage but it is the marital act that leads to procreation.

According to the Catholic Church's teaching therefore, the validity of marriage is not pegged on children. This means that, it is not the birth of children that authenticates marriage. The Canon Law does not prohibit or invalidate any marital union because of sterility (Canon 1084, par.3). The Second Vatican Council stresses that even when biological fecundity is impossible, personal fulfillment of the partners takes priority. The Council divorced procreation from being the basis of marriage since in Christian marriage children are not the main purpose but love (Paul II, 1982). In as much as the Catholic Church insists that children are not important in a marriage, many Catholic Christians in other parts of the world do not appreciate childlessness. Castro (2013) reports on how the Catholic childless couples in Philippines flock the Obando Bulacan to participate in fertility dances and seek the intervention of the Virgin of Salamba to have children. Some he says go to various parishes seeking for prayers, prosperity and healing.

The Catholic Church in Kisumu diocese would not act differently from the stand of the Catholic Church. At her level, the diocese stresses the teachings of the 'mother' Church and would not condone anything that would go against these teachings. The Luo childless couples in Kisumu diocese therefore have to adhere to the teachings and the understanding of childlessness according to the Catholic Church. Archbishop Zacchaeus Okoth of Kisumu diocese stressed on the teachings of the Church on marriage to the couples during the celebration of the year of family in the following words:



Marriage is a covenant that cannot be dissolved at any cost. Christians must live according to the Gospel values and depict Christ-like virtues in their marriages. Whether couples have children or not they must learn to love and cherish each other. They must accommodate each other and remain faithful in their marriage. Marriage is a sacred institution and must be according to God's will (Homily on 4/12/2013 at Kibuye Cathedral).

The above exposition indicates that the Catholic Church's understanding of childlessness differ with the traditional Luo understanding which values children as the main purpose of marriage. These differing worldviews present a dilemma to childless Catholic Luo couples, that is, they are caught up between following the traditional practices or solutions to childlessness and the teachings of the church. It would be their desire to have children and fulfill the expectations of the traditional society. In some cases, where children may not be forth coming, a Luo couple may decide to go the traditional way to remedy their childlessness. This could be marrying a second wife in the case of a man. In case of the infertility of the man, the woman may be allowed to sire children with a brother or a close cousin. The Church on the other hand does not condone polygamy and any form of illicit sexual union. Given that these couples are Christians, if they go for these traditional remedies, it becomes challenging as they may be regarded by the Church leadership as heathens or people who lack faith. The study sought to assess this difference between the teachings of the Catholic Church and the traditional Luo worldview.

Despite the fact that there is a perceived dilemma which results from the above difference, it would be rare to find most couples remaining in the dilemma. Some will try to overcome the dilemma and the most probable way is that majority would resort to the traditional remedies. Given the fact that these remedies are against the teachings of the Catholic Church, this would further complicate issues not only for the couple but to the Church too. Some couples who find that the Catholic Church is not helping them in any way will resort to join other New Religious Movements (NRM). As the Church loses some members to the NRM's, then her work of evangelization is jeopardized. This therefore made the study to investigate the influence of the challenges of childlessness to the pastoral work of the Catholic Church in Kisumu diocese.

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

In as much as many scholars have undertaken studies on childlessness and the availability of its definition, the understanding of childlessness has not been adequate enough to encompass the Luo understanding. Childlessness is majorly attributed to infertility of the couples which is also inadequate according to the Luo. Among the traditional Luo, childlessness in marriage is undesirable and has to be remedied by all necessary means. The traditional Luo childless couples enter into polygamous and sororate marriages in order to solve the problem of childlessness. However, the Catholic Church does not approve the traditional Luo remedies to childlessness. From this perspective, the two perceive childlessness from different angles. The Church emphasizes that marriage is for love and companionship while procreation is a fruit of marriage. On the other hand, the Luo would not withstand unfruitful marriage. If the Luo Catholic couples choose to abide by the cultural demands on account of childlessness, the effect is that they are not allowed to participate actively in the Church activities. They are barred from receiving the Holy Communion and denied positions of leadership in the Church. This difference between the Church and the Luo understanding leaves the couples in a dilemma. They are at a loss on which way to go.

Childlessness is associated with many challenges. Scholars have explored on the challenges of childlessness from various perspectives. Some have looked at the challenges from socio-economic and political points of view. However, the socio-religious challenges that the Luo Catholic childless couples face has not been exposed. Those couples who feel that the Church does not address their problem end up leaving the Church to join the New Religious Movements (NRM) which they feel address their plight, this therefore affect the pastoral work of the Church. This study therefore, carried out an investigation of the two worldviews regarding childlessness with the view of establishing the Luo meaning of childlessness, assessing the difference of the two worldviews in the understanding of childlessness, the challenges of childlessness to the lives of the couples and on the work of the Church.

### **1.3. Research Questions**

The main research questions that the study sought to answer were:

- i. What is the meaning and causes of childlessness in the Luo community?
- ii. What are the teachings of the Catholic Church on childlessness and how do they differ with the traditional Luo worldview on childlessness?
- iii. What are the socio-religious challenges that the Luo childless Catholic couples face and how do they affect their daily lives?
- iv. What is the influence of childlessness on the pastoral work of the Catholic Church in Kisumu diocese?

### **1.4. Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of this study was to explore the differing worldviews of childlessness between the Luo Community and the Catholic Church with focus on Kisumu diocese.

The specific objectives of the study were to:

- i. Establish the contextual meaning of childlessness and its causes among the Luo.
- ii. Assess how the teachings of the Catholic Church on childlessness differ with the traditional Luo worldview on childlessness.
- iii. Examine the socio-religious challenges that the Luo childless Catholic couples face and how they affect their lives.
- iv. Investigate the influence of childlessness to the pastoral work of the Catholic Church in Kisumu diocese.

### **1.5. Justification of the Study**

Involuntary childlessness in any marriage is undesirable. Like in many African societies, the Luo community acknowledges the existence and the burden of childlessness among the unfortunate or affected members. Consequently, they have developed and upheld modalities of containing the challenges of childlessness. These modalities however run into conflict with the Catholic Church which does not condone the measures such as sororatic union and polygamy. This study exposed the agony and the plight of these childless lay people. The challenge is socio-religious driven thereby requiring a broader approach to the issues of fertility and fecundity. The rise of

the New Religious Movements (NRM) and Independent Churches (IC) pose a challenge since most of the couples who feel that the Catholic Church is not helping them in addressing their plight find safe havens in these churches. Therefore, the study has exposed the plight of these Luo childless couples in the Catholic Church as they struggle to live authentic Christian lives with the ‘burden’ of childlessness. Pope Francis (2014) in his homily to couples acknowledged that childlessness can be a challenge to many infertile couples.

Through the findings of this research, the married childless couples could be helped to live an integrated Christian life. It could help the Catholic Church to know and understand deeply the Luo marriage values, beliefs and practices on childlessness. The findings of the study tackle the challenge of the Symposium of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM). The bishops recommended that studies need to be done on marriage and fecundity at the grass root level in each diocese to bring true change in the Christian lives (AMECEA documentation service, 150, 1978, p.1). The findings of the research could also help the diocese of Kisumu in its pastoral activity in helping the childless couples and also dealing with the challenge of mass movement of these Christians to the NRM. It could also help the Catholic Church theologians in their efforts aimed at marrying the Gospel with culture (Inculturation). Finally, as a contribution to the larger basket of knowledge, the study could help scholars to understand the challenges of integrating Luo beliefs and practices into the Church’s worldview and the way forward for enhanced evangelization.

### **1.6. Scope and Delimitations of the Study**

This study was carried out within the Catholic Church of Kisumu diocese. Kisumu diocese falls under the bigger Archdiocese of Kisumu. The Archdiocese has other dioceses like Kisii, Homabay, Kakamega, Bungoma, Eldoret, and Kitale. This site was strategically chosen since the diocese is predominantly Luo and the study focuses on the Luo Catholic childless couples. Moreover, the Catholic Church is a mainstream Church that stands its ground on the views about most traditional cultural practices including those employed to solve the problem of childlessness. The study confined itself to the Luo community where childlessness is loathed. Considering the existing literature, not much has been done to address this problem as it affects

the Catholic Luo couples. For this reason, the researcher wants to make a contribution to this area of study to make the agony and the dilemma of the Luo Catholic childless couples be exposed for deeper considerations and further research. The study was confined to the bonafide members of the Catholic Church who are expected to know the teachings of the Church and to conform to these teachings.

The study was conducted in four parishes of Kisumu diocese: St. Alloys-Ojolla, St. Joseph-Nyabondo, Holy Trinity-Rang'ala and St. Boniface-Aluor. These parishes were selected each from every deanery of the Catholic diocese of Kisumu. They are the oldest and the other parishes were curved from them in the later years. Burgman (1990) records that, the missionaries came to Ojolla in 1906, Aluor in 1916, Rang'ala in 1920 and Nyabondo in 1934.

The study faced certain delimitations like the unwillingness of some childless couples to take part in the study. Majority of the men were not willing to participate; some men were unavailable since they were in the urban areas where they are employed. These were overcome by being patient with those who were not willing and through the snowball method getting others who were willing until the information that was needed was obtained. In the case of the men who were not willing to participate and the ones who were in the urban centres, much of the information affecting their family was obtained through their wives.

### **1.7. Theoretical Framework**

This study was based on the Emile Durkheim theory of Functionalism (1858-1917). In his study of the primitive religions of the Australians, Durkheim held that there are no religions that are false. In his book, Durkheim (1995) stresses that, all religions fulfill the same needs, play the same role and proceed from the same causes. According to Alpert (1961), Durkheim has four primary functions of religious and ceremonial ritual: Firstly, it imposes self-discipline necessary for social life as members strive to follow religious rituals. Secondly, it brings people together, reaffirms their common bonds, reinforces social solidarity and strengthens their bonds of relatedness. Thirdly, it makes the members be aware of their common social heritage and lastly,

its euphoric function helps them when they are faced with calamities, disappointments, threats and losses of treasured members.

Hatch (1973) explains that functionalism means the contribution which a social fact makes to the needs of the society or the function of a phenomenon or its role in the establishment of the general harmony in the society. The problem of childlessness and its consequences disturbs the general harmony of the society. The childless couples would find themselves in trouble with the other members of the family or clan because they may be considered as failures in perpetuating the family or clan; and this causes them pain and disharmony. As they turn to the traditional ways of remedying childlessness, they find themselves going against the teachings of the Church and this interferes with their harmonious living as members of the Catholic Church. The tragedy here arises since the Catholic Church does not integrate the traditional Luo practices that are used to take care of childlessness. This makes the affected couple to be torn apart and therefore results to a gap that affects both the Church and the Luo community. Parsons (1961) argues that the society can run smoothly only when the society operates in such a way that its needs are fulfilled. These needs could be individual needs such as food and shelter among others which must be met for a social system to run. Reynolds and Tanner (1995) justify this view that the functions of religion is to respond to human needs, to help in times of crisis and in the everyday strain of normal life.

This framework therefore becomes a basis for this study because the problem of childlessness is a socio-religious problem. The reason behind marriage in Africa is not only to establish a family but it is a means of fighting their immortality (Mbiti 1969). This immortality is fought by having many children who would remember someone many years even after their death. Bujo (2009) corroborates this view that sexuality and family, marriage and posterity are related to eschatology and immortality. The childless couple find themselves in an identity crisis. They find it difficult to revert to the traditional remedies given that they are Christians. On the other hand, the pressure from their families and the stigma that is associated with childlessness may be too much to bear.

The dilemma comes when the couple wants to identify themselves with both the Church and the traditional culture. They may end up being alienated by the Church and their traditional culture. The Church needs to come in and operate in such a way that the couple would fit well in the Church. The Church has to play a role to help the couple belong such that the couple is not alienated by both the Church and the culture. Malinowski (1969) puts it clearly that religion is not just a tool of the society but an integral element in individual and social existence; it works to make the crises of life bearable.

Through the work of the Catholic Church, the childless couple should find a home and feel at home in the Church. If they cannot fit well in the Church or if the Church also alienates them, then the Church would have lost its very purpose, which is to be a kingdom where all belong. The Church therefore becomes a new family of those alienated by their traditional culture and wants to adhere to the teachings of Christ. If they lose their cultural identity, they need to find a new identity within the Church. In Luke 8:21, Jesus establishes a new family; it is the family of God that is not bound by blood relationship. In his ministry, Jesus gives a home to those who are rejected by the society. He is found among the poor, the lepers, the tax collectors and sinners (Luke 5:12-32; 7:34-50).

## **CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Introduction**

Many scholars have written on marriage and childlessness since marriage and fecundity are important aspects of human life and existence. Despite that availability of literature on marriage and fecundity, not much has been availed to address the problem of the differing worldviews on childlessness between the Luo community and the Catholic Church especially in Kisumu diocese. This section will review the studies so far done to show how they are relevant to this study and how they can enrich it.

The literature will be reviewed as per the objectives of the study, namely, the meaning and causes of childlessness among the Luo. The second part will deal with the teachings of the Catholic Church on childlessness which will handle the teachings of the Church on Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART) and the Church's teachings on childlessness and the Luo worldview. Then the last section will deal with the challenges of childlessness to the couples and to the pastoral work of the Catholic Church.

### **2.2. The Meaning and Causes of Childlessness among the Luo**

Bram (1985) did her study on couples who were voluntarily childless and those who delayed to be parents. She studied their attitude toward children and parenthood, self-image, marriage, lifestyle and goals. According to her, childlessness means those who have remained without children. She discovered that those who delayed to have children ended up having children. She further says that there are divergences in the development of attitudes among the childless men and women in regard to the meaning of childlessness and the value of work. This study is relevant because it gives the meaning of childlessness but this meaning is inadequate according to the Luo understanding.

Kawango (1995) in her study of health problems of mothers and children, their causes and management, found that one of the problems the Luo women faced was infertility. She describes



infertility as the inability of women to conceive and bear children. This infertility she says has several causes such as: sorcerers who either tied the womb of a woman or bewitching (*ndagla/nawi*). The other cause was the spirits of the dead who would also refuse to open the womb of the woman if they are offended by the woman or one of the couple, thus making the couple childless. If the parents of one of the couple were witches, then the spirits of the people that they killed turn to their children and thus cause the misfortune. Breaking of taboos also caused infertility for example when one married a blood relative then they would not be able to bear children.

Kawango (1995) also observed that sub-fertility would also occur if the wife had a child out of marriage and the tradition of *kalo nyathi*, (where the parents of the child place the child between them on their bed sometime after the delivery). If the baby was conceived on another bed or is of another man, either the child would die from *chira* or the mother would stop having more children. This was to check on unfaithful women. The last cause of infertility was genetic or hereditary. Couples who were having a childless member in their family also turned out to be affected by the same. She outlined some of the following causes and remedies:

Apart from hereditary causes of infertility, there are other human causes. They were to be solved by consulting the traditional medicine people. They consulted *ajuoga* (diviner) who diagnosed the cause and recommended a possible remedy. The remedy also varied. If it was that the woman's womb is tied, the spell was destroyed or was scattered. If it was the spirit of the dead, then they were appeased. If it was due to the breaking of a taboo, then a *manyasi* (a concoction) was drunk (p. 93).

Kawango (1995) further admits that a childless woman has an exasperating struggle since she is rendered dead because she has no offspring. She outlines the taboos a woman should observe during pregnancy like avoiding sexual intercourse especially outside marriage since it leads to miscarriage. They also need to wear protective charms. She observed that the expectant women consulted the Traditional Birth Attendants (TBA) especially in cases when they have abdominal problems. The study is from the perspective of health. She studied childlessness from the perspective of infertility and as one of the health problems facing the Luo women. Her understanding of childlessness is the absence of a child or children. However this definition is limited according to the Luo understanding.

Mboya (2001) in his book describes the ethics and moral codes which guided the Luo during their migrations, in the course of their daily living and work, and in their religious practices. The main purpose of this work is to enable the current generation to know and appreciate the cultural norms that were practiced and which made the Luo community to be cohesive and to survive as a people. The book illustrates the norms concerning the marriage institution, mothers and children and regulations during pregnancy and various deaths. Mboya (2001) further describes what he calls 'bad deaths.' In this section he gives regulations concerning the death of a virgin, of woman who dies without giving birth, of a bride dies before she is confirmed and the death of a pregnant woman. This literature does not explore on the meaning and causes of childlessness but he outlines the various norms and cultural practices that were observed in various circumstances.

Reed (2008) in his study was interested on how voluntary childless men define and construct the meaning of family life, how they make the decision to remain childless, the reaction they receive to this decision and the impact of their childless status to their identities. Most of his respondents had positive experiences with children and enjoyed children. When these respondents were asked the meaning of family, they thought of their parents and siblings. Most of his respondents defined family basing themselves on intimacy and they included other kin members. However, some of the respondents gave the definitions that fit the modern constructions of family that do not require a child. This work presents childlessness as the absence of children whether voluntary or involuntary. But this perspective is different from the Luo perspective of childlessness.

Forsythe (2009) in her study on the social stigma and the medicalization of infertility was interested in examining the history of infertility and the changes that have happened over the years. She wanted to see if the situation of women's control and care of their health and bodies has improved, stayed the same or worsened. She observes that the concept of infertility has changed over centuries from being known as barrenness to being known as infertility, which is a medical term. She defines infertility as a situation when a woman cannot conceive after a year of trying without contraception or cannot carry a child to term. Forsythe (2009) further distinguishes infertility into two, which are, primary and secondary. Where primary infertility is when a couple cannot have a baby after a year of regular sexual relations without contraception

and have not conceived before. While secondary infertility is where a couple has failed to conceive after bearing at least one child or has failed to carry a baby to term. This understanding of childlessness is inadequate according to the Luo understanding.

Ayayo (1976) in his work describes the social, economic, political and religious life of the Luo community. He shows the cultural norms concerning the traditional Luo marriages and the processes involved. He also describes the reasons that may make divorce permissible in the Luo community. He brings up issues such as impotence and infertility as reasons that may cause marriage to be dissolved and points out how the couples involved would be helped so as to save the marriage. He outlines the rights and obligations of a barren woman and shows that even though childlessness was not appreciated in the traditional Luo community, the barren woman still had rights and obligations. He does not explore much on childlessness but he gives the picture of the traditional Luo practices. Though Ayayo (1976) does not explore on the meaning of childlessness among the Luo, his definition of the term is that, it as a situation of lack of children. The current study will show that childlessness bears a different meaning within the Luo community.

The above literature gives a picture of both voluntary and involuntary childlessness. Voluntary childlessness is purely a matter of choice. While involuntary childlessness is caused by infertility. However, the context within which the Luo understand and define childlessness, and the causes attached to it is what the current study intends to expose.

### **2.3. The Teachings of the Catholic Church on Childlessness**

#### **2.3.1 The Teachings of the Catholic Church on Assisted Reproductive Technologies**

The Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith expresses that the Church encourages research and investment directed at the prevention of sterility. Science and technology are valuable resources for man when placed at his service and when they promote his integral development for the benefit of all (*Donum vitae*, 1987). The Church considers science and technology as a way in which human beings express the responsibility of dominion over creation that man was given at the time of creation (Genesis 1:28).

With regard to the treatment of infertility, the Church teaches that new medical techniques must respect three fundamental goals: first, the right to life and to physical integrity of every human being from conception to natural death; second, the unity of marriage, which means reciprocal respect for the right within marriage to become a father or mother only together with the other spouse; and lastly, the specifically human values of sexuality which require that the procreation of a human person be brought about as the fruit of the conjugal act specific to the love between spouses (*Dignitas Personae*, 2008). The instruction *Dignitas Personae* (2008) and Klaus (2009) identifies the following scientific technological interventions that are contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church: Obtaining a sample of seminal fluid by masturbation, Artificial insemination by a non-spouse or even by the husband if the sample is obtained and handled by non-licit means (masturbated specimen), In Vitro Fertilization (IVF), Zygote Intra-Fallopian Transfer (ZIFT), and Intracytoplasmic Sperm Injection (ICSI), ovum donation, "surrogate" uterus.

The Church teaches against these interventions in human reproduction (Flannery, 1992). The Catechism of the Catholic Church (2007) expresses that all techniques of heterologous artificial fertilization as well as those techniques of homologous artificial fertilization which substitute for the conjugal act are to be rejected. The instruction *Dignitas Personae* (2008) defines Heterologous artificial fertilization or procreation means the techniques used to obtain a human conception artificially by the use of gametes coming from at least one donor other than the spouses who are joined in marriage. While artificial homologous fertilization or procreation means the technique used to obtain a human conception using the gametes of the two spouses joined in marriage.

*Donum vitae* (1987) do not approve heterologous fertilization. This is because heterologous artificial fertilization violates the rights of the child; it deprives the child filial relationship with parental origins and can hinder the maturing of the child's personal identity. Furthermore, it offends the common vocation of the spouses who are called to fatherhood and motherhood: it objectively deprives conjugal fruitfulness of its unity and integrity; it brings about and manifests a rupture between genetic parenthood, gestational parenthood and responsibility for upbringing. Such damage to the personal relationships within the family has repercussions on civil society

which in turn, threatens the unity and stability of the family and therefore becomes a source of dissension, disorder and injustice in the whole of social life.

The Church through the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith teaches that while conducting the interventions on procreation, the values and rights of the human person should be safeguarded. The Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith in the instruction *Dignitas Personae* (2008) outlines that, the Church does not approve Intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI), that ICSI is intrinsically illicit; it causes a complete separation between procreation and the conjugal act. Indeed ICSI takes place outside the bodies of the couple through actions of third parties whose competence and technical activity determine the success of the procedure. Such fertilization entrusts the life and identity of the embryo into the power of doctors and biologists and establishes the domination of technology over the origin and destiny of the human person. Such a relationship of domination is in itself contrary to the dignity and equality that must be common to parents and children. Conception in vitro is the result of the technical action which presides over fertilization. Such fertilization is neither in fact achieved nor positively willed as the expression and fruit of a specific act of the conjugal union. The same teaching is supported by the Catechism of the Catholic Church (2007) that:

Techniques involving only the married couple (homologous artificial insemination and fertilization) are perhaps less reprehensible, yet remain morally unacceptable. They dissociate the sexual act from the procreative act. The act which brings the child into existence is no longer an act by which two persons give themselves to one another. Under the moral aspect procreation is deprived of its proper perfection when it is not willed as the fruit of the conjugal act, that is to say, of the specific act of the spouses' union...only respect for the link between the meanings of the conjugal act and respect for the unity of the human being make possible procreation in conformity with the dignity of the person (CCC, 2376).

Given the above scenario, the position of the Catholic Church on ART is known and that the Church does not condone any scientific interventions on human reproduction. What is not known is how the Luo would respond to such a teaching and the extent to which the teaching would affect the Luo childless couples. The Church holds that these techniques which assist procreation are not to be rejected on the grounds that they are artificial. This is because they bear witness to the possibilities of the art of medicine. The Church continues to state that before adopting them, they must be given a moral evaluation in reference to the dignity of the human person, who is

called to realize his vocation from God to the gift of love and the gift of life (*Dignitas Personae*, 2008).

The bishops of United States of America in their Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services (2009) teach that the Church cannot approve medical practices that undermine the biological, psychological, and moral bonds on which the strength of marriage and the family depend. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops continues to advise that if these technologies are adopted, then science will end up with children of technology. These bishops observe that, some approaches to infertility clearly violate the integrity of the marital relationship. These introduce third parties to fulfill essential aspects of parenthood, by using eggs or sperm or even embryos from “donors” (who are often paid, and therefore more accurately described as vendors), or even by making use of another woman’s womb to carry the couple’s child. The child resulting from these arrangements is not the fruit of the spouses’ commitment to procreate only with and through one another. The procreative aspect of their marital relationship is violated, just as its unitive aspect would be violated by sexual relations with a person outside the marriage.

Surrogacy is not accepted by the Church, but among the Luo it is common to find an infertile woman bringing another woman to give birth in her place and the children are legally owned by the infertile woman. Given that this kind of child bearing is not approved by the Church, how this would impact on the Luo childless couples is what the study is to expose.

The Church further holds that these procedures are contrary to the human dignity proper to the embryo, and at the same time they are contrary to the right of every person to be conceived and to be born within marriage and from marriage. Also, attempts or hypotheses for obtaining a human being without any connection with sexuality through "twin fission", cloning or parthenogenesis are to be considered contrary to the moral law, since they are in opposition to the dignity both of human procreation and of the conjugal union (*Donum vitae*, 1987). The Church, moreover, holds that it is ethically unacceptable to dissociate procreation from the integrally personal context of the conjugal act. Human procreation is a personal act of a husband and wife, which is not capable of substitution (*Dignitas Personae*, 2008).

Pope Pius XII (1956) says that the Church recognizes the legitimacy of the desire for a child and understands the suffering of couples struggling with problems of fertility. Such a desire, however, should not override the dignity of every human life to the point of absolute supremacy. The desire for a child cannot justify the “production” of offspring; just as the desire not to have a child cannot justify the abandonment or destruction of a child once he or she has been conceived. This teaching of the Church differs with the essence of the Luo marriages. According to the Luo, a child must be sought through all necessary means. What this teaching means to the Luo childless couples is that they are at a loss. The extent to which this would affect the couple is what the current study is interested in.

The Church teaches that fertilization achieved outside the bodies of the couple remains by this very fact deprived of the meanings and the values which are expressed in the language of the body and in the union of human persons (*Dignitas Personae*, 2008). Given that the church is a custodian of morality, the reasons behind artificial interventions on human reproduction are good. The Church is protecting the misuse and manipulation of human beings. According to *Donum vitae* (1987) the techniques of fertilization *in vitro* can open the way to other forms of biological and genetic manipulation of human embryos, such as attempts or plans for fertilization between human and animal gametes and the gestation of human embryos in the uterus of animals, or the hypothesis or project of constructing artificial uteruses for the human embryo. The Church’s Law states that:

Fertilization is licitly sought when it is the result of a conjugal act which is per se suitable for the generation of children to which marriage is ordered by its nature and by which the spouses become one flesh. But from the moral point of view procreation is deprived of its proper perfection when it is not desired as the fruit of the conjugal act, that is to say, of the specific act of the spouses' union (Code of Canon Law 1061).

The Church further teaches against human cloning that it is intrinsically illicit in that, by taking the ethical negativity of techniques of artificial fertilization to their extreme, it seeks to give rise to a new human being without a connection to the act of reciprocal self-giving between the spouses and, more radically, without any link to sexuality. This leads to manipulation and abuses gravely injurious to human dignity (*Dignitas Personae*, 2008). The United States Catholic Bishops Conference (2009) is in agreement that human cloning is the most extreme reduction of

human procreation to a manufacturing process. They said that IVF and cloning have adverse effects on the people involved. IVF and cloning they say, require surgically extracting eggs from women's bodies, a process that generally begins with the use of powerful fertility drugs to make their ovaries produce many eggs at a time instead of one. Some women develop a condition called ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome which can further damage their fertility and lead to serious medical complications and even death. Children conceived by IVF, if they do survive to birth, have been found by some studies to have an increased risk of some serious birth defects.

The Church does not reject the scientific methods wholesome. There are those that are accepted to be in compatible with the teachings of the Church. According to the instruction *Donum Vitae* (1987) and Klaus (2009), the following are the technologies Compatible with the Catholic Church's teachings: Observation of the naturally occurring sign(s) of fertility, sometimes called Natural Family Planning. This is done by timing sexual intercourse on the days of presumed (potential) fertility for at least six months before proceeding to medical interventions; general medical evaluation of both spouses for infertility can also be conducted; then post-coital test to assess sperm number and viability in "fertile type" mucus. These tests are undertaken after normal intercourse; they could also carry an appropriate evaluation and treatment of male factor deficiency. This is done by obtaining seminal fluid samples from a non-lubricated, perforated condom after normal intercourse; an assessment of uterine and tubal structural competence can also be conducted by imaging techniques such as ultrasound, hysterosalpingogram, among others; they could also conduct an appropriate medical treatment of ovulatory dysfunction; and finally an appropriate (usually surgical) correction of mechanical blocks to tubal patency.

According to the instruction *Dignitas Personae* (2008), these techniques are aimed at removing obstacles to natural fertilization, for example, hormonal treatments for infertility, surgery for endometriosis, unblocking of fallopian tubes or their surgical repair, are licit. They may be considered authentic treatments because, once the problem causing the infertility has been resolved, the married couple is able to engage in conjugal acts resulting in procreation, without the physician's action directly interfering in that act itself. It states that none of these treatments replaces the conjugal act, which alone is worthy of truly responsible procreation. Klaus (2009) corroborates this when he observes that any procedure which assists marital intercourse in



reaching its procreative potential is moral. Whereas the procedures which add a "third party" into the act of conception, or which substitute a laboratory procedure for intercourse, are not acceptable. This teaching presumes that all childless couples suffer the same cause of infertility. In as much as the Church permits these treatments, the Luo community as the study would expose understands that there are several causes of childlessness.

The literature here is relevant to the study because they present the Church's view concerning Artificial Reproductive Technologies. Science has come up with some methods which can assist couples who are childless to get children. These methods could be used by these childless couples to assist them so as to overcome their childlessness. The situation becomes complex, the Church is against these ARTs and at the same time she is against the traditional Luo remedies to childlessness. What then is the way forward? The childless couples find themselves in a dilemma.

### **2.3.2 The Church's Teachings on Childlessness and the Luo Worldview**

Traditionally the Catholic Church taught that the primary aim of marriage is begetting and educating children. Other purposes such as mutual love and support as well as the remedy against concupiscence were regarded as secondary. This view was held for a long time by the Catholic Church and was supported by various leaders of the Church. Pope Pius XI (1930) maintained that among the blessings of marriage, offspring holds the first place. God uses people as helpers in propagating life. Pope Pius XII (1951) continuing in the line of Pius the XI taught that nature and the creator impose upon the married couple who use that state by carrying out its specific act, the duty of providing the conservation of the human race. Therefore, it is the responsibility of married people to procreate and voluntary refusal is sinful. The Catholic Church grounded this view from the Biblical teaching that God created human beings and commanded them to go multiply and fill the earth. The Church probably felt obliged to support this Biblical teaching by stressing on the procreative aspect of marriage. This original position of the Church was in line with the Luo worldview which supports marital fecundity. This therefore, is a proof that originally, there was no difference between the two worldviews. However, the current study

is concerned with the difference in the understanding of childlessness that exists between the two worldviews.

Hastings (1973) defines marriage according to the traditional teaching of the Church; as a unit, permanent at least by intention of a man and a woman for the purpose of procreation and rearing of children and mutual companionship and assistance. He points out that the difference between the Church's understanding is that: in the traditional understanding, stress is laid upon the production of children and not upon the interpersonal relationship of the couple. The struggle here is because of the shift that occurred from the understanding of marriage. Instead of the procreative aspect of marriage, stress was laid on the couple's mutual love and companionship. Hastings (1973) observes that marriage in Africa today is torn apart between the three corners of a triangle: the claims of the gospel, the claims of African tradition, and the claims of modern man and woman. This battle over marriage in Africa is at the very center of the battle for an African Christianity. This literature is relevant since it brings out the genesis of the discrepancy between the two worldviews.

Hastings (1973) further maintains that the Christian marriage is monogamous. He suggests that there should be a real sympathy for Christians who at present, in conformity with the past custom of their people, decide with the willingness of the first wife to take a second in the circumstances of childlessness, the widowhood of a sister-in-law, and perhaps, the acceptance of an obviously handicapped girl. He argues that the Church's attitude to people in such cases should be very different from those indulging in irresponsible sexuality for social and economic advancement. Despite the fact that Hastings (1973) is stressing the Catholic Church's position, he recognizes the fact that in Africa, this still would cause a problem because the Africans value children. This is the reason for him pleading with the Church to be kind to those who find themselves going against this teaching due to the problem of childlessness. This study is relevant to the current study because the author is trying to show ways in which the two worldviews could be reconciled to help an African Christian. But how the Luo Catholic childless couples could be assisted is not known.

The Catholic Church teaches that marriage is between a man and a woman and marriage exists with or without children. This teaching brought a shift from the former traditional one that the

Church held on the supremacy of procreation. This teaching became more pronounced after the Second Vatican Council meeting that was held in Rome (1962-1965). Paul II (1982) on “The Christian Family in the Modern World” maintains the same teaching of the Church. He says that lack of procreation should not be the basis of breaking up of a marriage since in Christian marriage; children are not the main purpose but love. Fecundity is the fruit and the sign of conjugal love, the living testimony of the full reciprocal of self-giving. This view emphasizes the teaching of the Church which does not allow anything that can interfere with the union between the married partners. This view differs with the Luo worldview since the Luo cannot withstand infertile marriages.

Flannery (1992) on the Church in the modern world (*Gaudium et Spes*) writes on The Second Vatican Council’s resolutions on the dignity of marriage and the family. He stresses that marriage is an institution confirmed by the divine law; it is where the partners mutually surrender themselves to each other, for the good of the partners, of the children and of the society; and that marriage and married love by its very nature is ordered to the procreation and education of the offspring and it is in them that it finds its crowning glory (*Gaudium et Spes*, 48). On the fruitfulness of marriage, he explains that marriage and love are by nature ordered to the procreation and education of children; that children are the supreme gift of marriage and they contribute greatly to the good of the parents. Married couples should regard it as their proper mission to transmit human life and to educate their children; in this they co-operate with the love of God the creator (*Gaudium et Spes*, 50). The literature above exposes how the shift in the teachings of the Catholic Church on marriage led to a contradiction which has not been resolved by the Church even to date. In as much as the Catholic Church supports the supremacy of the couple’s mutual love and companionship, this would still not satisfy a Luo Catholic childless couple since it is the birth of a child that completes marriage.

Banzikiza (1995) in his study among the Kabale people of Uganda on the pastoral approach to fecundity and marriage illustrates how the African concept of fecundity and family life is contradicted by celibacy and consecrated life. The findings show that the people of Kabale view celibacy as alienation because those who choose celibacy break the lineage. This idea is foreign to the African people where a religious leader is not to be married. The traditional religious

leaders who performed priestly duties by officiating at sacrifices and making intercessions with the supreme God on behalf of the people were married men. The people of Kabale, therefore, strongly oppose the idea that their sons become celibate instead of marrying and begetting children. Banzikiza (1995) exposes the view of Symposium of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) on the value of fecundity and marriage in Africa. That SECAM acknowledges and promotes the value of fecundity in African marriage. In Africa, sterility causes serious marital problems among married couples. He suggests that, first, fecundity which is essential for the completeness of African traditional marriage should be seen as an implicit condition required for the consent in an African Christian marriage. Secondly, the Church needs to approach certain African values to make faith be lived in an authentic way. The study is relevant because it shows the dilemma that the African Christians face due to the difference between the teachings of the Church and the African cultures. However, the impact of the difference between the teachings of the Catholic Church and the Luo worldview on childlessness is not known.

Kemdirim (1996) emphasizes the mission of the Church which is to bring salvation to the world as brought out by Jesus, this salvation is holistic. In African situation, he talks of social redemption; that social redemption makes salvation relevant to Africa and the rest of the world. He points out that the African Synod of 1994 did not address the problems of the African Christians. The Synod did not meet the expectations of most people since it did not address specific problems that affect the Christians in Africa. The Church in Europe, he observes, addressed particular problems facing the Europeans for example divorce, premarital sexual intercourse, homosexuality, euthanasia, the changing role of women in married life and many others. The Church in Africa made no essential reference to any specific cultural heritage or social structures not yet fully transformed by the Gospel message such as patterns of marriage, traditional burial rites, oath and title-taking, widowhood practices, divinations and fortune-telling and caste system among others. These, as he observes, are a stumbling block to the people's holistic salvation.

Kemdirim (1996) outlines how the childless couples are frustrated in the society and even in the Church where some are barred from coming because of their 'irregular' marital relations. The

Church in Africa, he suggests, should re-examine its stand on some cultural institutions and practices that tend to hinder many African Christians from living the Gospel fully and sharing in Christ's salvation and liberation with all humanity. He questions whether the new image of the Church as a family gives a sense of belonging to all including the childless couples. In addition, he argues that in Africa, marriage or the family is not complete and does not exist when there are no children. This makes the childless couples not to be fully accepted in the society and also in the Church they may not find a lasting solace. Therefore they experience social, cultural, emotional, psychological and spiritual problems which they may not be in a position to bear or overcome.

This study shows that the Church's teachings causes dilemma to many Africans from various cultural background. This is a boost to the current study which deals specifically with the difference between the teachings of the Catholic Church and the Luo community on childlessness. The literature on the views of Banzikiza and Kemdirim shows how the Church in Africa is in need of a different kind of theology that would address her issues. Instead of focusing on the general understanding of marriage and family, the African situation needs to be looked at with a different approach. This could be done by, handling each issue in isolation, which is what the current study is interested in, by looking at the issue of childlessness.

Gyadu (2007) admits that childlessness is an issue of deep religious concern in Africa. In his study, he explains how the people try to counter the problem of childlessness using traditional African religions and the Pentecostal/charismatic churches and movements. He maintains that the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches understand that biological infertility, sterility or barrenness is synonymous with spiritual bondage. This was true of most African people, in their worldview; they believed that barrenness was caused by some supernatural powers. He describes how these indigenous Pentecostal/Charismatic movements deal with the problem of childlessness. They deal with it in a Christianized environment. One of the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches – Pure Five Miracle Ministries (PFMM) tackles this situation on the ground by putting up posters and calling on people to come and be delivered. This is an attempt by the African instituted churches to address the problem of the Christians. This helps these Christians against living a dual life. Since these churches address their problem, they do not have to look for solutions in the

traditional way. The literature review shows an attempt by the African instituted churches to help their faithful to overcome childlessness. However, how to make a Luo Catholic Christian couple live happily, integrated and authentic as Christians remain unknown. As such the current study strives to expose ways in which the Luo beliefs and practices concerning childlessness differ with the Catholic Church's teaching on childlessness.

In conclusion, childlessness is a reality and a common phenomenon in all cultures. Considering the literature, the couples feel devastated and there is always a tendency to fight it. On the other hand the Church's position is quite clear that marriage is between a man and a woman with or without children. The Church's law even forbids an impotent person from getting married. The Luo had and still have a great value for children. They try by all means to get children in marriage. To them marriage and procreation is one and the same thing such that without one the other cannot exist. In Luo traditional society, marriage was and still is for social purposes and even status, everyone had to participate.

#### **2.4 The Challenges of Childlessness**

Under this section, the study will examine the socio-religious challenges that the childless Catholic Luo couples face and how these in turn impact on the pastoral work of the Church in Kisumu diocese. The literature in this section is meant to address all these challenges.

Morell (1994) conducted her study in the United States of America among women who chose to remain childless. According to her, she wanted to remove the common myths about childless women and she questions the norm of motherhood. She challenges the idea that is common in most societies that women who do not give birth are considered to be selfish and have a problem. Morell (1994) in her study stresses that, every woman is different and there is no problem if one does not want to have a baby. She wants to challenge the idea that not having a child is unwomanly act as some people may tend to think. According to her, childlessness is something good that can be chosen by a couple and therefore it should not come up with any challenges to those who choose it.

Another study done in the United States of America was by Laurie (1999). She wanted to remove the stigma of childlessness that is often put on women. That, childless women have been in existence since olden days and some are part of a respectable cultural tradition that includes biblical matriarchs, celibate saints and the nineteenth century social reformers. Laurie (1999) further recounts how the realization that she will never give birth to a child enveloped her and slowly aroused in her an intense, combustible mixture of emotions. To choose to be childless, she admits, comes with pain and is complicated in nature. She presents motherhood as something boring and exhausting. In her study, she justifies childlessness and therefore childlessness should not be a challenging phenomenon.

The studies by Morell (1994) and Laurie (1999) deny that childlessness is accompanied with various challenges. They approach childlessness from a voluntary perspective. Since these couples choose to be childless, they may not experience certain challenges. However, the current study is focusing on involuntary childlessness. Therefore the challenges that are associated with it are what the study is interested in.

Mariano (2004) carried out his research among the Shangana of Mozambique. In his work involuntary childlessness among the Shangana, causes a lot of problems not only for the couple but also for the extended family and the whole community. And that the childless woman suffers more than the husband since pregnancy is the visible sign of fertility. Having children is of importance because it is a proof of man's sexual potency and it gives the woman a new status in the society. Once a woman has given birth, she is called by the name of her first born. Mariano (2004) narrates how a woman who dies without giving birth is buried with a lot of rituals. One of the rituals is that a cross is marked on her back with charcoal and then her corpse is taken out of the house through a hole made in the back of the house. Among the Shangana marriage meant procreation and barrenness negated the marriage. The barren woman is socially isolated and becomes non-participant to nativity rituals. This study is relevant because it reveals how women are faced with the challenges of involuntary childlessness. Even though the current study is also on involuntary childlessness, it is meant to expose the socio-religious challenges that the Luo Catholic childless couples are faced with.

Dyer (2007), in his research found out that in the western societies, infertility has few cases of social consequences as compared to African societies since in the west couples decide about parenthood without interference from others. He observes that in Africa, women carry the burden of infertility such as stigmatization, marital instability, abandonment, abuse and various accusations. According to his findings, children in Africa confer social status to the parents this is the reason couples desire children and women are under pressure to conceive. This makes infertility be associated with unhappiness. Majority of African people believe that children are a re-incarnation of the ancestors. This work is important to the current study since it enlightens the importance of children among the Africans and the challenges of having no children. However nothing is known about the Luo situation.

Hollos, Larsen, Obono & Whitehouse (2009) studied the problem of infertility among the Ijo and Yakurr, in Nigeria. They admit that the problem of infertility is a serious social and public health problem in Africa. The problem affects women most. Their study describes how among the Ijo, circumcision and pregnancy are prerequisites for entry into *erera* (the stage of mature womanhood). The circumcision is done on the seventh month of the first pregnancy. This becomes challenging to an infertile woman since she would not enter the stage of a mature woman. Among the Yakurr, they observe that, a childless woman is not considered mature and some may even refer to her as *odom* (a man) to refer to her inability to bear children. Both of these Nigerian communities do not advocate for adoption since child fostering is not sufficient enough to make a woman to attain full adult status. For this reason many infertile women of these communities do not take in foster children. This is a challenge that these Nigerian women have to face in their lives. This is relevant to the current study because just like other African women, Luo women would also face certain challenges, which is the mandate of the current study.

Hollos, *et al.* (2009) further reports that, in these two communities marriage is completed after the birth of the child. Among the Ijo, part of bride wealth is given at the beginning for consent but a substantial amount is presented after the birth of the child. This is not done to childless women, therefore their husbands do not pay for the traditional dance and thus they do not attain full adulthood. This in turn reflects badly on the image of the woman and her family. Among the



Yakurr, the bride relocates to the groom's household only after getting pregnant since the marriage ceremony was performed during pregnancy. It is only after pregnancy and circumcision that a woman's transition from childhood to adulthood was celebrated and then she was incorporated into the husband's lineage gradually. She left her parents household completely after the birth of her first child. Their study revealed that polygamy among the Ijo was not an option because the treatment the childless woman would receive from the husband and co-wives would make her leave. They observe that among the Yakurr and the Ijo, divorce is the most prominent consequence of infertility. If a woman fails to give birth to children, divorce inevitably follows. The Ijo widows had residential right only through their sons or else they were ordered back to the paternal homes, there they would be accorded demeaning burial rites.

The research found out that the affected Ijo women look for remedies in local therapies; if these fail they recourse to medical practitioners and some eventually go to the popular revivalist churches. It is reported that these pastors are more sympathetic than those in Anglican and Catholic Churches. This work exposes the agony of the Nigerian women from the Ijo and Yakurr communities. However it does not expose the agony of the Catholic Luo couples.

Obianuju (2009) in his research among the Igbo of Nigeria admits that the issue of childlessness is quite sensitive yet crucial in our society. He was moved by the way marriages were breaking down due to childlessness. Childlessness, he says is the major cause of breakages of marriages in Nigeria. Obianuju (2009) points out that, marriage among the Igbo is indispensable and is meant for procreation. The birth of a child is important for a woman because it is a sign of motherhood. A child fulfills marriage and portrays a woman as complete. Therefore, a woman going into marriage has the issue of childlessness to battle with. A sterile woman faces a lot of rejection, humiliation, abuse and many physical and emotional trauma. She is abused by the sisters-in-law and even the mother-in-law. The contemporary woman in Nigeria he says, turns to prayer and would often visit prayer houses hoping that one day she will be able to get a child. His study exposes the challenges that childlessness brings to the Igbo women. This study is relevant because it exposes the challenges the childless women in Nigeria face and how they try to attain assistance. The current study will expose the socio-religious challenges and the impact of childlessness on the pastoral work of the Catholic Church in Kisumu diocese.

Another study carried out in Nigeria was by Isioma (2009) on challenges of childless women in Nigeria. In this study, he admits that women are the ones who face the challenge of childlessness greatly. This is because every woman desires to be called a mother in the sense that she has actually given birth. Isioma (2009) points out that people have misunderstood the real purpose of marriage. Children are not in the hands of man to give but they are a gift from God. He is writing from a purely Christian perspective without considering that an African Christian carries with him/her culture wherever he/she goes. According to this study, a Christian ought not to find childlessness challenging. This however, is different from the current study which examines the socio-religious challenges that come with childlessness.

Maseko (2009) reports how cultural sensitivities discourage visits to fertility clinics in Johannesburg, South Africa. He negates the long held belief that, it is women who are responsible for childlessness. Maseko (2009) articulates that 40% of the problem lies with men and only 35% is on women. He shows how men still believe in the myth that all African men are fertile. It also affirms that the issue of stigmatization of infertile women is not only in African culture but in many cultures in the world. It shows how scientific breakthroughs have made it possible for childless couples to have children but the cultural stereotype does not allow men to visit the fertility clinics and this makes it difficult for the couple to be assisted.

This study is relevant because, it outlines the challenges of childlessness and also confirms that culture cannot be avoided when addressing the issues of childlessness. Culture plays a pivotal role in a person's worldview. Thus, in order to study childlessness among the African cultures, it is not possible to avoid the cultural interplay. However, the study is not specific to the challenges facing the Luo Catholic Childless couples.

Chamie and Mirkin (2012) carried out their study on the effects of voluntary childlessness. They found out that voluntary childlessness contributes to keeping the fertility below the replacement level. That childlessness reduces the size of the future labour force and boosts the proportions of the elderly and thereby increases old-age dependency ratio. They further argue that, voluntary childlessness leads to more programme support for the elderly, less support for education funding and other community programmes for children. Their study established that voluntary

childlessness affect the demographic pattern which have far-reaching implications on domestic labour force, immigration levels, voting patterns, taxation, pension expenditure, education funding and health-care costs. This study approaches the challenges of voluntary childlessness from socio-economic and political perspective. Whereas involuntary childlessness may bring about similar challenges, the current study focuses on the challenges of involuntary childlessness and their impact on the socio-religious lives of the Catholic Luo couples.

The literature in this section indicates that there are certain challenges that are associated with childlessness. However, what is not known is how these challenges associated with childlessness affect the lives of the Luo Catholic childless couples and how these challenges affect the pastoral work of the Church in the diocese of Kisumu.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

This section describes the research procedure that was followed during the study. It consists of the following subtitles: research design, area of study, study population, Sample size and sampling procedures, data collection procedures (methods of data collection), methods of data analysis and presentation.

#### 3.2 Research Design

A cross-sectional research design was adopted which sought to give explanatory and descriptive analysis of the problem of childlessness. Vogt (1999, p. 65) defines cross-sectional design as: “*a study conducted at a single point in time by taking a cross section of a population at a particular time, and studying a given phenomenon within that population*”. This design helped the study to understand the challenges of childlessness among the Luo Catholic couples. The study also adopted some aspects of historical design in order to historicize some aspects of the Luo marriages. The design generated qualitative data.

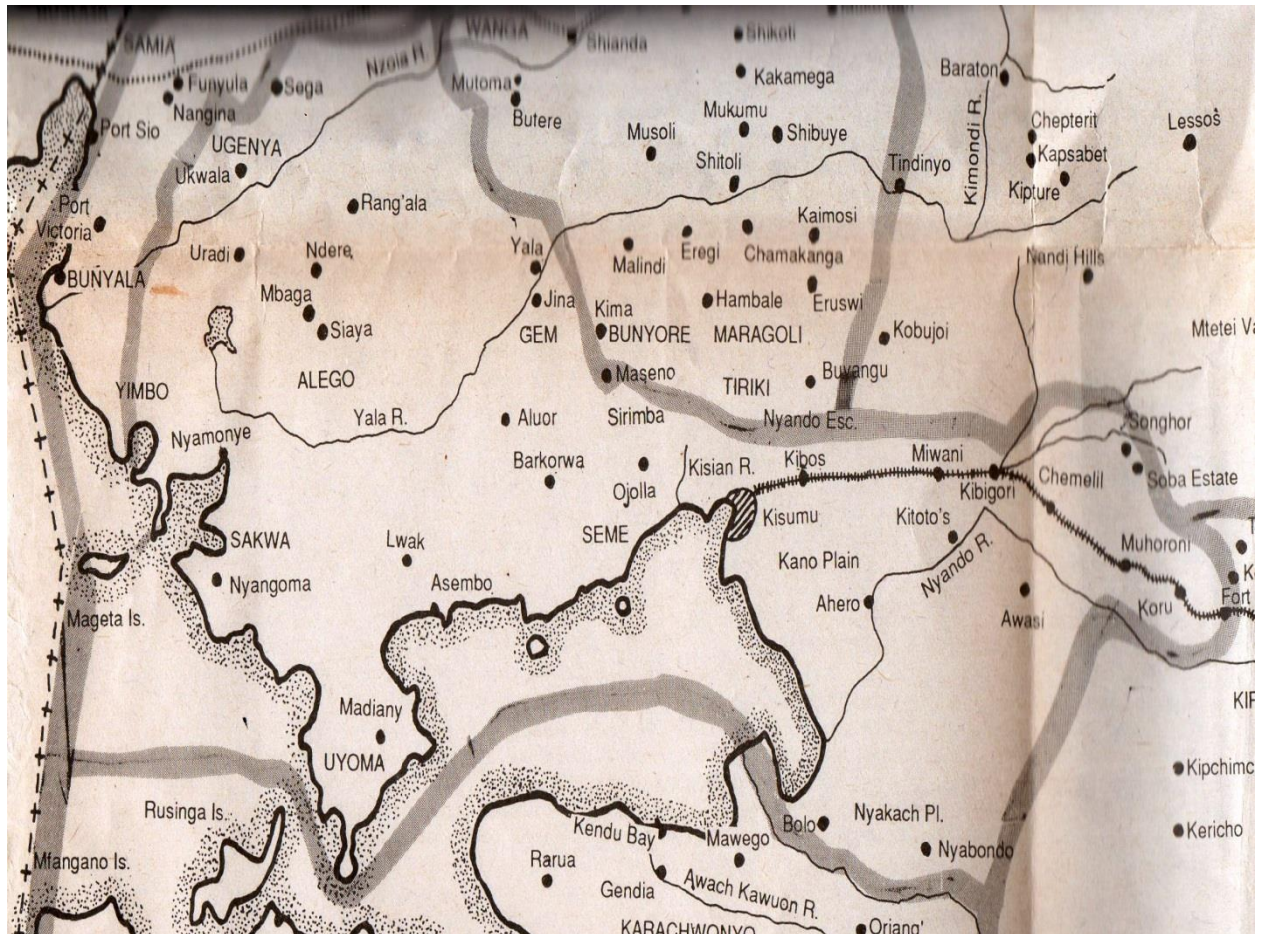
#### 3.3 Study Area

The study was carried out in Kisumu diocese. Kisumu diocese is an ecclesiastical area covering Kisumu and Siaya counties. It covers the former districts of Siaya, Ugenya, Ugunja, Gem, Rarieda, Bondo, Kisumu West, Kisumu Municipality, Nyando and Nyakach. The diocese of Kisumu is located in former Nyanza province, Kenya. It was part of the Vicariate Apostolic of the Upper Nile. The Mill Hill missionaries came to the area in 1903. In 1925 it became a Prefecture Apostolic Kavirondo; in 1932 it became a Vicariate Apostolic of Kisumu and in 1953 it was established as a diocese. It became an Archdiocese in 1990 (*Kenya Catholic directory* 2006).

Currently Kisumu diocese has four deaneries namely Kisumu, Nyando, Siaya and Bondo. Kisumu deanery has the following parishes; St. Paul's, Kibuye, Milimani, Riwo, Nanga, Nyamasaria, Ojolla, Reru and Barkorwa. Nyando deanery consists of Ahero, Chiga, Masogo, Awasi, Muhoroni, Koru, Alendu, Nduru, Katito, Bolo and Nyabondo. Siaya consists of Yala, Rang'ala, Sega, Ugunja, Yogo, Ukwala, Nyagondo, Holy Cross, Mbaga and Uradi. Bondo deanery has Bondo, Aluor, Nyang'oma, Nyamonye, Lwak and Madiany. (*The Kisumu Archdiocese archives*, 2012)

Kisumu diocese has a total population of 442, 907 Catholic faithful (*The Kisumu Archdiocese archives*, 2012). The diocese is predominantly Luo speaking with few pockets of other ethnic groups especially in town parishes. The map below shows the parishes in Kisumu diocese.

**Map: The Parishes in Kisumu Diocese.**



Source: Burgman (1990, p. 337)

### **3.4 Study Population**

The Catholic diocese of Kisumu has a population of 442, 902 Catholic faithful and 75 members of the clergy who work in the thirty six parishes and the various offices of the diocese. From a pilot study that was done, the study targeted 48 childless couples. The accessible population was the childless couples in the four purposively sampled parishes, which, are, Aluor, Rang'ala, Ojolla and Nyabondo.

### **3. 5 Sample Size and Sample Frame**

Mugenda (2008) describes a sample size as the selected elements chosen for participation in a study. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) suggest that samples in a qualitative study are usually small in size because statements about incidence or prevalence are not the concern of a qualitative research. Ritchie and Lewis (2003, p. 84) state the rule of thumb that the samples for a single study involving individual interviews often lie under 50. Given that this study was qualitative, there was no need of calculating a sample size. Moreover, the use of snowball sampling does not allow for calculation of sample size since saturation is reached at an unknown number in the beginning of data collection. The parameters of generalizability in this sample are negligible since the study did not seek to generalize to the wider population.

According to Currivan (2004) a sampling frame is a list or a device used to define a researcher's population of interest. A researcher rarely has direct access to the entire population of interest, thus must rely upon a sampling frame to represent all of the elements of the population of interest. The sample frame of the childless couples was 23 from the estimates that were found from the Parish Priests; however some couples were identified through snowball. The Small Christian Communities' list was obtained from the various Parish Priests from where the sample was obtained.

### **3.6 Sampling Procedures**

According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003), qualitative research uses non-probability samples for selecting the population for study. The researcher purposively sampled four parishes, one parish from every deanery. These were Aluor, Rang'ala, Ojolla and Nyabondo. This is because they are

the oldest. They are the mission stations founded by the missionaries. The choice was also informed by the presence of big congregations. It is presumed that the problem is the same in the other new parishes since they were curved from these old ones. Given that these parishes are homogenous, the four which were selected enabled an in-depth study which would still hold the same in the rest of the parishes. Mugenda (2008) in support of this says that if the population is significantly homogenous, a small sample will produce accurate estimates of the measure.

There were four Parish Priests of the four parishes who were selected through expert sampling given that they were the spiritual leaders of these parishes. They are also knowledgeable in administrative and pastoral issues. The researcher also took into account the length of service of the priests in the various parishes. There was one priest who was incidentally sampled. At the time of the study he was teaching at St. Mary's School, Yala but since he had worked in some of these sampled parishes before and he had a lot of interest in the topic. Chief Catechists were also selected through expert sampling; they were from the four parishes that had been selected. This is because catechists deal with these couples from the grass roots. They are mediators between Church faithful at the grass roots and the parish.

Since it was not possible to determine the total number of the childless Catholic couples in each parish, the researcher used snowball sampling up to a point of saturation. This was done until there was no new information that was coming up from the respondents. A total of twenty-eight (28) childless couples were interviewed through an in-depth inquiry. One couple who had given birth to one girl child was interviewed as a childless couple. Another couple who had given birth to a single male child and had resorted to polygamy was also interviewed. These also came up to be interviewed as childless couples. As the study revealed, the contextual definition of childlessness according to the Luo community is that those with female child or only one child may also be considered childless.

The researcher purposively sampled one leader from every Small Christian Community. These were leaders of the SCC's which belong under the four parishes that had been sampled for the study. The SCC leaders are chosen from the members and by the same members. They consist of the chairperson, the secretary and the treasurer. In some cases they have their deputies. These



leaders interact with the couples at the grass root level even up to their homes. They also link these couples to the catechists and the priests. The four parishes had a total of 271 SCC leaders who participated in the study.

### **3.7 Data Collection Methods**

Both secondary and primary data was used in the study. The secondary data was obtained from published articles, textbooks, journals, Church documents and Papal encyclicals. The primary data was collected through field study. In the field study, both oral in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were employed.

#### **3.7.1 Oral in-depth Interview**

Semi-structured interviews were used in the study to gather data from various respondents. Welman and Kruger (2001) observe that semi-structured interviews may be used in topics that are sensitive and when respondents are from divergent backgrounds. This suited the study given that the issue of childlessness is not something that many couples would want to discuss openly. Given that the respondents were also from divergent backgrounds, these semi-structured interviews were helpful in obtaining the needed data. These interviews were conducted using interview schedules in appendix B and C, and the proceedings of the sessions were recorded using a tape recorder.

Oral in-depth interviews were useful in this study because of their flexibility and adaptability. They enabled the researcher to get detailed answers that generated qualitative data (Mwanje 2001, Kothari 2004). This method was used to interview the parish priests, the head catechists and the childless couples. The researcher was also able to study the mood and emotions of the respondents on this topic of childlessness as they answered the questions which were posed to them by use of an interview guide. The researcher took note of these emotions using a pen and a note book.

### **3.7.2 Focus Group Discussions**

Focus Group Discussions gave opportunity of getting information from a large number of people. All the SCC leaders were engaged in Focus Group Discussions. Each FGD consisted of about eight SCC leaders. According to Mugenda (2008), each FGD should comprise of 5-10 participants. During the scheduled dates, the leaders of the SCC's were divided into their various groups and the researcher led the discussions in each group using the guide in appendix D. The discussions in the groups were conducted individually at different times. The Focus Group Discussions were conducted up to a point of saturation.

### **3.7.3 Observation**

According to Kawulich (2005) there are two types of observation, direct and participant. The direct observation is where the researcher observes activities without interrupting and records what can be taken through the senses about the setting and the interactions contained for the duration of the period. Participant observation on the other hand is where the researcher is involved in the various activities over a period of time as this enables the observation of the culture of the members and their lives and how they participate in their activities. For the purpose of data collection in this study, direct observation was employed whereby both the verbal and non-verbal behaviours of the respondents were captured during the interviews and recorded as field notes. The observation captured the mood of the respondents and the physical environment or the mood of the homestead. The observations were done using the observation guide in appendix E.

### **3.7.4 Validity**

According to Polit and Hungler (1995), validity refers to the degree to which the instrument measures what it is supposed to be measuring. The researcher focused on content validity which refers to the accuracy with which an instrument measures the factors under study. Therefore, content validity was concerned with how accurately the questions asked during the in-depth interviews tended to elicit the information sought. The research instrument was tested for content

validity by doing a follow-up interview using a phone call since the contacts of some of the respondents had been obtained.

### **3.7.5 Reliability**

Reliability refers to the precision and accuracy of the instruments if used on a similar group of respondents in a similar context, the instrument should yield similar results (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). The questions were carefully and accurately phrased to avoid ambiguity. This led the respondents to a particular response that was needed. The interview guide was designed and followed to enable reliability of the tool. The respondents were informed of the purpose of the interview and of the need to respond truthfully. The pre-testing of the instruments was done in Mbagha parish to ensure reliability.

### **3.8 Data Analysis and Presentation**

The in-depth oral interviews generated the data that needed to be transcribed from the tape recorders that were used as instruments during the oral interviews. Then coding was done by combing the raw data based on the main ideas that emerged from the in-depth interviews, topics and themes. Each oral interview was inspected and themes identified. These codes were labeled in relation to the themes. A list of codes was made which helped to identify the main issues that were contained in the field data. After which common themes were put together and they formed categories which were used for analysis and the discussions. The categories were in line with the objectives of the study and subsequently discussions were done as per the objectives. Some of the responses are presented verbatim as obtained from the respondents so as to present the clear picture of the divergent worldviews on childlessness between the Catholic Church and the Luo community in Kisumu diocese. The primary data was presented and discussed in comparison with the secondary data that had been obtained from the library. From the observations made in the field, the moods of the different childless couples have been presented in the narratives.

### **3.9 Ethical Considerations in the Study**

The study was conducted purely as an academic research and this was clearly explained to the respondents. They were informed of the objectives of the study and given an opportunity to decide whether to participate in the study or not. Their consent was sought before being interviewed and they signed a consent form (see Appendix A for the informed consent). The information given by the respondents is emotive and confidential; therefore it has been handled discreetly without breaching confidentiality. In this regard, the real names of those interviewed are not used. The names of the childless couples used here are pseudo names for the sake of anonymity. This is aimed at concealing their true identity to avoid any embarrassment that may be caused by the information they have given.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THE BACKGROUND OF THE LUO AND MEANING OF CHILDLISSNESS**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter and the preceding ones will discuss the themes which had been generated from the field data. The themes will be discussed under the four objectives of the study. They include: the contextual meaning of childlessness and its causes among the Luo; the difference between the teachings of the Catholic Church on childlessness and the traditional Luo worldview; how the socio-religious challenges that the Luo childless Catholic couples face affect their lives; and, the impact of the challenges of childlessness on the pastoral work of the Catholic Church in Kisumu diocese. Before discussing these specific objectives, it would be necessary to bring out the background information of the Luo people. This section would consider the Luo's historical origin, religious practices, economic activities and social organization.

#### **4.2 Background Information of the Luo People**

##### **4.2.1 The Historical Origin of the Luo**

The Luo are an ethnic group in western Kenya, eastern Uganda, Sudan and northern Tanzania. They are part of a larger group of ethno linguistically related Luo peoples who inhabit an area ranging from Southern Sudan (South Sudan), South-Western Ethiopia, Northern and Eastern Uganda, South-Western Kenya and North-Eastern Tanzania (Ochieng' 1974; Ogot 2009). Ochieng' (1974) gives the origin of the Luo to have been around Wau at the junction of Rivers Meridi and Sue. Due to various factors like wars, diseases, population pressure and others, the Luo migrated. Today the Luo are found in Sudan, Uganda, Tanzania and Western part of Kenya. This historical background is attested to by Ayot (1987) who confirms that the cradle land of the Luo is Sudan. They migrated due to various reasons and then found their way to Nyanza. The Kenyan Luo tribe is a subgroup of the larger Luo community that spans across Uganda, Tanzania, Sudan, Congo and even Ethiopia (Ochieng' 1974; Ogot 2009).

Ogot (2009) confirms that the Jii-speaking peoples (Western Nilotes) originally were situated in the Upper Nile basin, from where they migrated due to internal conflicts, human population, ecological changes and other external factors. Were and Derek (1986) describe how the Luo infiltration into the Lake Victoria region began in 1490 and 1600. The Luo constitute the largest group of the Nilotic group in Kenya. They are called Nilotes because they were close to river Nile.

Ojore (1995) describes the etymology of the name Luo. This is from the word *luwo* literally meaning 'to follow' and *lupo* meaning to 'fish' *Jo Luwo* would therefore mean 'those fond of following' and *Jo lupo* would mean 'those fond of fishing.' Therefore, these were people who were fond of following river courses for fishing and watering their animals. The Luo in Kenya are sometimes referred to as the Southern Luo. Ochieng' (1974), Ayot (1987) and Ogot (2009), record how the Luo settled in their current places after their migrations. The Luo currently are ranked position four in Kenya with a population of 4,044,440 (*The Kenya Bureau of Statistics census, 2009*).

#### **4.2.2 The Religion of the Luo**

The Luo were deeply religious people. This was evident in their meticulous rites of passages which they observed with rituals and feasting. These started from birth to death. To cite a few examples; People were discouraged from noting when a woman is pregnant for fear that problems might result from jealous ancestors or neighbors. Older women and midwives assisted the woman throughout her pregnancy and in childbirth. The birth of twins, was believed to be the result of evil spirits, was treated with special attention and required taboos (prohibitions) on the part of the parents. Mboya (2001) elaborates on the many rituals that are linked to pregnancy and childbirth.

Adolescence was a time of preparation for marriage and family life. Traditionally, girls obtained tattoos on their backs and had their ears pierced. Girls spent time in peer groups where conversation centered on boys and their personal attributes. Sex education was in the hands of older women who gave advice in a communal sleeping hut used by teenage girls (also termed as

*siwindhe*). Lovers sometimes made secret arrangements to meet near these huts, although premarital pregnancy was strictly forbidden (Ayayo, 1975). Luo initiation rite involved the removal of the six teeth from the lower jaw which they called *nak*. The Luo, however, did not adopt circumcision for men, as practiced in some neighbouring Bantu groups (Ayayo, 1975).

Death was characterized by many rituals and taboos. Mboya (2001) gives the various ceremonies that would be carried out in cases of death depending on the age, gender, status, place and the type of death. The Luo mourning ceremony, *tero buru*, is still practiced in some places. This is a unique, elaborate and dramatic ceremony that symbolizes the departure of a loved one. Since there are no initiation ceremonies in earlier stages of the life cycle, the funeral serves as the most important symbol for family and community identity. Burials must take place in Luoland, regardless of where a person may have lived during his or her adult years.

Another unique Luo custom is wife guardianship whereby, if a man dies, one of his brothers or close relatives “inherits” his widow and must meet all of her marital requirements. Funerals last for four days for a male and three days for a female. After the burial and expression of grief through speeches and viewing of the body, there is a period of feasting and celebration. After the funeral of a man, a rooster (which symbolizes masculinity to the Luo) is taken from his house and eaten by his relatives. This signifies the end of his homestead. When a new homestead is founded, a man is given a rooster from his father's home (Mboya, 2001).

The Luo believed that the ancestors reside in the sky or underground, from where they may be reincarnated in human or animal form. Ceremonies were sometimes performed when naming a baby to determine if a particular spirit had been reincarnated. The spirits of ancestors were believed to communicate with the living in their dreams. In the Luo religion, troublesome spirits could cause misfortunes if they were not remembered or respected (Ayayo, 1975). The Luo refer to spirits by the term *juok*, or "shadow." Ogot (2009) confirms that these spirits are not worshipped but they communicate with the living members of the society. He says that they are invisible though they see and hear everything that the living do and say (Ogot, 2009).

The Luo refer to God by many names that indicate his power. For example, *Were* which means "one certain to grant requests"; *Nyasaye*, "he who is begged"; *Ruoth*, "the king"; *Jachwech*, "the molder"; *Wuon koth*, "the rain-giver"; and *Nyakalaga*, "the one who flows everywhere." Prayers and requests are addressed to God by those in need of his assistance (Ayayo, 1975). Ogot (2009) also submits that the Luo believe in God who created the earth. He gives the other names of God used by the Luo like *Were Hagawa* or *Were Dibo* which are manifestations of *Were Nyakalaga* the only true God. This means that the Luo have only one God but these are different ways in which they understand God as expressed to them. The Luo practice various ceremonies and prayers to God for various reasons like peace, good health, and fertility among others. Ogot (2009) supports this argument and confirms that they had prayer meetings called *Lamo Mar Piyo Mach Manyien* (Prayer for lighting the New Fire), sacrifices for cultivation, peace prayers and thanksgiving at harvest time (Ogot, 2009).

#### **4.2.3 The Economic Activities of the Luo Community**

According to Ayot (1987) in the Luo traditional society, everyone had a part to play and none was idle right from childhood to adulthood. There was division of labour, for example the men cleared the ground of bush making it ready for cultivation. Women and children broke the ground and men occasionally helped if they were not held up with other duties. She also revealed that men looked after cattle, hunted game and would also fish. There were some men who were blacksmiths or iron workers. Women she says were involved in domestic work and girls were expected to help their mothers and grandmothers in the domestic work and cultivation. Ominde (1977) in his research corroborates this that a girl was expected to be trained by the mother to be competent in household duties as early as possible such that when she got married, she would carry out her responsibilities as a responsible wife. He also says that boys on their part were to follow the footsteps of their fathers and grandfathers. Ayot (1987) in her research found out that the Luo economy had the concept called *saga* or *rika* where people would pull their labour together and work in one farm in a day. This she says was common during weeding, harvesting or when one had a house to construct. She points out that *saga* was a *harambee* spirit (Ayot, 1987).



Historically, the Luo people had a mixed economy; Herring (1979) noted that the Luo in the early days practiced a flexible mixed economy where they kept livestock and cultivated various crops such as sorghum, bulrush, and millet among others. Ayot (1987) also attests to the fact that the Luo were mixed farmers. She says that they kept cattle and that they were also agriculturalists (Ayot, 1987). Today for the Luo living in rural areas, freshwater fishing in Lake Victoria is the most important economic activity. The fish are consumed locally while some, especially the Nile perch, are exported to Europe and other countries. Agriculture, especially sugarcane and cotton farming, is also practiced in other areas where the Luo live. The Luo are agriculturalists; they cultivate subsistence crops like maize, beans, millet, cassava, bananas and sweet potatoes (Ogot, 2009).

The most notable fact about the Luo economy is that women played and even still play the primary role in farming. Before the introduction of the modern money economy, the garden was the centerpiece of the women's world of work. Industrious women could earn considerable wealth by exchanging their garden produce for animals, handcrafts, pots, and baskets. Ayot (1987, p.171) confirms this when she said that: *“women were the promoters of the society. A girl was expected to help her mother and grandmother... later on when she got married; she carried the responsibilities of a wife, a mother and provider of food for the entire members of the family”*.

Men were preoccupied with livestock and spent a great deal of time in "social labour" concerned with placing their cattle in good contexts, such as bride wealth exchanges, trading partnerships, and commercial sales. According to Ayot (1987), men cleared the ground for cultivation, looked after cattle and hunted for game meat. In the modern economy, cattle and goats have a monetary value as well. Men have control over animals and cash crops.

#### **4.2.4 The Social Lives of the Luo**

The Luo society is a patrilineal community, meaning that succession in the family is exclusively through males. Descent is patrilineal (traced through the male line) to determine kinship. They are exogamous, thus marrying outside one's clan and this enables them expand their relationship

through affinity. They also have strong kinship and communal ties (Ayayo, 1975). Social relations among the Luo are governed by rules of kinship, gender, and age. Kin align themselves for purposes of exchange of goods, marriage, and political alliance.

#### **4.2.4.1 The Marriage Customs among the Luo**

Historically, couples were introduced to each other by a go-between commonly known as *jagam* in dholuo (Ayayo, 1975 and Mboya, 2001). The traditional marriage ceremony took place in two parts, both involving the payment of bride wealth by the groom. The first ceremony, the *ayie*, involved a payment of a token to the mother of the bride; the second stage involved giving cattle to her father. If the husband died during the marriage, his brother replaced him and continued with the marriage arrangements. Traditionally marriage was considered to be the most significant event in the lives of both men and women. It was thought inappropriate for anyone to remain unmarried. Large families ensured adequate numbers of workers. The system of polygyny (multiple wives) guaranteed that all people married.

According to Ayot (1987) the Luo society puts a lot of emphasis on exogamy in marriage. The elders educate the young people the importance of the custom which forbids a man to marry within his own clan or among his relatives. Therefore, when a man is of age to marry, he would look for a young woman out of the clan. Once this was done, and a woman is identified then the marriage negotiations would start. In the traditional society, girls were taught on how to relate with men. Ominde (1977) says that pre-marital pregnancies were very rare in the past. This is because sexual relationships before marriage were prohibited. He says that virginity was highly valued during marriage and it was a source of personal pride and honour. This he says would motivate a young woman and the female relatives to work together through a rigorous sex education to safeguard the virginity of the woman. This is because the honour and pride was not for the woman herself but for the whole family that their daughter had integrity and was a woman of worth.

The bride wealth was quite significant among the Luo. Members of the groom's family initiated a process of negotiation with the bride's family that may have unfolded over many years.

Negotiations could be intense, and for this reason a "go-between", who is neutral to the interests of each family, was used. The Luo believed that divorce could not occur after the bride wealth had been exchanged and children are born. Even if separation happened, the couple could still ideally be considered to be married. Ayayo (1975) notes that if a woman wants a valid divorce, her father must return the bride wealth in a ceremony called *wero* (Ayayo, 1975).

Names are received through the male line, and after marriage women reside in the homesteads of their husbands. A married woman builds up alliances for her husband's family by maintaining strong relationships with her brothers and sisters who live at her birthplace or elsewhere. It is expected that after marriage a woman will bear children for her husband's lineage. Bride wealth, given by her husband and his family, contributes to the woman's ability to maintain ties with her own family throughout her life. By having children, a woman greatly enhances her power and influence within the lineage of her husband. As the children grow, they take special care of her interests. This contributes to solidarity between a mother and her children, and between children born of the same mother (Herbich, 2002, Ojore, 1995, Ominde, 1987). Sons build their *simba* (small huts) adjacent to the main gate of the compound in the order of their birth (Mboya, 2001, Ayayo, 1975). The husband builds his *duol* (hut for discussing issues) near the center of the compound.

Marriage among the Luo was essentially for procreation. Ayayo (1976) observes that impotence and infertility could lead to the dissolution of marriage but measures could be taken to save the marriage. In the study of Kawango (1995) that had been earlier reviewed, she noted how the Luo struggled with issues of infertility and the various ways in which they tried to remedy it such as consulting diviners. Most of the reviewed literature shows how childlessness is an issue of great concern among the Luo.

#### **4.3 The Meaning of Childlessness among the Luo**

Childlessness is a phenomenon that confronts the Luo community with challenges akin to many other African communities. The couples interviewed in this study had been married from between 6 to 47 years. Their experience and challenges were quite varied depending on how long

they had lived together as a couple. All the Focus Group Discussions of the Small Christian Community leaders affirmed that childlessness exists and there are terms used to refer to it such as *migumba* or *lur* which are derogatory. These terminologies refer to a tree or an animal that cannot bear fruit or an offspring.

The above is corroborated by Bennette (1972) who observed that in Africa, child bearing is necessary for a woman's mental health since a childless woman is looked at with pity as a tree without fruits. Dyer (2007, p.73) also explains that among the Chadians, there is a proverb which says: "*A woman without children is like a tree without leaves*". Nwagwu (2008) too confirms that childlessness is a reality which is challenging in many marriages. She says that in Africa, childlessness is considered an evil because the fertility of both male and female is seen as a blessing.

SCC leaders from Nyabondo Parish observed that childlessness among the Luo is not only in the fact that the couple have no children, but the birth of only girl children is still considered as childless (FGD conducted on 11/4/2012). A catechist of Ojolla Parish submitted the following on the birth of female children:

It is not just being childless that the Luo community does not like. Some do not appreciate female children. This happened to me since I had only girls. My family pressurized me to have another wife (oral interview on 27/3/2012 at Ojolla Church).

Field data indicated that some of the couples who had only female children resorted to polygamous marriages so that they could get sons. The case of Peter Okello and Martina Auma who had only one daughter is an example that suffices to describe this option. Peter sadly said that:

God blessed us with a baby girl and that was all. This caused the two of us a lot of worries in the house. Living without children is not a good life. This issue troubled us until we sat down and we agreed that I marry another woman (oral interview on 21/11/2011 at Aluor).

It was also established that having only one male child could warrant a couple to be considered childless. This was the case of Japheth Owino (oral interview on 22/2/2012) at Ojolla Karateng'). He said that having only one child is like having one eye, and that, according to the Luo, one eye

is considered dangerous. One is expected to have many children such that even if a misfortune strikes, one may still remain with some children.

Among the Luo and in most African communities, female children are not considered to be equal to male children. When one gave birth to male children then there was certain pride and contentment. Nwoye (2007) in his study discovered that African people would not be satisfied with a sonless marriage. He says that this would be a condition for interventive polygamy. This corroborates the sentiments of Martina Auma:

Among the Luo, a baby girl is like having no child. People want that you give birth to male children. They say *wuoy siro* (which literally translates as a boy is a pillar). If you have not given birth to a boy or boys, then it is like you have not given birth at all (oral interview on 21/11/2011 at Aluor).

Peter Okello the husband of Martina added that:

People believe that when you give birth to a girl, it is not enough. She will leave you when she gets married and you remain the two of you. This is why they call girls *ogwang'* (which means mongoose). You will need a son who will take over the home from you. He will protect your assets or to inherit your property. The son will perpetuate the home and your name (oral interview on 21/11/2011 at Aluor).

The priest of Aluor Parish in his pastoral ministry observed that the Luo people are not contented with the female children and they will do all that it takes to get male children. He reiterated that those who have female children are viewed as childless. He said this:

It is really hard not having a child and many people would find it quite challenging. You leave alone even the case of being childless, even the fact that they do not have a son. So if you don't have a child and majorly you do not have a son then this is against the custom. I have seen some women who are thrown out because of not having that ability to bear a son. And I have heard a situation where a man comes with another woman, sleeps with her in the sitting room and the wife is sleeping in the bedroom. This is because the wife has only given birth to girls. Thus not giving birth to a son is like having no children (oral interview on 21/11/2011 at Aluor Church).

Despite the fact that the traditional Luo community does not consider female children equal to the male ones, it should be known that female children are not less humans than their male counterparts. History has proved that female children are equally important and they play a big role in their families. There are great women in history who have done great things. In the Luo community we have Hon. Grace Ogot former Member of Parliament for Gem Constituency, the

late Dr. Margret Ogolla a medical doctor and a great author, Lady Justice Effie Owuor among others. These and many other women have proved that the female gender should not be despised since they have great potentialities and are not “useless” as the traditional Luo community would depict. Despite the fact that there are such role models among the Luo women, this has not changed the perception of some of the Luo people on female gender. This is why some Luo parents may prefer to educate a male child at the expense of the female one.

#### **4.3.1 The Importance of Children in the Luo Community**

The Luo biases against female children prompted the study to dig deep into this reality and the study found out that a male child was considered important since out of them the clan would get warriors who would defend the clan and the family. Mboya (2001) supports this when he says that when a village went for *tero buru* (a pre-burial ceremony) in the enemy’s land, all the boys joined in with all the paraphernalia associated with the ceremony. These included shield and even spears. Japheth Owino (from Ojolla, Karateng’) had the following to say on the function of male children:

When there are male children in a homestead, no one would come to joke in your home or even start a quarrel with you since one would see that you have some sort of security. But if you do not have children or even if you have female children, someone can just come since they will not fear anything because the female ones may not fight back yet male ones would easily defend you (oral interview on 22/2/2012 at Ojolla, Karateng’).

Apart from being able to defend their parents, male children are also considered important because they remain in the homestead to take care of it when the parents grow old or pass on. While the female ones are married off to become part of another clan. The priest of Ojolla Parish confirmed this when he said that:

The male children are considered more important since they will take care of their parents when they are old. They also take care of the home when the parents are no longer there. If there is no one to take care of the home then that homestead would remain *gunda* (abandoned home) (oral interview on 10/1/2012 at Ojolla Church).

This was supported by another priest who pointed out that the Luo fear that their homestead should remain *gunda*. This is because the dead who are buried in the homestead would feel

abandoned too. He says that this is the more reason for the Luo wanting male children since they would always be there in the homestead to keep it warm. The priest observed that:

The Luo have the concept of *kudho mach* (lighting fire) which is to be done by the living towards the dead. Once there are people living in the home they will be lighting fire as they cook or at the den of livestock or where they are seated in the *duol/abila* (a small hut in a homestead where the elders deliberated on issues). During these times even the dead will be feeling the warmth (oral interview on 12/12/2012 at St. Mary's Yala).

When the homestead is not abandoned then the graves of those who have passed on would be tended which is also an important aspect of the Luo culture which shows respect to the dead. This is viewed by Mbiti (1969) as the cult of the living dead. He points out that most African communities would take care of the places where their dead are buried. In some cases when they move to live in another area, they ceremoniously remove the remains from the graves to where they are going to live. Nwoye (2006) confirms that children are important for various reasons, for prestige, they help in the work for the family, they help their parents in old age and give their parents decent burials, they cement marriage since without them the marriage may be dissolved, they also protect and inherit the family property.

The SCC leaders from Ojolla Parish observed that children were important when they said that children protect the family by giving security, they give assurance to the family of life after death and finally some inherit the property of the dead relatives. The male children are also important among the Luo since they help in expanding the clan by bringing new members through marriage. When they marry women from various places, they expand the kinship ties. These women in turn give birth to children who would be playing in the home. As children play in the home, they give it warmth and the home becomes alive. Japheth Owino supported the above argument when he observed that:

When you have children, they play in the home and they give the homestead warmth of its own kind that may not be there where there are no children. Homes without children are cold and no child would come but if you have children, they will attract other children who would come to play with them and thus the home becomes lively and warm (oral interview on 22/2/2012 at Ojolla, Karateng').

The above reasons therefore made the Luo people have preference for male children over female children. This has affected the Luo worldview to date. A couple that bears female children only consider themselves childless. There are people who would still have a big problem when they

have only female children because of the above issues. The perception of the society and their own future fears would not make them feel insecure.

Apart from the importance of male children which makes them be considered over their female counterparts, generally children are very important in Africa and specifically among the Luo. Children among Africans and specifically among the Luo are very important for several reasons. The catechist of Ojolla confirmed that: *“Children are so important to a family, they help the parents in old age, they inherit their property and they make the family tree be perpetuated”* (oral interview on 27/3/2012 at Ojolla Church).

The catechist of Nyabondo also observed that children assist their parents especially in old age or during illness or when one is infirmed. This is the worry of majority of couples when they do not have children. When they do not have children they know quite well that they must rely on their own even when they grow old. This causes them great anxiety. The value of children among Africans is explored by Osaso (2006) who in her study cites how the importance of children in the Bukusu community made it difficult for the late Maurice Michael Cardinal Otunga to choose priestly celibate life. Given that the Cardinal was the son of a paramount chief, he was expected to start his own family to perpetuate the family of Sudi the great chief. The late Cardinal narrated how it took him quite some time to disclose his desire of being a Catholic priest to his father. Even after disclosing to the family, his decision was met with a lot of resistance.

In another FGD in Ojolla, they discussed that children are important and they are a source of joy to a family. The catechist of Rang’ala commented on the importance of children saying:

Among the Luo, the reason for marrying and being married is to have children. Children are the joy of the family. Without children, a family is not happy and sadness is experienced in such homes (oral interview on 3/2/2012 at Rang’ala Church).

Majority of the respondents agreed that children are a great source of joy to the parents. The SCC leaders in their FGD’s observed that most couples who are childless are always cruel and unhappy, they often quarrel children. Nwagwu (2008) points out that children are the welfare of the society and social security of the parents and other close relatives and that is why they are treasured. She says that: *“Children are of immense value and pride to an African family, they are*



*the joy of parents, the glory of elders and the hope of entire community*” (p. 139). Dyer (2007) too supports the argument when he said that children give women social security, for this reason the women really value their children since without them there is no security, joy and happiness.

The priest from Yala supported this argument by saying that:

There was a man who was living with his grandchildren. He kept on complaining that the grandchildren were troublesome and spoiling his property. He called the parents of the grandchildren to come and pick them and they ended up remaining the two of them, him and the wife. After a couple of days, he started complaining that the home is dull and quiet. He ended up recalling the grandchildren. When the man was asked why he needed the grandchildren back, then he said that he has come to realize that the noise that the children make is the joy of the home (oral interview on 12/12/2012 at St. Mary’s School Yala).

The priest argued that children are important since they are the joy of the family. He observes that children give happiness to the parents and most couples without children are always sad. Ogola (1994, p.100) argues the importance of children when she presents Nyabera having a great dilemma between adopting the new religion by accepting baptism and levirate union which would enable her to get children that she needed so much. She says that: *“children were a consolation, laughter and security, children were everything”*. Blankson (1999) supports this argument saying that in Ghana, children are referred to as the cloth of the body, without which one is naked.

The above observation is supported by Dyer (2007, p. 75) who argues that most of the people agree that life without children is unhappy, not worth living and unfulfilled. He says that: *“Homes without children are homes without pleasure and happiness”*. Umezulike and Efetie (2004) also observed the same thing among the Nigerian barren women, that they felt angry, sad and felt that infertility was life’s worst experience. Nwoye (2007) reinforces the importance of children in a marriage. He says that children become an investment for the parents since when they grow old; they have those who would take care of them. This is always the fear of childless couples. Their worry is always about the future, how they will cope with old age without anyone to assist them. This view is confirmed by Osaso (2006) who clarifies how children were the only visible way to prove that a family was having a future (immortality). She continues to argue that: *“Everyone recognized that an individual was a full person when he/she married and got*

*children*” (Osaso 2006, p. 13). This means that children bestowed some status to their parents because without a child, one would not be considered mature.

Clementine Odhiambo commented on the importance of children saying that:

A child is very important to the Luo people this is because children bind the couple together; they are a great source of consolation. If you cannot have one, you cannot live in someone’s home. They cannot accept you easily and if you live, it is by God’s grace (oral interview on 23/1/2012 at Nyabondo, Dago).

This was supported by almost all the SCC leaders in the FGD’s. They observed that children are the source of happiness of a family; they are the future of the family such that without them one is worried about the inheritance of his/her property. They observed that children are the ones who would make a marriage to have a strong bond. Mbiti (1975) agrees that children strengthen the marriage bond. They are the glory of the marriage. Without them the marriage may break up.

Susan Achieng’ had similar sentiments concerning the importance of children when she said:

It is unfortunate that I still do not have one. But I think children are a great source of fulfillment to someone. As a woman you may have problems with your husband but if you see your children you get a lot of satisfaction and a reason to continue living with your husband (oral interview on 26/4/2012 at Rang’ala, Ugunja).

Other studies that have been done among peoples of other cultures found that children are still appreciated. Even though in some cultures today some couples would choose to be childless because of their own reasons, children are still important. This is confirmed by Yang and Rosenblatt (2008) who found out that even among the Koreans children are important. They believe that even those who chose to be childless feel guilty and sorry. Those who are childless deny their parents of the joy of being grandparents.

The study therefore revealed that the children have both social and religious importance. The priest of Aluor Parish said that:

According to the traditional Luo community, children are very important because of the aspect of the immortality that they give the parents. When the parents look at their children, they see the future and this gives them hope. In their children, they see people who would take the mantle of the family after them (oral interview on 21/11/2011 at Aluor Church).

The above argument was supported by the catechist of Rang'ala Parish who observed that children are the future of the family. Without children, a family considers itself a dying family. Thus they have a religious significance. The same is corroborated by Caroline Akinyi who said that:

In child (ren) parents see their future so if you do not have a child like me, the future is shattered and it is quite sad. If I die today that will be my end. No one will ever see me again. But those who have children even if they die, they are seen in their children (oral interview on 23/1/2012 at Nyabondo, Dago).

Milka Achieng' (from Ojolla) had similar views when she said that: *"A child is every woman's joy and her future; if I had one, I would be having a bright future today, but since I do not have one, I know that I have no future"* (oral interview on 11/4/2013 at Ojolla, Kapuonja). This is supported by Mbiti (1969, p.134) when he said that children ensure that there is personal immortality. He said that: *"It is in one's family that the living dead are kept in personal memory the longest, after their physical death"*. Mbiti further says that children are important since they are the buds of the society and that when a child is born, life springs up and the community continues to thrive.

The priest of Rang'ala in support of the religious importance of children among the Luo said that:

Africans and in particular the Luo, go into marriage, to have children this is because somebody want to get people who can take after him, people who can support him. Therefore everybody who goes into marriage has that deep within him, in the mind. The Luo set up is what makes the people to see it that way; that they need continuity in the family tree (oral interview on 3/2/2012 at Rang'ala Church).

Dyer (2007) in the same line argues that in many African communities children have a religious importance. For example, he says that mature children would inherit the ancestral land and they also give their parents highly regarded funeral when the parents pass on. Among Africans, ancestors are believed to re-incarnate in the children. This is the reason for naming the children after the dead. It is the ancestors who ensure physical and spiritual wellbeing of the family and even fertility of the couples.

Mbiti (1969) also shows the religious importance of children since they would make one to live longer even after death. He observes that in many African cultures, a son who died before marriage would be helped so that he is not cut off from the chain of life by arranging for him a marriage “in absentia” so that children are born in his name to perpetuate his lineage. This is the same idea that Runganga et.al. (2001) found out among the Gambians, that, without children one will be forgotten, and those without children are equated to the dead.

Generally, the couples who did not have children had a feeling of sadness. They were not happy with their state since they lacked an important aspect of their marriage. Even though some were able to put up with their situation, they could not be compared to the couples who had children. They shared their unfortunate story and all of them were feeling bad about their situation which majority of them concurred was beyond their reach. This is why most of them said that they can only leave their situation to God; it is God who knows why they do not have children.

#### **4.3.2 Causes of Childlessness according to the Luo**

Some of the common causes of childlessness which were cited by the FGD’s were: - *Sicknesses* which may invade home, for example, *sigete* or *rariw*, which is a disease that affects the reproductive system of both men and women. That such childlessness results from a sickness that affects one’s reproductive system. Childlessness could be *inherited* from the family. These SCC leaders observed that some of the childless couples had some ancestors in their lineage that had no children. They also pointed out that in the contemporary society the use of *family planning pills* may interfere with the woman’s hormones which in turn affects and renders an individual infertile or sterile.

The SCC leaders established that *chira* (ritual uncleanliness) could result into childlessness. This could be due to neglecting some of the taboos concerning marriage. *Chira* could also be caused if the father enters the bedroom of his married son or even if the father is involved in sexual intercourse with the daughter-in-law. Also if a son is married, and the father has two wives and he does not go to the house of his son’s mother. This affects the son and the son may end up not having children with his wife. Meaning that the parents should engage in ritual sex before the son and the wife could start engaging in sexual intercourse. It was established that may be it

could be from the parents who may not have married in the right way and this causes *chira*. This could be that the customs of marriage are not adhered to.

Another cause of *chira* is when a young man engages in sexual union with women who are widows or married women. Such could affect this young man when he is married. This is because there are cultural regulations on engaging in sexual intercourse with a widow, there are also specific people who are allowed to have sex with the widows. It is a taboo for a young man who has not built his own home to engage in sexual intercourse with widows and women whose husbands have constructed homes. Ayayo (1975) gives the sexual taboos among the Luo in which he says that a young man is forbidden from having sexual intercourse with a woman whose husband had just died. The SCC leaders from Rang'ala observed that such a young man would *rocho kare* (which literally means interfere with his future life). If he did, then it resulted into *chira*.

Childlessness could also be as a result of a woman being *married in a "bad home."* Bad home was explained as a situation where one of the ancestors had killed people using *nawi* (sorcery). This may affect the descendants. Other causes of childlessness were established to be due to a *problem in the reproductive system* of a man or a woman. May be because of lack of "power" in men which may be because of *impotence*; could be there is lack of ovum in a woman or sperms in a man. Childlessness could also be due to *God's plan* or could be when a woman had given birth before marriage and *she threw the child away* or may be the woman had procured an *abortion*. Today there are many cases of drug abuse which may affect those who use them. Also those who contracted *diseases like syphilis* before they are married risk not having children since it affects the reproductive system. There are also cases where the ovum comes at the same time during menstruation and so this makes it difficult for a woman to conceive. Some couples may give birth to children but then they may again all die leaving the parents childless.

The SCC leaders also observed that childlessness could be caused by *witchcraft*. There are evil people in the African society who would not want other people to be happy and to live normally. Such people may use witchcraft and sorcery to make couples unable to bear children. This data is supported by Field (1960) who explains that among many African communities, childlessness

was caused by witchcraft. This she says is the reason for these affected couples going to consult the diviners so that the diviners diagnose the cause and then assist the people with the problem. This scenario is also experienced among the Luo, one of the remedies that will be discussed later is that they visit *ajuoga* (diviners) to tell them the cause of their problem. These diviners are able to reverse the witchcraft and the couple can have children.

Other than the above causes of childlessness, the SCC leaders of Aluor Parish said that when the *blood of the couples* does not rhyme then they may end up not giving birth. Dutney (2007) also points out that one of the causes of childlessness would be if the *ancestors are not pleased* with certain rituals in the community. He says that the problem of childlessness has socio-religious dimension. They are caused as a result of *breaking the social norms* which in turn have some religious implications. Mariano (2008) also consents with the causes of childlessness as presented from the field study; he points out that childlessness could be due to *punishment inflicted by the spirits of ancestors* for bad behaviour or deviating from the rules or customs. This is seen from the findings as presented by the SCC leaders especially when they talk of the causes due to *chira*. It is believed to be a punishment from the ancestors because one has deviated from the customs or has broken a taboo. The taboos here are majorly sexual taboos. Given that the taboos are sexual in nature, the consequence is childlessness.

There are cases of unexplained causes of childlessness which have been on the rise in Kenya in the recent past. Akinyi (2012), in her study on infertility explores the possibility of being unable to conceive normally yet the woman is well and the man is also normal from the doctor's findings. She points out that such a scenario frustrates many couples since even the doctors may not be able to establish the cause. She points out that even doctors concur that unexplained infertility is quite disturbing for both doctors and patients. She reports that the situation is incredibly stressful for everyone involved. She observes that according to the fertility records in the country, unexplained infertility accounts for ten to twenty per cent of the couples with infertility. This argument is supported by Blackburn (2001) who says that in Britain 10 percent of cases of infertility, the cause is not known.

Women have been blamed for childless marriages and many women have suffered in such situations yet in reality men are also capable of being impotent and unable to sire children. Biologically it has been proven that men can also be the cause of childlessness in marriages. The male ego may not allow them to accept this fact. This is the reason for blaming women without any tangible proofs. In most of these cases, they do not have medical proofs since most of them do not seek medical attention. The fact that it is the women who carry the burden of pregnancy should not be the reason for blame if they are not seen pregnant.

Contrary to the popular African traditional belief that childlessness is due to barrenness of the woman, the study established that male infertility or impotence can be a cause of childlessness. The study therefore affirms that it is not only women who should be blamed in cases of childless marriages since men may also be responsible. The SCC leaders were in consensus that either the man or the woman can suffer infertility. These observations counteracted the biases of the Luo culture that put blame on women when cases of childlessness are experienced in a marriage. Burnett and Panchal (2008, p.188) concur with these findings and they say that males too can be responsible. *“Male factors account for 40% of the causes of infertility, female factors account for 40%, interactive factors account for 10%, and 10% of the causes of infertility are unexplained”*.

The study established that majority of the couples did not attempt to find out the cause of their childless marriages. Some of the couples when asked if they tried to find out the cause of their childlessness, they responded that they did not try to find out. The best some did was to seek traditional medication. Only a few had gone to the hospital and established what was wrong. Caroline Akinyi (of Nyabondo) is one of such women who did not seek to know the cause of her childless marriage. She said: *“We did not even try traditional medicine. We were just living in hope that one day God would remember us, but bad luck my husband died before God remembering us”* (oral interview on 23/1/2012 at Nyabondo, Dago).

Similar sentiments were echoed by many others like Leonida Ajuang’ (from Ojolla), Monica Awino (from Ojolla) and Tabitha Anyango (from Nyabondo). Tabitha indicated that they were

not able to establish the cause of their childless marriage. She said that they were waiting to see how things would unfold for the better. She narrated the following:

We have not tried to establish the cause of our childless marriage. We just decided to wait if it is the will of God then he will give us a child. But this wait has been fruitless (oral interview on 23/1/2012 at Nyabondo, Kodong'a).

Cleophas Okwiri and Janet Agutu (from Aluor) on their part admitted that they did not try to find out the cause. Their reason was more or less influenced by cultural undertones. Cleophas responded that:

It is because of ignorance, we did not know that it is possible to establish the cause. We were also convinced that the cause of our childlessness was cultural since I married immediately after the death of my father (oral interview on 30/10/2011 at Aluor, Kanyauma).

Tradition here seems to play a major role as per Cleophas and Janet's argument. They believed that their problem was as a result of not observing the rituals after the death of a father. According to Mboya (2001), the culture of the Luo dictates that after the death of a parent, one is not to engage in any sexual relations before all the burial rituals are finalized, after which children of the deceased disperse from the home and can engage in sexual intercourse in the order of their birth starting with the eldest. If a younger sibling engages in it before the elder siblings then this brings a curse.

The study established that some couples were ignorant that they could find out the cause of their problem. Mary Auma and her husband Anthony Owino (from Aluor) did not bother to go for any medical checkup. Mary said: *"No, we never went to the hospital or anywhere to find out the cause of not being able to bear children. We did not know that such was possible to establish medically."*

The use of traditional medicine was common among many women. This indicates that many of them attributed their state to some cultural reason. This explains why some couples were reluctant to go to the hospital to determine the real cause of their childlessness. Clementine Odhiambo (from Nyabondo) is among those who sought the help of traditional medicine. When asked if they ever tried to establish the cause of their childless state she said that: *"No I have not*



*gone to the hospital. I was just drinking some traditional medicine but when it did not work I stopped*” (oral interview on 23/1/2012 at Nyabondo Dago). Monica Awino and Leonida Ajuang (both from Ojolla) admitted that they tried using the traditional medicine from a *nyamrerwa* (traditional healer).

Despite the fact that majority of the couples did not seek medication to find out the cause of their childlessness, the study also established that there are some couples who sought medication and they found out the cause of their childlessness. Maureen Atieno and Jacob Owiti (from Nyabondo) on their part went for medical checkup and they established that Maureen had a uterine problem. Maureen in tears narrated the following:

We went to the hospital and it was found that I had a problem with my uterus. I had to be operated on every time. I was told that there was a tube that was removed when they were operating me so I could not conceive (oral interview on 23/1/2012 at Nyabondo, Kamgan).

Joseph Oloo and Anne Maria Oloo emotionally narrated how they tried to seek medication for their childlessness. Joseph said that:

When she miscarried, we went for the traditional medication. After that she started experiencing stomach problems and she ended up in Kenyatta Hospital. So at Kenyatta I do not know the kind of treatment she received which interfered with her. I do not know what the doctor may have done. When I saw what she underwent I told her that since she almost died, we leave that issue even if it is staying without a child. Till now we have not tried anywhere else (oral interview on 20/10/2011 at Rang’ala, Mudhiero).

The same was experienced by Rosemary and Gregory (from Ojolla). Gregory with a lot of pain had the following to say:

This problem has caused us a lot of pain and misery. We have gone to so many hospitals. If childlessness was treatable, we would be having children with Rosemary. But maybe this is what God wanted (oral interview on 11/4/2013 at Ojolla, Nyahera).

The study also found out that men were finding it difficult to go for medical checkup. Susan Achieng’ (from Rang’ala) described how she had to plead with the husband Carillus Okoth so that they could find out the reason for their childlessness. She was worried since they were a young couple. She sadly narrated that:

We had been married for two years and got worried that we were not having our first born yet. When I asked my husband he told me that it is my problem because he knows very well that he is not the cause. This worried me a lot and I went to see a gynaecologist alone without telling him. The doctor told me that I have no problem and that I should come with my husband. When he accepted and we went, it was found that he had low sperm count. It really took him time to accept this. He even refused to use the remedy that the doctor recommended (oral interview on 26/4/2012 at Rang'ala, Ugunja).

This is the observation that Maseko (2009) makes in his study of the South African situation. He describes how culture has discouraged many males from visiting fertility clinics. This is in disguise that males are always fertile and it is the women who can be infertile or barren. Due to such a conception, many couples would still suffer silently even in situations where they would have been helped to get children. It would be in order for the males to come out of the cultural cocoons and accept that they may be having a problem. This would allow them to embrace new technological advancements that would help them to discover the cause of their childlessness and even give scientific remedies.

Whatever the cause, childlessness is something that is quite difficult to put up with. This is the reason for many Luo couples seeking solutions from various places to remedy their childless marriages. The agony of childlessness is explored by Ogola (1994) who describes how Chief Owuor Kembo was under pressure to marry another wife since the wife was not able to conceive regularly. The wife Akoko had two children but to the clan this was not enough, they considered them childless. As a chief, he was expected to have many children. Ogola (1994) further presents the issue of the Luo culture on childlessness and how it disturbed the mother of Mark who had married Elizabeth and for the third year they did not have any offspring. This made the mother come to ask the son what was happening that they could not have children. She needed to see her grandchildren. This therefore proves that childlessness is a concern for the whole family and the community at large. This is not among the Luo only but in most of the African cultures as literature indicates. Oduyoye (1999, p.105) explains the importance of child birth among the Akan of Ghana. She says that: *“The seven signs of human well-being include the power to procreate”*.

In this section, the study undertook to find out the contextual meaning of childlessness and its causes among the Luo. The study discovered that childlessness is not only the state of having no child at all, but having a single child or even having only female children. This is contrary to the definition of many authors who have written on childlessness. They define childlessness as lack of children. Ram (2006) states that among the Indians, childlessness is complete lack of offspring. The study further indicates that childlessness is associated with the place of residence, religion, caste, standard of living and educational status, age of marriage, substance use and experience of sexual transmitted infections. The same view is held by Schoech (2012) who says that voluntary childlessness is not childlessness *per se*, but it is where couples are said to be “child free”. He further argues that childlessness is where couples are going through a biological infertility. It is a state in which they are in need of children but they cannot get them.

The study also found out that the causes of childlessness are enormous and that they are both natural and unnatural. There are some causes which are directly associated with the couple in which they are responsible while there are some causes that are beyond the couple. This is similar to Banzikiza (1995, p.13) who attributes barrenness to certain omission and commission in the marriage ceremony, malicious and angry human as well as spiritual agents and refusing to share bride-wealth to aunts and uncles. Some studies show that there are differences in the causes of childlessness. According to Ram (2006), childlessness among the Indians is associated with the place of residence, religious caste, standard of living, educational status, age at marriage, body mass index, substance use and previous experience of sexually transmitted infections.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CATHOLIC CHURCH'S TEACHINGS AND THE LUO WORLD VIEW ON CHILDLESSNESS

#### 5.1 Introduction

The chapter will discuss the findings of the study on how the teachings of the Catholic Church on childlessness differ with the traditional Luo worldview. This chapter first examines the teachings of the Catholic Church on childlessness, divorce and illegitimate unions as recorded in the Church's documents and other sources and then it looks at how the Catholic childless couples reacted to these teachings of the Church. Secondly, it looks at the Luo worldview on childlessness, that is, how the Luo remedied the childless marriages. Thirdly the chapter will explore how the two contrast.

#### 5.2 The Teachings of the Catholic Church on Childlessness

The Catholic Church's teachings on involuntary childlessness are derived from her teachings on marriage and children. In Genesis 1:28, God said to human beings "Be fruitful and multiply." This means that God himself gave human beings the gift of fecundity. The Catechism of the Catholic Church is explicit that marriage must be open to fertility (CCC, 1652). This is the reason for the Church being against contraceptives. Any act that prevents conception is condemned. In cases of childless marriages, it states that: "*Spouses to whom God has not granted children can nevertheless have a conjugal life full of meaning, in both human and Christian terms. Their marriage can radiate a fruitfulness of charity, of hospitality and of sacrifice*" (CCC, 1654). The Church teaches the following on childlessness: "*A child is not something owed to one, but is a gift. The supreme gift of marriage is a human person. A child may not be considered a piece of property, an idea to which an alleged right to a child would lead*" (CCC, 2378).

Pope Pius XII (1951) in the same line argues that:

The Church understands the pain of infertility in marriage but still insists that marriage does not confer upon the spouses the right to have a child, but only the right to perform those natural acts which are per se ordered to procreation (p.471-473).

The Second Vatican Council similarly holds that marriage is not only for procreation of children. It is by its nature an indissoluble contract between two people and the good of the children demand that the mutual love of the partners is properly shown. In cases where despite the intense desire of the spouses there are no children, marriage still retains its character of being a whole manner and communion of life and preserves its value and indissolubility (Flannery, 1992). Therefore Christian marriage will still hold whether the couple has children or not.

The Church teaches that the couple needs to stay as they are, with or without children. They should accept their situation. The Church consoles spouses who still suffer from infertility after exhausting legitimate medical procedures that they should unite themselves with the Lord's Cross, the source of all spiritual fecundity. The Church sympathizes with the couples who are childless but insists that: *"The Gospel shows that physical sterility is not an absolute evil. They can give expression to their generosity by adopting abandoned children or performing demanding services for others"* (CCC, 2379).

The above teaching is supported by Paul II (1982) that, spouses who find themselves in this sad situation are called to find in it an opportunity for sharing in a particular way in the Lord's Cross, the source of spiritual fruitfulness. The Pope calls on sterile couples to remember that even when procreation is not possible, conjugal life does not for this reason lose its value. He insists that physical sterility can be for the spouses the occasion for other important services to the life of the human person, for example, adoption, various forms of educational work, and assistance to other families and to poor or handicapped children. He stresses that the fruitfulness of conjugal love is not restricted solely to the procreation of children, even understood in its specifically human dimension. Pope John Paul II in his homily when he visited Nigeria had this to tell childless couples:

Husband and wife in their love for each other can also learn to redirect their openness to children to become open to life in many other ways that are badly needed today. To couples who cannot have children of their own I say: you are no less loved by God; your love for each other is complete and fruitful when it is open to others, to the needs of the apostolate, to the needs of the poor, to the needs of orphans, to the needs of the world (Homily at Mass for families, Onitsha, Nigeria, February 13, 1982).

The Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith in its teaching on the Dignity of the Human person, in the Instruction *Dignitas Personae* (2008) calls on spouses to be open to accepting a child from God. The Congregation warns couples against the exaggerated promises of some fertility clinics. It insists that no one can guarantee that each couple will receive this gift. This, it says can be a painful truth for couples who have longed to conceive and raise a child together. Thus, their suffering should call forth the sympathy and support of others and of the whole Church.

The Church strongly supports adoption as a wonderful way of helping the infertile couples who want to have children and to build a family. The Congregation for the Propagation of Faith in *Dignitas Personae* (2008) teaches that:

In order to come to the aid of the many infertile couples who want to have children, adoption should be encouraged, promoted and facilitated by appropriate legislation so that the many children who lack parents may receive a home that will contribute to their human development (p 6).

Paul II (1982) supports adoption in his teachings that when the spouses are physically sterile they can opt for adoption as a way of offering services to the needy. The United States Conference of Bishops (2009) supported adoption by stating the following:

The Church strongly supports adoption as a wonderful way to build a family. As Christians we should especially appreciate this, as we are all sons and daughters of God by adoption (Gal 4:5). Those who cannot conceive or bear a child who wants to consider adoption should receive every assistance and support so this process can be successfully completed in ways that respect the dignity of everyone involved. Adoption is a gift to a child who receives a new family, to the new parents who receive a child to love and to raise, and to the biological parents who, in self-sacrificing love have done all they can to provide their son or daughter with a good home and a bright future. Adoption also benefits the society by contributing to a culture of life in which the inherent dignity of every child is recognized (p. 11-12).

The priest of Ojolla Parish in agreement to the above teachings said that a child is a gift from God. He reiterated that the fruits of marriage are basically the goodness of the spouses and also the procreation of children. But in a case where a child is not forthcoming from the marriage, the most important thing is the goodness of the spouses. The priest suggested that a solution to this would perhaps be for the couple to understand one another. A husband needs to understand the wife and the wife needs to understand the husband and then accept each other in their marriage. The priest of Nyabondo concurred that children are gifts, and this is why during marriage as the couple exchange their vows and make promises, they give it an open room; if God gives them children they will accept them; And if not they will also accept that fact. He said that marriage is more of a commitment to one another; and children are a gift from God. Thus a child is not a fundamental element in a marriage.

Both the priest of Rang'ala Parish and the catechist of Ojolla Parish were in consensus with the teaching of the Church that marriage is a call in which two people enter into. The two partners enter into a consent which creates a permanent bond that no one can separate. To have children is a blessing and a gift from God. Therefore no one can force this and to look for children desperately like that is not Christian. The priest continued to say that:

When the two come together, they have to be open in their marital bliss to the getting of children but in a situation where that does not happen, that should not be a basis of declaring a marriage null. According to the Church's teaching marriage is not based on children (oral interview on 3/2/2012 at Rang'ala Church).

The catechist of Rang'ala Parish (oral interview on 3/2/2012 at Rang'ala Church) observed that the Church's stand and teaching on childlessness is that love is the greatest thing in marriage. Children can also be part of a marriage but they should be seen as a gift from God. God gives children in his own way and in his own time. This is the same view that both the priest and the catechist of Aluor Parish (oral interview on 21/11/2011 at Aluor Church) also stressed that the Church would wish that a couple should have children. But if they are married and they cannot have children, the Church teaches that they should accept their childless situation since what is important in marriage is the love between the husband and wife.

In conclusion, the Church's view is that whether a couple has children or not, the marriage still exists. Children are not the reason for marriage, they are a fruit. Therefore a childless couple ought to stay as they are without children. This is the basis of the dilemma that the childless Catholic Luo couples experience in their life.

### **5.3 The Church's Teachings on Divorce and Illegitimate Unions**

Even though in the traditional African communities divorce was rare because of childlessness; field data indicated that today there are some cases where divorce is witnessed due to childless marriages. For example, Rita Awino (oral interview on 3/2/2012 at Rang'ala) and Mary Auma (oral interview on 30/10/2011 at Aluor, Akala) both indicated how their marriages had to break because they could not bear children. For this reason it is important to find out what the Church teaches on divorce and illegitimate unions. Such unions are common among the Luo people specifically when there are cases of childlessness.

The Church teaches that marriage is a permanent union and therefore divorce is not acceptable. This is in line with Jesus' teaching in the Scriptures, when the Pharisees approached him to question over the issue of divorce he had this reply to them: *"For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery"* (Matthew 19:8-9). St. Paul too while writing to the Corinthians reminds them that there should be no divorce (1 Corinthians 7:10-11). St. Augustine following the same trend places what he calls the blessing of matrimony in this indissolubility when he says: *"In the sacrament it is provided that the marriage bond should not be broken, and that a husband or wife, if separated, should not be joined to another even for the sake of offspring"* (Casti Connubii, 1930). He continues to say that, it is wrong to leave a wife that is sterile in order to take another by whom children may be brought forth. In *Gaudium et Spes* (1965) the Second Vatican Council teaches the following:

Polygamy, divorce and free love unions affect the institution of marriage. Marriage is meant to be a lasting union and this is for the good of the spouses, their offspring and the society. The spouses have to love each other with perpetual fidelity. Marriage is a holy institution that should not be profaned by adultery or divorce (no. 47 and 48).



The priest of Rang'ala (oral interview on 3/2/2012) stressed that in as much as there may be no children in a marital union, the Church does not permit divorce. Once a couple is married, it must be until death separates them.

Pope Paul VI in his encyclical letter reminds Christians that marriage is a permanent bond which only death can terminate (*Humane Vitae*, 1968). Pope John Paul II in his exhortation to Christian couples reminds them that in marriage the two give themselves to each other in a lifelong union until death (*Familiaris Consortio*, 1981). The Church therefore does not permit divorce at any time. The Church is against any form of illegitimate union. Such unions are those that are outside the institution of marriage. This is based on the Commandments of God and the Biblical teaching on human sexuality. The Bible condemns adultery (Exodus 20:14). The Book of Leviticus forbids other forms of illegitimate sexual unions (Leviticus 18:6-30). St. Paul teaches against sex outside marriage which he calls sexual immoralities. He asks the Corinthians to shun all forms of sexual immoralities (1 Corinthians 6:13-20).

Pope Pius XI exhorts Christians in his letter that there should be no carnal intercourse outside the marriage bond with another man or woman even if it is for getting offspring (*Casti Connubii*, 1930). He condemns both Cohabitation and trial marriage. According to St. Augustine, there should be mutual fidelity of the spouses in fulfilling the marriage contract, so that what belongs to one of the parties by reason of this contract sanctioned by divine law may not be denied to him or permitted to any third person (*Casti Connubii*, 1930). Pope Pius XI teaches that Christ the Lord wish only to condemn any form of polygamy or polyandry, as they are called, whether successive or simultaneous, and every other external dishonorable act, but, in order that the sacred bonds of marriage may be guarded absolutely inviolate (*Casti Connubii*, 1930). Pope Paul VI teaches that marital fidelity is in accord with the nature of marriage and also that it is the source of profound and enduring happiness (*Humane Vitae*, 1968). Pope John Paul II supports this teaching of marital fidelity and says that it is in accordance with God's plan. He says that fidelity secures one against every form of subjectivism or relativism. Thus it does not limit one's freedom but protects one from being used or being an object (*Familiaris Consortio*, 1981).

All the Parish Priests and the catechists interviewed consented that the Church does not condone divorce and illicit sexual unions. They said that sex should be within the marital union. The priest of Ojolla (oral interview on 2/7/2013 at Ojolla Church) said that one who is involved in such kind of unions is not allowed to receive Holy Communion. The priest of Aluor Parish concurred that divorce and illegitimate unions are unchristian and those who are involved excludes themselves from Holy Communion (oral interview on 21/11/2011 at Aluor).

In conclusion, since the Church is against illegitimate sexual unions, all the unions that the traditional Luo engage in as a way of remedying childlessness are viewed as sinful because they are contrary to the Church's teaching. Therefore according to these teachings, the Luo Catholic childless couples are not permitted to engage in any form of sexual union even if it is for begetting children.

#### **5.4 Childless Couples' Response to the Church's Teachings on Childlessness**

Given that the Catholic Church is firm in her teachings on childlessness, the study found out that various couples had different ways in which they responded toward the Church's teachings on childlessness. The catechist of Rang'ala observed that some accept the Church's teachings and hold on to the teachings whereas some do not. He justified why some do not hold on to the teachings and live by them. He said that:

Some couples may accept the teachings of the Church but the pressure from the family and these relatives may be too much to resist and this would create a problem. The relatives of the man may advise him to marry another woman since the childless one would not benefit him. Sometimes the pressure is from the woman's family. They may also advise her to leave her husband and try somewhere else. So there are many things that surround the life of the childless couples that would affect them even if they have been taught what the Church wants, they would still find it difficult to cope if they are not devoted and strong in their Christian life (oral interview on 3/2/2012 at Rang'ala Church).

The priest of Ojolla said that the Church's teachings are good in itself because it safeguards against many other multiple problems that might arise in marriage. However, the relevance of the teachings depends on how well the couples welcome that teaching. The priest gave example of polygamy within the Luo culture. He admitted that polygamy is one of the traditional remedies

that some couples would use but it comes with its challenges which may not be easy to handle. The priest insisted that polygamy has got its own problems, it is never a solution. He observed that:

There is that lack of peace in the entire family when it comes to polygamy. That is why I said the teachings of the Church are very good. It all depends on the couple's willingness to understand and to accept it (oral interview on 10/1/2012 at Ojolla Church).

When asked how polygamy brings about quarrels, he said that there is a lot of rivalry among the co-wives and even the children. That each wife would be fighting for the attention of the husband and each child would also be struggling to be loved by the father. This he said brings misunderstanding and therefore leads to lack of peace. The catechist of Nyabondo warned that polygamy is not a guaranteed solution. She firmly said that:

There is also a family I saw that a man married another wife because the first one could not give birth and this second one also could not. So the man was just embarrassed by his actions and the whole situation since both women could not conceive. It was clear he may have been the one with the problem (oral interview on 23/1/2012 at Nyabondo Church).

The catechist pointed out that the above situation disapproves many who support polygamy as a solution to childlessness. This is an indication that even men can be sterile or impotent and therefore marrying another wife would not help in giving them children. The priest of Rang'ala had the following to say on how the childless couples respond to the Church's teachings:

From a majority that I have talked with, they would like to accept the teachings of the Church, but looking at the conditions and the traditions they come from and particularly the Luo culture, the fact that continuity in the family is important; it is a challenge to them. I am aware of cases where people have been coerced by members of the family to make decisions that turns out to be a threat to the institution of marriage as understood by the Church (oral interview on 3/2/2012 at Rang'ala Church).

Japheth Owino (oral interview on 22/2/2012 at Ojolla, Karateng') observed that the Luo traditional beliefs make the Church's teachings not convincing for many couples. He said that, what is important to many couples is that they have children who would be heirs. According to him, childlessness causes pain and misery to many couples and this makes it quite difficult for them to accept the teachings of the Church but the pain is deep inside them. He observed that some couples may just take it to please the Church but the pain is still there. The misery experienced by the childless couple is due to the significance attached to the children in a Luo

family. Rosenblatt (2008) in his study supports the significance of children even in other cultures and the challenges associated with childlessness. His findings are that even among those who voluntarily chose to be childless; there is still some form of misery.

If they chose not to have children, I imagine they might be very modern and sophisticated. Childless families are not common in our society. Those people might have an uncommon lifestyle, free from the fixed ideas of our society. They must have self-confidence, express themselves clearly, and love each other very much. But I can't deny the feelings that their life might be dry. I feel they might be selfish (p. 578).

In the process of trying to live according to the teachings of the Church and also having the pressure from the cultural obligation of children, a dilemma would arise. These couples would be torn apart. This may be because the Church is not in touch with the people's cultural values. This calls for the Church to do a lot of cultural studies into the traditional Luo culture to be able to understand their way of life, their heritage and values. The Church should go beyond the policies and be in touch with people's lives to understand their situation.

The study established that most couples were ignorant of the Church's stand on the scientific interventions on human reproduction. For example Susan Achieng' (from Rang'ala) said that the scientific solution to the problem of the husband who had low sperm count was Intracytoplasmic Sperm Injection (ICSI). But she admitted that she did not know what the Church teaches about ICSI. In reality the Church does not approve of it. Such a situation puts the couples in confusion since they may not be sure on what to do. Sometimes they may end up using the method yet it is not approved by the Church. In as much as the Catholic Church does not approve the Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART), studies indicate that Islamic teachings do not condemn them. Inhorn and Tremaye (2012) reports that, Islam permits Artificial Insemination which is done with the husband's semen. And that In Vitro fertilization of an egg from the wife with the sperm of her husband, followed by the transfer of the fertilized embryo back to the uterus of the wife is allowed. This indicates that Muslims would have a broader perspective of addressing the problem of infertility than their Catholic counterparts.

The study found out that there are some couples who knew about this dilemma and decided to avoid it by accepting to remain childless. This is the case of Cleophas Okwiri and Janet Agutu (from Aluor). Janet Agutu had the following to say about the situation:

He is a committed Catholic and this is why he could not take another wife. You know if one marries two wives then he is not to receive Holy Communion. Marrying another wife would have interfered with his Christian beliefs (oral interview on 30/10/2011 at Aluor, Kanyauma).

Given the above scenario, it needed such a great faith to be able to resist the pressure. According to Janet, her husband was aware of the conflict that exists between the Christian faith and the Luo remedy of polygamy; this is why he avoided marrying another wife. Cleophas may have been courageous to resist the traditional cultural expectations and the pressure from the community.

The above field data therefore shows that the childless couples responded differently to the teachings of the Church concerning childlessness. There are those who accepted the teachings and lived by them whereas some yielded to the pressure of having children and resorted to the traditional solutions.

### **5.5 The Traditional Luo Remedies to Childlessness**

The findings of the study showed that due to the importance attached to children by the Luo community, most couples tried to remedy their childless marriages. The main methods used as per the findings were that some men went for second marriages which led to polygamy, some women who suspected to be the cause of the problem brought female relatives to their husbands (sororate marriages), this too led to polygamy, some women would have sexual union outside wedlock as an attempt to look for children, some couples visited diviners to establish the cause of their childlessness, while others visited medicine men/women who administered herbs for them to drink.

The priest of Rang'ala observed that men may go for polygamy, marrying the second and even a third wife when they cannot have children with their first wives. The priest of Ojolla and the

priest of Aluor also agreed that polygamy is the most common remedy of childlessness. In his long experience, the catechist of Aluor said that majority of men would opt for a second wife as a solution to their childlessness. He observed that: *“The first remedy a man may think about when he does not have a child with his wife would be to take another wife so as to try a possibility of having a child”* (oral interview on 21/11/2011 at Aluor Church).

The FGD's by the SCC leaders in all the four parishes confirmed and consented that polygamy is the most common remedy for childlessness in marriages. The priest of Aluor (oral interview on 21/11/2011 at Aluor Church) explained that a man may not only marry another wife because of childlessness, but also the birth of only female children. The above argument is supported by Ogho (2005) who points out that polygamy is often connected with barrenness of the first wife or with her one-dimensional production of only female children. Nwoye (2007) supports the same idea that polygamous unions are a remedy to childlessness. He points out that the taking of a second wife is so often the simple consequence of the barrenness of the first. He reinforces the idea that interventive polygamy is for remedying a situation that is interfering with the integrity, fulfillment and the goal of marriage.

Burke (1987) observes that the main factor behind polygamy is not sexual incontinence, but the desire to have children which is seen in the taking of the second wife. This is often the simple consequence of the barrenness of the first. Nwoye (2007, p.384) further supports the argument that in Africa polygamy was not just to satisfy the male sexual lust as often thought by members of other cultures. One is likely forced into polygamy by some pressing conditions. He says that: *“... in that regard the problems posed by childless marriage provide generally one of the main reasons”*.

The catechist of Rang'ala (oral interview on 3/2/2012 at Rang'ala Church) said that there are many ways which the couples use to remedy childlessness; the first one is that they may go to a diviner (*ajuoga*) to find out what the problem is and to help them. Secondly, some would go to the hospital to seek medical attention. Thirdly, some women may try to get children outside marriage thinking that the husband is the one that is not functioning. Lastly, the man may also opt to marry another wife presuming that the wife is the cause of the problem. The SCC leaders

of Nyabondo also confirmed that another common remedy to childlessness is that the couple may seek help from the traditional specialists who they call *nyamrerwa* (which means healer). The catechist of Ojolla in the same line had the following argument:

Some try therapies that are nowadays commonly advertised in the radio, others seek help from witchdoctors to establish the cause of their childlessness. Some men may try and marry another wife to try their luck (oral interview on 27/3/2012 at Ojolla Church).

The Focus Group Discussions at Rang'ala established that some couples would go out of their marriages as they try to get children. The SCC leaders observed that the man may try if he can impregnate a woman other than his wife. The woman on the other hand would also look for other men to establish if it is the husband who is impotent. In such cases, the SCC leaders said that, the women in question may not disclose to their husbands if they succeed in getting a child. The priest of Nyabondo had the following contributions on the remedies to childlessness:

According to the culture of the Luo, if a man is not able to get a child, there is that room for the brothers to come in secretly or sometimes even planned by the family so that they make that cover up, but at the end of the day they have children who are named after the man who is impotent. But when you talk of the woman not able to conceive, then the remedy is to bring the sister to give birth to children for that family. So to be a childless person is not something valued. Those who stick to the culture opt to get a second wife or third or may be going to the brother of the man in order to get children. This practice is still carried out secretly (oral interview on 22/1/2012 at Nyabondo church).

The study established that the fact of a man not being able to impregnate a woman was a highly guarded secret. The SCC leaders supported what the priest said above about a close relative of the man or the brother to help in siring children with his wife. They said that: *"In some cases, a private arrangement is made, especially in the olden days; a woman would be advised to look for a close cousin of the husband"* (FGD conducted in Ojolla on 27/3/2012). This is supported by Ayayo (1976) that the elders would summon such a man to tell him to allow the wife to look for his brother to sustain his lineage. In cases where the man was not co-operative, only the woman was advised by the elderly women to do the same. Such a scenario may not be unique among the Luo only but also among some African ethnic communities. Bujo (2009) indicates that sterility of the man in some communities is solved by his brother impregnating the sister-in-law. This is also supported by Mbiti (1975, p.114) who says that: *"If the problem lies with the husband, then a close relative or friend is asked or allowed to sleep with the wife in order that she may bear*

*children for the family*". Nwoye (2007) also corroborates the above idea, that in many African communities where interventive polygamy cannot help in the healing of the problem of childlessness, the culture has a provision in which another man (usually a relative or friend agreeable to the husband concerned) is approached to help in impregnating the wife, in search of a child for the home. The traditional perspective would view the child that is a product of this private and arranged liaison as a product not of the genitor but of the husband of the wife concerned.

Field data indicated how some of the childless couples tried to solve their childlessness. Anne Maria Oloo (from Rang'ala, Mudhiero) painfully, with tears in her eyes, recounted how the mother-in-law arranged for the husband to marry another wife. She said that:

My mother-in-law had organized for my husband to marry another wife. I did not know what was going on. My husband went with his brother secretly to see the woman. When they came back and he told me is when I realized that something was going on (oral interview on 20/10/2011 at Rang'ala, Mudhiero).

Joseph admitted that he had accepted to go and look for this woman to marry, but unfortunately there was an obstacle. He sadly said that:

I thought about marrying another wife at first. I had even asked my wife Anne Maria to bring a relative of hers to live with us. The problem was that I had never finished paying the bride price for Anne Maria and this became a stumbling block. Since I had not finished all the traditional marriage rites I could not initiate another, so I decided to abandon the idea of another wife (oral interview on 20/10/2011 at Rang'ala, Mudhiero).

The case of Joseph is similar to that of Benjamin Ooko who accepted that he had an option for marrying another wife but he could not do so since he lacked wealth. Benjamin sorrowfully said the following:

I did not have enough wealth so I could not think of marrying another wife. You cannot take someone's daughter and stay with her without giving the parents anything (paying dowry). They would not allow you to take her (oral interview on 21/11/2011 at Rang'ala, Sikalame).

This similar argument was raised by the SCC leaders of Rang'ala. They were concerned that men in childless unions may be pressurized by the family or even friends to marry another wife even when they are so poor to afford bride wealth. The FGD's conducted in Rang'ala confirmed that sometimes the family, relatives and friends may influence the man to marry another wife or they may even bring another woman for him to marry. Maureen Atieno (from Nyabondo) in tears



recounted how she had no choice when her husband married another woman due to the pressure from the family. She narrated that:

I had a problem with my uterus so I could not bear children. I saw that his family was complaining that he does not have children. They kept on blaming me that I cannot give their son a child. So I told him to look for another wife who could bear children for him. He married another woman and she bore children to him (oral interview on 23/1/2012 at Nyabondo, Kamgan).

Leonida Ajwang' (from Ojolla) is another woman who experienced the pressure from the family of the husband. She said that:

My mother in-law and the brothers did not like me because I could not give their son a child. They put a lot of pressure on my husband until he had to marry another wife (oral interview on 11/4/2013 at Ojolla, Obambo).

Japheth Owino (from Ojolla) sadly narrated how he ended up in polygamy due to the pressure from the family after the first wife gave birth to only one child. He said that:

According to the Luo traditions, having one child is viewed to be risky. This made my family to pressurize me to have another wife. I was convinced that in case this one child can die I would remain completely childless. This is why I took another wife. At first I was confused; it was not easy to give in to the pressure of marrying another wife. It took me time since I had to think about my faith. With time my mother convinced me and I ended up marrying another woman (oral interview on 22/2/2012 at Ojolla, Karateng').

All the Focus Group Discussions made similar observations that the man can, out of his own initiative, decide to marry a second wife to bear him children. Caroline Akinyi (from Nyabondo) punctuating her narration with periods of silence, shared how her husband married another woman because of the fact that she could not give birth. She said this:

Since I could not give birth after we had been married for quite some time, my husband was concerned and he kept on complaining. He therefore decided to marry another woman to bear children for him. Since I could not give him the children that he needed, I could not resist a co-wife (oral interview on 23/1/2012 at Nyabondo, Dago).

Peter (from Aluor) justified his polygamy being a result of childlessness. He had the following to say:

There are also rare cases like mine who may marry because of childlessness of the first wife. My case is rare because I did not intend to marry another wife but because we wanted children my wife brought her sister and we are living in peace (oral interview on 21/11/2011 at Aluor).

The study found out that sororate unions which lead to polygamy are common remedies to childlessness. Tabitha Anyango (from Nyabondo) described how her husband wanted to marry another wife due to the fact that she could not give birth. She ended up bringing her sister for the husband to marry. She said that:

After we had lived for ten years, he told me that he wanted to marry. I told him that it's alright he can just marry. He went and took another woman and I told him that the woman was not fit for him since we needed a child. We disagreed with the woman and the woman left. My sister came and he took my sister as a wife (oral interview on 23/1/2012 at Nyabondo, Kodong'a).

Mary Auma (from Aluor) also said how she had to endure the pain of bringing a relative for the husband to marry. She narrated:

Since I could not bear children, I brought for him my niece and he married her. She has given birth to children. We lived in peace, and even the children loved me more than her. They were like my children (oral interview on 30/10/2011 at Aluor, Akala).

Rosemary Atieno (from Ojolla) and Martina Auma (from Aluor) are also examples of women who brought their female relatives to their husbands.

The SCC leaders of Ojolla said that such sororatic unions are very common and culturally accepted. They said that the children from such unions would belong to the elder wife who brought the other woman. Sororate marriage is a common phenomenon among the Luo especially in cases of childlessness and even the death of the wife. This SCC leaders confirmed in the FGD's that a woman would always bring her sister if she suspects that she is the one who cannot bear children so that her sister can bear children for her with her husband.

Nwoye (2007) supports the idea of sororatic unions and he adds that in a polygamous family where the first wife is barren, she could "marry" another wife for the husband. Sometimes, the first wife, with age, consolidates her position as mother to subsequent wives, while it is not uncommon to see a harem of wives live like sisters. This means that the first wife may also not necessarily bring her sister or a relative but any other woman. Ogho (2005, p.285) points out that: "*Children born by subsequent wives are also children of the first wife*". This is a similar observation that Mbiti (1975) made when he said that a barren woman would make arrangement for the husband to get another wife so that the children can be born in the family. Some good

men would take one of the children to the house of the elder wife to act as her child. The child is meant to help her in various duties.

The priest and the catechist of Aluor as well as the catechist of Nyabondo concurred that in some cases, when a second wife is married because the first one cannot bear children, there have been cases where the second wife conceives then the first one also conceives almost after the second wife has conceived. This is a strange phenomenon but it is not common. They say that, “*Nyachira oyawo ni mikayi*” (which literally translates as, “The second wife has opened the womb of the first wife”). The SCC leaders of Ojolla agreed with the above scenario that a woman may be barren but when the husband marries the second wife, she may also conceive (FGD on 27/3/2012 at Ojolla Church). It was observed that even when such cases arose, the man retained both the first and the second wife.

There are some couples who attested that they tried other remedies to childlessness. Clementine Odhiambo in tears narrated how she resorted to the traditional remedies as she was trying to have children. She recounted:

I did not go to the hospital. I went to another medicine woman in our village who gives women medicine to cleanse their uterus. She gave me some traditional medicine which I took but since it was not working out, I stopped using it (oral interview on 23/1/2012 at Nyabondo, Dago).

Tabitha Anyango on her part sadly narrated her experience with the following words:

When I realized that I could not conceive, I went to the sister of my husband who took me to another woman. She gave me some herbs but I did not see any effect (oral interview on 23/1/2012 at Nyabondo, Kodong’a).

There were other couples who admitted to have visited medicine people. They were, Benjamin Ooko and Jenifer (from Rang’ala Sikalame), and Henricus Otieno and Milka (from Ojolla, Kapuonja). They supported that their main reason was to establish the cause of childlessness in their respective marriages and find solutions. The act of visiting the medicine men or diviners is not only common among the Luo. According to Katz and Katz (1987), inability to have children is a common phenomenon among Kenyan women; some seek treatment in Kenyatta National Hospital while others go to traditional healers (*waganga*). This is also reported among the Igbo of Nigeria. In the literature reviewed it was observed that the Igbo women who were barren would visit the native doctors (Diabas) to help them (Obianuju, 2009).

There were some like Mary Auma who refused to visit the medicine men because of their faith. She said the following:

I had an option of visiting *ajuoga* (diviner) but I could not do so since my faith could not allow me. Our Church teaches against visiting a diviner. This is an act that is contrary to faith. Better I remain without children but not sin against God (oral interview on 30/10/2011 at Aluor, Akala).

The reason for visiting witchdoctors and diviners is because childlessness is sometimes attributed to supernatural powers. Since it is beyond the powers of the couple, they will seek help from those who can see the unseen world and can tap the supernatural powers. This observation is made by Gyandu (2007) that among the Africans, barrenness is caused by supernatural powers. He observes that traditionally, among the Igbo of Nigeria a woman who is childless would visit the native doctors (Diabas) to help her manage her situation. Dutney (2007) in support of this argues that infertility causes social alienation which would bring about rituals which may be done to appease the ancestors.

It is worth noting from the findings of the study that, those who succeeded to get children were the ones who used sororate and polygamous unions. Those who visited medicine men and diviners did not report any success. This is why they abandoned the medicine they were given when they realized that it was not working. Jenifer (from Rang'ala) reported that she had to abandon the traditional medicine. She said the following:

When we realized that we were not having children, we went to a medicine man who gave us a traditional medicine called *sejera*. We tried it for some time but we realized that it was not helping us (oral interview on 21/10/2011 at Rang'ala, Sikalame).

The above findings show that childlessness in the traditional Luo society is not appreciated and therefore the affected couple used various methods to remedy the situation. Some of these are like some men married other wives leading to polygamy, some women who had known that they are barren brought a relative to the husband (sororate marriage), and this also led to polygamy. Other methods that some used were: the husband and wife were living together yet they had sexual union outside their marriage. They looked for other sexual partners to prove if they are fertile. Some visited diviners to consult the supernatural world so as to know the cause of their childlessness. Some sought the help of medicine people who gave them medication. Given that

these couples are Catholic Christians, the traditional remedies they used are contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church. This eventually led to a great dilemma that these affected couples had to deal with.

### **5.6 The Difference between the Teachings of the Catholic Church and the Traditional Luo Remedies to Childlessness**

From the above discussions, it is a reality that majority of the childless couples would turn to the traditional remedies of childlessness to help their childless marriages. The SCC leaders of Rang'ala were in agreement that many couples resorted to the traditional methods like polygamy, sororate marriages, extramarital sex, visiting diviners (*ajuoga*) among others. These remedies they observed are against the teachings of the Catholic Church. They said that: *“The Church teaches against polygamy, extramarital sex and that couples should be faithful to each other at all times”* (Rang'ala FGD on 6/3/2012 at Rang'ala Church).

The above argument is supported by Arinze and Fitzgerald (1990) who argue that most African Christians may revert to traditional religious practices when confronted with critical issues in their lives. They say that if they do not turn to the traditional religious practices they would turn to the New Religious Movements (NRM) or Independent Churches (IC). Given that childlessness is a crisis in marriage, the Luo would turn to these ways as the study established.

The framework of this study is based on Durkheim's theory of functionalism which stresses that religion should function so as to bring harmonious living in the society. The affected couples would only adhere to the religious practices which seem to work out for them in solving the problem of childlessness. This is why they would turn to the traditional cultural practices or the New Religious Movements. When these Christians revert to traditional remedies to childlessness, there will be a problem since most of these traditional practices go against the Church's doctrine. The priest of Rang'ala said that the remedies have serious consequences. When the man marries another wife then it brings a challenge to the institution of marriage as taught by the Catholic Church. The priest of Ojolla clarified how some of the traditional

remedies like polygamy go against the Church's teaching which does not permit polygamy. The priest said that:

Polygamy you know will definitely deny the two of them the sacramental life which is very vital in a Christian life. The first wife will of course continue with the sacraments. The husband and the second or the third will not receive Holy Communion (oral interview on 10/1/2012 at Ojolla Church).

The priest of Aluor admitted that these divergent views cause a dilemma among the Luo Catholic couples. The Church teaches that the couples are supposed to stay as they are, with or without children; and according to the Luo, love and fecundity goes hand in hand and therefore all cases of childlessness ought to be remedied. He said that this dilemma also tears the Church apart. This is because the Church does not reject the children born out of the second union. The Church baptizes them meaning that the Church incorporates them into her larger family. The catechist of Rang'ala Parish had the following to contribute on this:

Some of these methods are against the teachings of the Church since they interfere with the faith of the parties involved. They may lead someone into breaking the Commandments of God. Probably it is only seeking medical attention from the hospital that is not against the teaching of the Church (oral interview on 3/2/2012 at Rang'ala Church).

The same observation was made by the catechist of Aluor. He said that: *"If someone marries a second wife, he acts against the Church regulations, which prohibits one from marrying more than one wife"* (oral interview on 21/11/2011 at Aluor Church). Gumo (2004) confirms this fact about the Church and polygamy. She says that the Catholic Church condemns polygamy as adultery and prostitution. She further says that: *"The Church can recommend polygamists as members only if they become monogamous by sending away his wives except the first one; Otherwise they are barred from participation in the Sacramental life of the Church"* (p. 124). The SCC of Aluor concurred that polygamy is against the teachings of the Church. They said that those who resort to polygamy risk being excluded from the Holy Communion, being denied leadership positions and that their children are also not baptized easily. The Church considers polygamy as a form of infidelity which is an offence against marriage (CCC, 2380).

On his part, Peter Okello (from Aluor) recounted how his remedy cost him his sacramental life. He said that:

I used to receive Holy Communion and I was a staunch Catholic. I married a lady called Martina Auma. She was not a Catholic but she converted. Since she could not give birth she brought her sister and I married her. We participate actively; Martina is receiving Holy Communion except me and her sister. The only wish I have is that the Church could allow me to receive Holy Communion because I am like someone who has married twins. I feel that my wife and her sister are like one flesh. The Church should understand the problem which forced me to marry another wife. It is the problem of children that made me marry another wife (oral interview on 21/11/2011 at Aluor).

Japheth Owino (from Ojolla Karateng') is one of the victims of the difference between the traditional remedies and the Church's teachings. He admitted being taught the doctrine of the Church that, when one has become a polygamist; he has to stop receiving the sacraments of the Church. The Church can only accept him after he has left another woman or if one of the two women passes on. Gregory Ochieng' (from Ojolla), the husband to Rosemary concurred that polygamy has denied him the opportunity of receiving Holy Communion. He had the following to say:

We needed children and Rosemary brought her cousin so that we can live together. But in as much as we have the children, I cannot receive Holy Communion since I have two wives. I think the Church should consider our plight (oral interview on 11/4/2013 at Ojolla, Nyahera).

The catechist of Nyabondo contributed by saying that, the Church's teachings does not allow one to resort to the traditional remedies like going to the diviners or marrying more than one wife. She pointed out that those who do so have a weak faith. The catechist of Ojolla supported this argument saying that looking for children desperately and resorting to traditional remedies is not Christian. The SCC leaders of Nyabondo Parish also confirmed that visiting the traditional specialists or diviners to establish the cause of childlessness is against the Church's teachings. One who goes against this is not supposed to receive the Holy Communion until he or she repents the "sin".

Susan Achieng' (from Rang'ala) was of the same opinion that resorting to traditional Luo remedies to childlessness would bring a problem to one's Christian faith and spiritual life in general. She had the following to say:

Yes, if I was not a Christian I would have had the option of being unfaithful to my spouse and commit adultery all with the intention of conceiving a child. However, as a Christian, my morality and conscience cannot allow me to do that. It would be sinful to break my marriage vows to have children out of marriage. So I have decided to wait, may be things will turn out differently (oral interview on 26/4/2012 at Rang'ala, Ugunja).

The SCC leaders of Rang'ala had these observations on the difference between the traditional remedies and the teachings of the Church. They observed that:

They may end up breaking the commandments due to infidelity, this affects them. Some men may end up marrying another wife and they end up not coming to Church. They may end up not receiving Holy Communion and thus affect their faith. The marriage may be at risk since even the woman may end up leaving and marrying another man (FGD on 6/3/2012 at Rang'ala Church).

The SCC leaders of Ojolla Parish confirmed the above argument saying that:

There are some remedies which are not acceptable like, polygamy, the woman going out looking for another man. These are forms of infidelity. Some scientific innovations are also not accepted by the Church (FGD at Ojolla Church on 27/3/2012).

In another FGD of Ojolla, SCC leaders said that these methods are against the teachings of the Church. Since a child is a gift from God, some methods like marrying another wife, going out to look for a man or taking a relative of the husband, interfere with the marital covenant and they also lead the couple to fall into sin (FGD on 27/3/2012 at Ojolla Church). These remedies are incompatible with the teachings of the Church since the Church teaches against illegitimate unions, adultery or extra-marital sex; the Commandments of God are against these unions. The Catechism of the Catholic Church condemns practices of divination and magic. "Practices of magic and sorcery, taming occult powers for one's service, even if it is for restoring one's health is contrary to religion" (CCC, 2117). The above are condemned by the Kenya Episcopal Conference (2008) in adapting to the teachings of the Catholic Catechism wrote that: "...divination, magic and sorcery are offences against true religion" (A Catholic Catechism No. 321).

Therefore from the above discussions, it is evident that, when these childless couples visit diviners for help, it is viewed as a spiritual offence. The act of visiting herbalists for medication is also discouraged. Gumo (2004) argues that when the missionaries came, they brought



Christianity and they also came with new ways of treating illness using modern medicine. This has made traditional herbalists be irrelevant and visiting them has been branded outdated and superstitious. Those couples therefore who are seen to have visited these medicine men/women and even diviners are regarded as having committed sin.

The priest of Nyabondo Parish on his part said that these remedies bring a conflict between the Luo culture and the Church's tradition and teachings. He suggested that this is one of the issues that need to be considered for inculturation. On the other hand he pointed out that the couple should also accept the true meaning of marriage as taught by the Church. He narrated the following:

The Luo would find it difficult to accept childlessness considering the values that are attributed to children. At the same time if you look at Christian values and teachings you will find that the core elements in marriage do not regard getting children as essential to marriage. That is why you will find for the Luo, there is that essential element of children in so far as making marriage contract is concerned. So it is a conflict between cultural values and Christian values (oral interview on 22/1/2012 at Nyabondo Church).

The above is emphasized by Banzikiza (1995) who observes a conflict between Christianity and the traditional culture. He says that Christianity has challenged people's traditional concept of fecundity by condemning some beliefs and values associated with it. Instead they emphasize Christian values of love in marriage, celibacy and virginity. He observes that these concepts are alien to an African mentality.

The study was to assess how the teachings of the Catholic Church on childlessness differ with the traditional Luo worldview on childlessness. The above exposition shows that there is a difference between the teachings of the Catholic Church on childlessness and the Luo perspective and remedial measures to childlessness. This therefore leaves the childless Catholic Luo couples perplexed on which way to follow. The couples find it challenging to fit in the society and even within the Church. The lives of these couples are interfered with in the society and within the Church. They are torn apart and unable to decide which teachings to adhere to; whether to follow the Church's teachings and remain childless or to follow the cultural remedies and to have children. This dilemma is quite challenging to both the couples and the Church. These challenges influence the evangelization work of the Church.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE CHALLENGES OF CHILDLESSNESS

#### 6.1 Introduction

In this section the study explored how the socio-religious challenges that the childless couples undergo affect their lives: how some have tried to overcome these challenges, how these challenges on childlessness influence the pastoral ministry of the Church and finally how the Church could overcome these challenges that may hinder her work of evangelization. This therefore led to more discussions on the meaning of inculturation, the need for inculturation, misconceptions in inculturation and the challenges that the Church in Africa and in particular Kisumu face in inculturation. The various childless couples who were interviewed concurred that the state of being childless is indeed a very challenging reality. These challenges are socio-religious in nature and they affect the lives of the couples in a tremendous way.

##### 6.1.1 The Social Challenges of Childlessness

The catechist of Ojolla Parish said with certainty that childlessness is not something to be desired and people try so much to get solutions how to come out of it. He observed that due to the societal expectation that a couple need to bear children, some women fake pregnancy by stuffing clothes in their stomach to lie to people that they are expectant and later on they steal children. Field data revealed that the issue of childlessness affects women so much. This is supported by Rabia (2013) who says that among the Muslims, childlessness is considered to be a woman's problem.

Tabitha Anyango (from Nyabondo) suffered great challenges at the hands of her husband because of her inability to conceive. In tears, she had the following to say:

The fact that I could not give birth brought a lot of problems. My husband continuously blamed me and could occasionally talk about it when we had quarrels. He continued to scold me about it every now and again (oral interview on 23/1/2012 at Nyabondo, Kodong'a).

She observed that it is important for a woman to have her own child since it gives one the courage to talk even amidst other women. The child even gives one a name in the village. The sufferings that Tabitha underwent were not unique to her only. Majority of women attested to this and indicated that being unable to bear children affected their lives a great deal. Maurine Atieno supported this saying:

There is no Luo who would want to marry without a child. Childlessness is something so serious that one would try so hard to overcome. When it comes to the issue of a child, one can do anything, even the indigenous ways. At that time one cannot think of other things, even one can forget about the Christian teachings (oral interview, 23/1/2012, Nyabondo, Kamgan).

The above data that infertile women suffer a great deal is supported by Inhorn and Curtin (2012) that involuntary women in Middle East, face ridicule and social ostracism and that they may be accused of casting evil eye on other women's children through their uncontrolled envy. Rabia (2013) observed the same that infertile women are viewed as a potential source of harm to the children of others thus they are avoided and excluded from social events. Achebe (1958, p.54) confirms this when he said that, "The birth of children in the traditional African societies should be a woman's crowning glory". This is the reason for women being happy at child birth. In it, they see their success and progress. This is again supported by Mariano (2008) when he observed that a woman who has not given birth is considered incomplete because she has not fulfilled all the life stages from childhood to adulthood. Even without suffering at the hands of the husband and other people, she would feel that there is something lacking in her life.

Nwoye (2006) concurred with this field data. He indicates that childlessness is not accepted in the traditional African communities. He says that barrenness would make marriage unsuccessful and a successful marriage is that in which children are born in. This means that according to the African society, the success of a marriage is determined by the number of children brought forth. It does not matter whether the couples have a successful career, a good home or money. Basden (1966, p.68) observes that, "to be childless is the greatest calamity that can befall an African woman". Mbiti (1969) supports this argument when he observed that all marriages in the African society are meant to bear children, and that marriage without procreation is incomplete. The study established that the reality of childlessness affects the couple since it is something that is not normal. Every couple expects that once they are married they should beget children. This too

is the expectation of the community. Therefore, being childless is unacceptable and many people would want to avoid it by all necessary means. Macreen Anyango (from Nyabondo) sadly expressed how the fact that she could not bear children disturbed her tremendously. She said that:

I was troubled yes since as a human being I also need to have my offspring. Thinking that I could not have my own children was quite unbearable. But I just left it to God since may be that was his plan (oral interview on 23/1/2012 at Nyabondo).

Benedette Agolla (from Ojolla) expressed her feelings with the following words:

I really feel sad that I cannot have children. Sometimes life is so lonely and before I came to terms with it I continuously blamed God for my state. It is a terrible thing (oral interview on 11/4/2013 at Ojolla, Karateng’).

Mbiti (1975) confirms the above challenge that, in Africa, every normal person is obliged to marry and bear children. Childlessness therefore is greeted with a lot of skepticism. No one would want to be childless since it is a calamity and a bad omen.

The study revealed that the fact that men cannot be able to sire children among the Luo is quite a disappointing experience. Joseph Oloo (from Rang’ala, Mudhiero) described with a lot of pain and sorrow, punctuating with silence his narration, “Till now we did not try anywhere else to get a child. We are now old...it is a sad story... but, we left it for God. I have gotten used to staying like this” (Oral interview on 20/10/2011 at Rang’ala, Mudhiero). This experience is well resounded by Barden (2005) who reports how males from Malawi and Egypt describe infertility as humiliating, threatening and a profoundly emasculating experience. Infertility is not just pernicious to an African. According to Inhorn and Curtin (2012), they observe that in Middle East, infertility affects men’s personhood, marriage and even family relations.

The field data indicated that childlessness is an experience that majority of people dread. This is because being childless does not ensure the continuity of the family. The SCC leaders of Rang’ala Parish (FGD’s conducted on 6/3/2012) admitted that childlessness is not something that one could desire or even accept. They observed that majority of couples are not happy with their predicament. Mbiti (1975, p.115) supports the argument when he said that: “*without children, there is no concept of the family in Africa; without children therefore, the concept of the family would grind to a halt*”. The same was observed by the SCC leaders from Aluor Parish (FGD’s

conducted on 11/2/2012). They said that childlessness indeed was a reality that interfered deeply with the family and the clan's development. Since the family makes up the clan, the clan would be affected since there would be no growth in terms of the number of children that are born.

The study found out that childlessness affected most of the marriages and the lives of the couples in a very profound way. This is because among the Luo and among many African communities, marriage is meant to bear children. The Luo community as a whole and the Luo couples would not appreciate childlessness in their marriages. Mary Auma (from Aluor) described with deep pain and sorrow how her state of not being able to bear children affected her marriage and the relationship with her co-wife. She said this:

Some people told her that since I do not have children, I will 'spoil' her children. This started to derail the harmony that we had. She started to withdraw her children from me and soon there were chaos in the home. Even my house was burnt down in the home and since then I am living in a rented house where I carry out my business (oral interview on 30/10/2011 at Aluor, Akala).

Rita Awino (from Rang'ala) emotionally and in tears recounted her story how her inability to bear children cost her marriage after a grand wedding. She said the following:

We had a very colourful wedding and I knew that my marriage would be so wonderful. After two years problems started because we did not have a child yet. My mother-in-law started to complain. The third year I could not bear it and we called off the marriage. Now I have built my home where I live with the three children that I adopted. I do not want issues of men and marriage anymore (oral interview on 3/2/2012 at Rang'ala).

The story of Mary and Rita are not strange since most childless couples are not living in peace. This was corroborated by the SCC leaders of Rang'ala Parish who confirmed that majority of childless couples rarely live in peace. The Small Christian Community leaders observed that such couples are always in pain, sadness and loneliness. They said that some of such couples quarrel a lot and are bitter with other children. The same was observed by the SCC of Nyabondo Parish. They said that, "Childlessness brings a lot of sadness and bitterness to the affected couple" (FGD conducted on 11/04/2012 at Nyabondo). The same experience is observed by Blackburn (2001) who reports that childlessness may make marriages to end and some women may contemplate suicide. Ram (2006) says the same on Indian women. That they suffer most and are faced with divorce, separation, dissolution or disruption of marriage and even domestic violence from the husband and the in-laws.

Sewpaul (1999) in her argument displays that in Africa, two people enter into a marriage relationship in order that they may have children. This has a main purpose of perpetuating the clan. Therefore, if they cannot bear children, then they interfere with the ritual life of the community. Mbiti (1969) concurs with this argument saying that African marriages are meant to bear children. Mbiti (1975, p.106) supports this saying that: *“Through marriage and childbearing, human life is preserved, propagated and perpetuated”*. Therefore, if the marriage of a couple is not fruitful then the process of perpetuation of life is profoundly interfered with. This becomes very challenging to the couple and even the community as a whole.

The study found out that there was instability of the marriages. This was mainly caused by the man’s family. The members of the family are always worried when the marriage is childless. This is the reason for them even trying to push the couple into certain remedies. Anne Maria Oloo (from Rang’ala) had to put up with the pressure from the kinsmen of the husband. They put a lot of pressure on the husband to marry another woman because she was not able to bear children. She said that:

The family and clan had a lot of problems saying many bad things and abusing me because we did not have children. I am the one who they thought had a problem so they put a lot of pressure on my husband to marry. But with him he did not care about what they were saying that is the why we have lived with him to date (oral interview on 21/11/2011 at Rang’ala, Mudhiero).

Jenifer Ooko (from Rang’ala) on her part painfully shared her own personal experience how the family and the clan of her husband had a lot of problems with her childlessness. She said the following:

My in-laws had a lot of problems with me. They were saying many bad things and abusing me. The only thing that helped me and saved my marriage is that my husband told me that he is the one who married me and not his family (oral interview on 21/11/2011 at Rang’ala, Sikalame).

Maurine Atieno equally described how she had lived with her husband peacefully and happily but the family came in to interfere. She narrated this:

We lived peacefully for thirteen years without children. The family of my husband kept on complaining that their son needed to have children. They pressurized him to marry another wife to get children. When he married another woman, this affected the peaceful marriage that we had. Our relationship changed tremendously since he gave more time to the other woman and the children (oral interview on 23/1/2012 at Nyabondo, Kamgan).

The above findings indicate that the family of the man is responsible for the pressure that the couples undergo. This gives the couples limited options and this is a great challenge to the lives of these childless couples. The same culture is depicted in Ogola (1994, p.30) where both the mother of Chief Owuor Kembo and the council of elders insisted that he should marry. The mother said: *“My son, what if some ill-wind took your only son!”* Mbiti (1969) confirms that among Africans, marriage and procreation are issues of obligation that an individual had to undergo. This obligation that each individual owes to the community is what drives the community to put pressure on an individual when there seems to be no offspring in a given marriage. Ogola (1994) presents this when he depicts the council of elders trying to convince the chief that he needed to marry another wife even if he did not want but for the sake of the community, so as to get enough heirs to guide them when he is gone.

The SCC leaders of Aluor Parish had the same observation that the couples face pressure from the parents and other friends or company. Especially the men may be pressurized to marry another wife. In some cases, the relatives of the woman may also pressurize her to leave the man. Similar observations were made by the catechist of Ojolla Parish and the catechist of Nyabondo Parish, they both concurred that majority of the childless couples had unstable marriages due to quarrels. Tabitha Anyango narrated her painful experience how childlessness spoilt her happy marriage. The husband married her sister and later on married a third wife, after which the man abandoned them for the third wife. She said that:

We live in the same house but he is not helping my sister and I. We feed and clothe ourselves. After he married the third wife; he abandoned my sister and I. Since then, we are living in the same house but there is no peace. We have a lot of quarrels and sometimes we do not even talk in that house (oral interview on 23/2/2012 at Nyabondo, Kodong’a).

In one of the FGD’s with Rang’ala SCC leaders, it was reported that in some marriages where couples suffer childlessness, the unions do not survive. They end up in divorce. They also reported that some mother’s-in-law cannot let the son and the daughter-in-law live in peace without children. The SCC leaders of Ojolla Parish (FGD’s conducted on 27/3/2012) further commented on this when they observed that childlessness may lead to divorce and marriage instability. Nwagwu (2008, p.139) supports this argument when she observes that, “A marriage without children in Africa is regarded as incomplete and unhappy”. Some women also cannot

withstand living with a man who is infertile. The study discovered that some women would say that, “I cannot live with my fellow woman.” This may make such men to live alone given that no woman would want to live with them. The SCC of Ojolla Parish concurred that some childless couple would be having unstable marriage which may lead to divorce.

The priest of Ojolla argued that childlessness would change the perception of an individual of himself/herself. The priest said that:

A man is ashamed of himself, what people think about him, that he has no manhood. You are *long lilo*. One is not useful to the society as such. The woman also feels that shame and guilt that she cannot conceive (oral interview on 10/1/2012 at Ojolla Church).

The catechist of Rang’ala Parish observed that some of them do not live in peace since they do not love one another. They quarrel every day, they accuse each as the cause of childlessness, and thus they lose trust in one another. Such accusations arise because some men find it difficult to go to the hospital and have potency test that might open avenues for treating the disorder. The priest of Ojolla Parish supported this view that the blame game that exists between the childless couples makes the relationship between the couples go sour. The catechist of Aluor Parish concurred that some couples do not live in peace; they live blaming each other and majority of the men end up marrying another woman. The priest of Nyabondo Parish observed a similar experience that childless couples have quarrels that may even lead to break ups. He said that majority of the marriages are no longer monogamous since the men would want to try from other women if they can have children. This was also confirmed by the SCC of Nyabondo Parish who observed that childlessness may lead to extramarital sex.

The priest of Rang’ala Parish argued that one of the reasons that make the couples find it difficult to accept their state of being childless and live comfortably with it is how the society perceives them. Thus the pressure from the society may create disharmony between the couples. The reason for such problems in the marriages of the couples is because the marriages have not fulfilled their main objective which is to bear children. Mbiti (1969) concurs with the above argument that childlessness caused by sterility or barrenness on the part of the wife could cause divorce. He says that marriage is complete only with the birth of the first child. Similar



observation is made by Nwoye (2007) who observes that the traditional African marriages are basically teleological. These goals are to have a permanent peaceful relationship and for procreation of children. Once children are not attained as one of the goals, then there would be no peace and even the relationship may end up not being permanent. This is corroborated by Olawoyim (1968, p.2) who says that: *“One of the primary purposes of customary marriage is to beget children”*.

Given that childlessness is challenging to the couples because it is a reality which is against the normal expectation of the community; the SCC leaders observed the following challenges which the childless couples face: some couples are abused by their relatives, while others also despised and ridiculed. Women specifically undergo a lot of this from their mother’s-in-law and other women. It was observed from the FGD’s conducted in Rang’ala Parish that some are abused that they are “filling up the toilet” only, instead of giving birth. Some are abused that they do not profit the home with anything. When they correct a child who makes a mistake, they are always reminded to give birth so as to quarrel their own children. The abuse that the infertile women undergo is not only among the Luo community. Dyer (2007) in his study of infertility among the women of South Africa reports that infertile women face maltreatment and abuse.

The SCC leaders from Ojolla Parish reported that, the couples themselves feel bad since they may not have anyone to send. They may be rich but not happy since even there is no child to eat their food and enjoy their wealth. They would feel bad when they compare themselves with their age mates and even neighbours. Some may even end up developing hatred towards children and those with children. The SCC leaders of Aluor Parish concurred that those who are rich face challenges even of inheritance of their wealth. They also observed that childless couples are despised by their fellow villagers. Burnett and Panchal (2008, p.190) on the Challenges associated with childlessness said: *“There are stigma, anxiety, helplessness, confusion, and shame regarding their inability to have a child”*.

The childless couples gave their own testimonies of the challenges that they personally undergo. Caroline Akinyi painfully shared her challenges saying:

It is quite challenging since I have no one to help me. I now live alone given that my husband died. Am forced to struggle on my own and whatever I get is what I live on. Sometimes there is no one that I can send. It is quite challenging I have always prayed to God to give me one or two but there is nothing (oral interview on 23/1/2012 at Nyabondo, Dago).

These similar sentiments were shared by Maurine Atieno (from Nyabondo) and Anne Maria Oloo (from Rang'ala) who described how being childless is quite heavy on them. They said that they are lonely and even if they were unwell there is no one to send. The same was experienced by Janet Agutu (from Aluor) she made a rejoinder that:

These challenges are so many and they make any one to be scared of being childless. It is something that I cannot avoid but I would not wish anyone to go through what I am going through (oral interview on 30/10/2011 at Aluor).

Dominic Owino and Benedette Agola (from Ojolla) admitted that even if they are a couple living together but the loneliness is still there. They observed that:

The loneliness is not because one is living alone in this home but children keep their parents company. Our home is so lonely and it feels bad. We just have nothing to do about it (oral interview on 11/4/2013 at Ojolla, Karateng').

This experience of loneliness was also observed by the SCC leaders of Aluor who said that: *"When they are unwell they may not have anyone to help them and so this is quite challenging to them"* (FGD conducted on 11/2/2012 at Aluor Church). This was corroborated by the SCC leaders of Nyabondo Parish who said that one of the challenges the childless couples face is loneliness. They said that this may be as a result of stigmatization in the society as they may not have people to associate with them.

Dutney (2007) in support of the above argument observes that childlessness is quite challenging, it brings about social and cultural alienation. Those who are childless may find it difficult to perform certain cultural rites which are done specifically with the birth of a child. He observes that the couples may cut links totally with the ancestors since it is the children that link the parents with the ancestors.

Jenipher Ooko in tears had the following to share when she was asked on the challenges they faced as childless couple. She said that:

It is quite challenging being without a single child. Even if you are sick there is no way in which you can help yourself. There is nowhere you can even get money. You know a woman of my age now gets her money from the children. My fellow women can do many things because they are being supported by their children, me I cannot do much since I have no one to help me (oral interview on 21/11/2011 at Rang'ala, Sikalame).

Macreen Anyango (from Nyabondo) also shared the same experience like Jenifer Ooko (from Rang'ala) that she has no one to help her. She said that she relies on God since she is living alone with no one to talk to since the husband died. She continued to say that it is quite a frustrating life and she finds no purpose of living too. This is the loneliness that the catechist of Ojolla commented on. He said that when the couples grow old it worsens. The priest of Ojolla Parish (oral interview on 10/1/2012 at Ojolla Church) supported this argument saying that there is always a worry for the future, how the future is going to be. In Luo culture there is that aspect of the future generation. The SCC leaders observed that this aspect of the future is quite challenging since these childless couples may lack financial and other material support as they grow old.

The above field data is supported by Blackburn (2001) who says that involuntary childlessness brings loneliness and isolation to the couple. Umberson et al., (2010) also associated childlessness with loneliness and depression. This is associated with lack of companions, missed experiences and lack of support and care. The same is supported by Chamie and Mirkin (2012) who argue that, the aged childless couple especially women are likely to be affected. They further note that in Italy, older childless couples lack health-care and social support. And in the Unites States of America, older childless couples have higher medical costs and more complex health-care needs than their counterparts with children.

Mary Auma (from Aluor) said that being unable to conceive makes a woman to be despised not only by the community but even when the husband has married another wife and she has given birth to children. It would be easy for the co-wife also to despise the other one who is not capable of giving birth and this would make one feel bad. Harriet Achieng' (from Nyabondo) also shared her challenges of being childless. She said sadly that:

One has to be troubled since your age mates are progressing and leaving you behind ... Sometimes you look at the future; you see that children are the ones who help their parents. Now I just live knowing that there is no help for me even in future (oral interview on 23/1/2012 at Nyabondo, Oboch).

This was corroborated by the catechist of Rang'ala, he said that:

Someone without a child would see that he/she has no future. When they see their peers or those they are staying with having children, they may feel so bad in their hearts. Sometimes the community may also scold and laugh at their predicament (oral interview on 3/2/2012 at Rang'ala Church).

Clementine Odhiambo (from Nyabondo) said that the childless couple has many challenges especially on the part of women. She sadly narrated her challenge saying:

No one can accept a woman who cannot give birth. This is why I was sent away from my first marriage then I came and stayed with my sister before I got this man that I am now living with (oral interview on 23/1/2012 at Nyabondo, Dago).

Benjamin Ooko (from Sikalame, Rang'ala) attributed their poverty to childlessness. He said that:

If God would have given me children, he would have given me ways of how to take care of them. But it is really challenging because as my brothers had children, I see that I would have also had someone to help me. Another thing is that when you have children God also adds certain gifts with the presence of children. Who knows I would have had wealth! When you do not have children like now I do not have, people laugh at you and despise you (oral interview on 21/11/2011 at Rang'ala, Sikalame).

The poverty of the couple was evident through observing the state of the homestead. In the homestead stood one single mud-grass thatched house which was not well maintained. The home was also bush and not well taken care of given that the two were already advanced in age.

Leonida Ajuang' (from Ojolla) admitted that lack of children can make one lazy to work. She said this:

You know when you have children then you can have the strength to work hard. You have a reason to go out of your way to make sure that they have a good life and future. Without them you do not even struggle since all these become useless. When you die all is taken by other people. Why should I now work hard? (Oral interview on 11/4/2013)

Achebe (1958) supports this argument that children come along with wealth and that many Africans amass children instead of wealth. Thus children are more than wealth and where there are children there is wealth. The Africans and the Luo in particular saw the potentiality of being

rich in the children born in a community. They believed that a child can change the fortunes and the destiny of the family. Ogola (1994, p.36) too presents the futility of wealth without children when one of the council members called Oyier disagreed with Chief Owuor Kembo when the chief refused to marry another wife. Thus he went home muttering under his breath that: “*wealth without children is useless*”. The Luo have a saying, “*Nyodo okonyo Omboga*” (which literary translates that bearing of children has helped a man called Omboga). They believe that when you have children wealth will also follow automatically. Therefore according to the Luo, lack of children is a sign of material poverty. This is also one of the reasons that make childlessness to be dreaded. Dyer (2007, p.74) in support of this argument says that: “*Children bestow social status, wealth and prestige on the parents*”.

Children indeed are considered more important than wealth or are equated with wealth. This is not just among the Luo but in most African cultures. Fieldman (1994) supports this argument by pointing out that among the Bangante people of Cameroon, without children, women struggle to cultivate the land and cannot build their support system. In addition, he says that these women face poverty without help and support from children. Hollos et al., (2009) reports the same among the women of Nigeria that only sons secure a home for a woman in her old age since her right to reside in her deceased husband’s home is possible only through her male offspring. According to Blankson (1999, p.1), the Yoruba have a saying that a man’s wealth is measured in part by the number of children he has and a woman’s value to her husband is determined by her ability to bear children.

The priest of Rang’ala shared his pastoral experience of the childless couples. He said that the couples loose self-esteem. He narrated the following:

They always feel good when being called the father of so and so or the mother of so and so. In a situation where somebody has none, he/she has no backbone; he has no roots and sometimes may not get any responsibility given in the society. Others would not like these types of people to be given responsibilities. For example if you want someone to instruct children, you would easily prefer the one with children than the one without (oral interview on 3/2/2012 at Rang’ala Church).

From the above argument it is evident from the study that without children a couple would feel bad since they will have no one to call them mother or father. They are in turn also not able to be

called by the name of their children. In most of the cultures in Africa, most mothers and father are not called by their real names but by the names of their children. Mariano (2008) supports this argument when he observed that in Africa, a child is important since he/she plays an important role in the construction of the identity of the parents. The people would call them after the child for example, the mother of so and so. Japheth Owino (from Ojolla) on his part admitted that childlessness is quite challenging to the couples. He observed that:

There are many challenges that those who do not have children go through, they live in fear in the community. One is always despised by the age mates. He can easily be abused. When one passes on, there is no one to take care of his wealth and so people would just come and spoil your property. When you do not have children, during old age and sickness there is no one to assist. People will also despise your home, they just walk in and out doing anything knowing that there is no one who can resist them from coming in. Lastly for the Luo they believe that when they have children even if they die, they will not be lost forever (oral interview on 22/2/2012 at Ojolla, Karateng’).

Mary Auma (from Aluor) in tears described how she suffered isolation from her co-wife and the husband. Even the children were discouraged from going to her house because she would culturally affect them. She narrated the following:

Due to the fact that I did not have children, my co-wife had to restrict her children from coming to my house. She was advised that since I do not have children I would affect her children and they may even die. This even made them to burn my house so that I cannot live close to them (oral interview on 30/10/2011 at Aluor, Akala).

This is validated by Dyer (2007) who argues that, infertility results in stigmatization and isolation. He points out that, even children are advised to avoid infertile women. Geritts (1997) describes how women in Mozambique who had not given birth were prevented from participating in speaking about important traditions surrounding fertility and childbirth. This social alienation is not only among the Luo community but in most of the African cultures. Dyer (2007) points out how the infertile women of Nigeria are deprived of their womanhood. This is because womanhood is obtained after clitoridectomy which is conducted in the seventh month after pregnancy. Infertile women therefore will not obtain the status of mature adult woman. Thus they are marginalized. Mariano (2008, p.262) also consents that, childlessness may lead to social isolation.

### **6.1.2 The Religious Challenges of Childlessness**

The SCC leaders expressed out from their respective FGD's that there are challenges that the couple undergo within the Church. The SCC leaders of Rang'ala Parish realized that sometimes the members of the Church and in particular the SCC in which these couples belong may be responsible for the dismal participation of the childless couples in the Church. They observed that some members of the SCC are guilty of despising and talking ill of the childless couples. This makes it difficult for them to be at the same forum with those who have abused them. Therefore, they end up withdrawing and this affects their participation. The SCC leaders of Rang'ala said that childlessness could lead to the disintegration of the SCC. This is because the SCC is a neighbourhood Church. The Christian community may not be cohesive if it comprises the people who despise the couple and they are expected to come together to share in the life of the community. It would be extremely difficult to heal the division that would arise due to such.

The SCC leaders therefore realized that they have a challenge to help the other members in changing their attitude towards the childless couple and to be charitable to them to enable them transform the SCC to be a new home for these couples. The SCC leaders of Ojolla Parish observed that the SCC leaders have a great role of trying to improve the participation of these couples in the SCC. This is because the SCC is a neighbourhood Church and the things that happen in the neighbourhood or even in the village may infiltrate into the SCC. These could be the abuses that such couples undergo and these may impact directly to the SCC. This means that there is need for the Church to change her attitude towards childless couples in order to create a good environment that would facilitate their active participation in the Church activities. This is because such issues may facilitate the withdrawal of such couples from the Church and the SCC and refrain from coming to Church because of the perception the society have on them. The priest of Rang'ala concurred that childlessness affects the level of participation in the Church. The priest said that:

In my experience I have seen that once one has remedied childlessness through a second marriage, if they were participating actively in the sacramental life of the Church and was receiving Holy Communion and also had responsibilities in SCC, there are things that now one may not do in the community e.g. Leadership and even receiving the Holy Communion (oral interview on 3/2/2012 at Rang'ala Church).

The priest of Nyabondo Parish concurred with the priest of Rang'ala Parish when he said that:

In normal cases, those who have these kinds of challenges rarely come out openly, even the Church to reach them is not easy. I think it is an area that the Church has not taken keenly not unless there has been a domestic problem which leads to that and probably out of that the Church can address the issue (oral interview on 22/1/2012 at Nyabondo Church).

The above was confirmed through the observation which showed that some of these childless couples who had been involved in polygamous marriages did not attend SCC meetings and were not active in the Church activities. The priest of Rang'ala blamed the Church partly for being responsible for the couple's dismal participation. He said this:

Because of the understanding of the Church on permanency of marriage, the situation where these people are not able to get children, they would go home but then the society would view them in a way that they would sometime shy off. The level of participation in the Church will have to change. The Church insists that a good Christian would remain and stick to his/her vows whatever the situation (oral interview on 3/2/2012 at Rang'ala church).

On the other hand, the participation of the childless couples in the Church may be hampered by the couples themselves or one of them trying to solve the problem of childlessness using traditional remedies which may end up excluding them from some Church activities and duties like Holy Communion and even leadership at some levels. Gyandu (2007) supports this argument about childless couples excluding themselves from the Church; he observes that to be childless whether in the traditional African context and the Christian context in Africa, childlessness is the epitome of shame, pain and sorrow. It is this shame and sorrow that would prevent a childless couple from coming to the weekly meetings. Another challenge would be that the couples may lack time to come for the weekly meetings due to the fact that they are busy and they may have no one to relieve them back at home of their duties. This was attested to by the catechist of Ojolla Parish (oral interview on 27/3/2012 at Ojolla Church). Spot check observation showed that some of these couples were not attending SCC meetings. They gave various reasons for their action. Such as being busy, some not free with the other members, embarrassment and even lack of interest.

The study revealed that the society perceives these couples differently and this is the reason for some of them withdrawing even from going to the Small Christian Community meetings. The priest of Rang'ala had the following to say:



Africans and in particular Luo, married to get children, people strive to get those who would take after them, people who would support them, and so everybody who goes to marriage has that deep within him/her. If it happens that these people will not get children, then it perturbs them, not only the couple, but even the society. This sometimes becomes the basis of ridicule. The cultural set up is what makes people see they need the continuity in the family tree and here childlessness is like an obstacle and so the society mainly will find ways of fighting it, even the couples themselves will find ways of trying by all means so that the aspirations of the society are realized (oral interview on 3/2/2012 at Rang'ala Church).

In conclusion, in this section, the study explored how the social and religious challenges that the Luo childless Catholic couples face affect their lives. This is supported by various studies as discussed above. Schoech (2012) notes that, those who are happy being childless are those couples who have decided to be childfree. Otherwise the couples undergoing through biological infertility are in a terrible loss and they grieve over childlessness. However, Chamie and Mirkin (2012) observe that the challenges of childlessness do not affect only the couples. They note that voluntary childlessness in the developed world affect the economy of the nations as well.

The discussions above indicate that childlessness carries with it great social and religious challenges. These affect the way the couples relate and live within the society. It also affects their Church life and their relationship with God. It is worth noting that the priests, the catechists and even the leaders of the Small Christian Communities partially support the Luo worldview on childlessness. This does not mean that there is no difference between the Luo worldview and the Church's teachings on childlessness. This is because the Church's teachings are not based on individual priest's view. The Church has clearly laid down regulations and teachings concerning these issues.

Perhaps the main reason behind the priests, catechists and SCC leaders partially being in agreement with the Luo worldview is because they belong to the same culture, and therefore they have been influenced by the worldview. This explains the role of culture and religion on an individual. This is a clear indication that emphasis should be laid by the Church to revisit her teachings so that the Church becomes relevant to the people's lives. The same way the cultural values play a role and make impact in the lives of the people is the same way the Church should

also strive to act to transform the lives of the people. With this, the childless will not find themselves torn apart between following the Luo cultural values and the teachings of the Church.

## **6.2 Coping with the Challenges of Childlessness**

### **6.2.1 Acceptance**

Despite the fact that childlessness is quite a challenging phenomenon and unacceptable among many, the study found out that a few couples had accepted their state and they were happy in their marriages. Cleophas Okwiri and Janet Agutu whose marriage had lasted thirty eight years were exceptional. They shared how they had to work hard to overcome the challenges associated with childlessness. Cleophas said the following concerning their marriage and how they do not consider childlessness in their marriage as a challenge:

Childlessness is not a challenge to our marriage. We have been living in peace with my wife Janet since 1974. This though did not come without a share of certain challenges. There was pressure from my family and clan that I should marry another woman who could give birth to children. Even Janet pressurized me to marry her sister but I refused (oral interview on 30/10/2011 at Aluor, Kanyauma).

When asked why he refused to marry another wife to try his chances of getting children he said that:

It is my faith; I am a Christian and a Catholic. I wedded Janet and told her that I will live with her for better or for worse. Why should I betray these vows? This is the worse. My sacramental life has been a pillar that has helped me (oral interview on 30/10/2011 at Aluor, Kanyauma).

Janet on her part supported that their state of being childless did not affect their marriage. When asked about her husband, she said that:

He is never interested in getting another woman. People have tried to convince him but he refused. At a certain time I was also tired of being blamed and I asked him if I could bring my sister to him but he declined. He is a committed Catholic and this is the reason behind him not taking another wife (oral interview on 30/10/2011 at Aluor, Kanyauma).

Janet also shared her experience and what has kept her going even though she had no children. She narrated the following:

I realized that am not alone. There is a story of two women, one had no children and the other had many children. One day the childless woman went to commit suicide because she was tired of being despised and ridiculed. She met the other woman with children who also wanted to commit suicide because her children were disturbing her. When the two women met, they asked each other what was going on. Each shared her story and the reason for suicide. They then realized that they need not to die. What they decided was that each to accept her situation. The story taught me that even having children does not give someone happiness, it may just be a source of sorrow. I do not know why God did not give me children, so I leave it for him (oral interview on 30/10/2011 at Aluor, Kanyauma).

Their peace and happiness was seen even in their faces as they were being interviewed. They sat together and enjoyed the company of each other. This was one of the rare couples in the study site since most of the couples of their age value children because of the effect of the cultural values bestowed on children. This was similar with Caroline Akinyi (from Nyabondo); her marriage was also exceptionally peaceful. She said that:

Due to the fact that I could not give birth, my husband married another wife who gave birth to children but he still loved and cared for me. We did not have grave disagreements in our marriage (oral interview on 23/1/2012 at Nyabondo, Dago).

Clementine Odhiambo on her part gave the reason behind her husband accepting her despite the fact that she could not bear children. She said this:

I got married to a man who had married before and the wife left leaving the children behind. So the fact that the man had children made him to accept my state. Otherwise things would have been different if the husband did not have those other children. He told me that he is not interested in children but a companion who would give him peace (oral interview on 23/1/2012 at Nyabondo, Dago).

The priest of Aluor Parish while commenting on the peace that exists among some of the couples who come from his parish termed it unique. He attributed it to the spirituality of the couples which gives them the orientation in life. He observed that whatever they miss in their marriage they are able to obtain it from the Church. He commented that:

Once people are rooted in Christianity and they are taught values, then they may depict different characteristics. They will definitely live the Christian values; they will no longer be controlled by the dictates of traditional cultural values, some of which may be incompatible with the Christian faith and values (oral interview on 21/11/2011 at Aluor Church).

Therefore, once they are inculcated into Christianity, then they would not see childlessness as a great challenge. Childlessness becomes a challenge because of the cultural values which are attached to children. The Church has to put more effort on evangelization so as to fight against

the cultural values which may impact negatively on the Christians. Togarasen (2006) confirms that challenges in life can make one be close to Jesus and the Church. He confirms this in his study of what attracted the women in Harare to Christianity. He realized that their needs were addressed by Jesus or the Church. He observes that once someone has identified Jesus as a liberator, then such a person would find a fulfillment of all the problems in Jesus and the Church.

Concerning Church participation field data indicated that there were some couples who actively participated in the Church and were even lay leaders in the Church whereas some did not even care about the Church. Cleophas Okwiri (from Aluor) was one of such couples who had been close to the Church despite his condition. He said that, he does not want anything to come in between him and the sacraments. He participated actively and even in the recent past he had been the chairperson of the Pastoral council of the Parish. Perhaps his active participation is what had made him not to resort to traditional remedies. Janet the wife of Cleophas (from Aluor) also confirmed that their condition had not affected their Church's participation. She said that:

Our Church participation is good. Our problem has not affected how we participate in the Church. Cleophas has been even the chairman of the Parish Pastoral Council (oral interview on 30/10/2011 at Aluor, Kanyauma).

The catechist of Rang'ala Parish confirmed that some couples actively participated in the activities of the Church despite their predicament. He said that such couples have an amazing faith. Their faith, he said, keeps them stronger in the Church's participation. The priest said that:

Majority of the couples who live in peace yet childless are devoted Christians. If you research deeply, they love prayer. They may also have understood the teachings of the church that in marriage it is not the children that are important but the mutual love of the couple. This I think encourages them that even if they do not have children they continue with their normal life and they continue with their work (oral interview on 3/2/2012 at Rang'ala Church).

The priest of Ojolla Parish confirmed that some couples are active in their participation in the Church. He said this:

Yes some couples are very active and moving in their faith. They are dedicated to an extent that you may not know that they have a problem if they do not share it with you (oral interview on 10/1/2012 at Ojolla Church).

The SCC leaders of Aluor also consented that those who are active in the Church's activity are those with deep faith in Jesus which does not allow them to give up their Christian life. The

catechist of Nyabondo Parish also confirmed the active participation of some of these couples. He said that:

The ones I have known are quite active they help the Church in many other activities. There are even some who have resorted to the traditional remedies and becoming polygamous but they are still dedicated in their coming to Church, SCC meetings and even paying their tithe even though they do not receive the Holy Communion (oral interview on 23/1/2012 at Nyabondo Church).

Susan Achieng' on her part said that:

My condition cannot control my life. The problem of being childless has made me even stronger and a better Christian. It has strengthened my hope and trust in God. I have therefore kept hoping in God and believing in his time which is the best (oral interview on 26/4/2012 at Rang'ala, Ugunja).

This means that some of these couples still have hopes that they can still have children. They cannot give up completely since some of them are still young and could be having hopes. This is the reason for them not being over whelmed by the problem of childlessness. It can be concluded that the elderly childless couples feel the pain more than the young ones. This is because the young ones still hope that something can happen to change their situation. But the elderly ones see that now all is lost.

Peter Okello and the wife Martina confirmed their full participation. Peter said that he is limited in his participation since he does not receive Holy Communion because he married another wife. Peter had the following to share concerning their participation in the Church:

I participate in the Church in many ways. I support it with my contributions. At first the Church held that someone not receiving at the altar should not hold leadership position. Later they came to realize that these people are very important. But still they can only deputize. In the year 2008; they elected me to represent Catholic men in the Small Christian Community, in the chapel and in the sub-parish. When I reached the parish I asked whether it would be okay for me to be elected since I do not receive Holy Communion. I was told that the priest can permit me. The same happened at the deanery level. Later we went to the diocesan level and I asked the Archbishop whether being a polygamist would affect my chances of being elected. He said that if I have come from the grassroots and have been elected then there is no problem (oral interview on 21/11/2011 at Aluor).

Japheth Owino (from Ojolla) had similar sentiments since he is also a polygamist who married another wife to remedy their childless marriage. He had the following to say:

I unite with them in prayers, in celebrating the Eucharist; I sing in the choir, the Church also has been close to me. This is because I was initially a catechist, so there are some things that the priests who know me would want me to teach the Christians and strengthen, and then they would invite me. But I also know my limit which I cannot go beyond (oral interview on 22/2/2012 at Ojolla, Karateng’).

It can be concluded therefore that despite the fact that childlessness is challenging to the childless couples, there are those who have been able to overcome some of these challenges and have been involved actively in the life of the Church. They have also integrated well in the society such that people have gotten used to them and their situation and accepted them. They have refused to bow down to the cultural pressure and they live happily. Blackburn (2001) notes that, one way in which a couple can cope with childlessness is by taking up new activities which would give them new meaning to life. She advises the childless women to find ways in which they can fulfill maternal instincts. They can also look at the positive aspects of childlessness.

### **6.2.2 Adoption**

The field data pointed out that adoption is one of the ways in which some couples remedied the challenges which are associated with childlessness. Most of the couples who have remained firm in their faith have remedied their childlessness through adopting one or two children. Some may have not done it legally but they took some children of their dead relatives and lived with them, brought them up and even educated them. The children consider them as their parents. Maureen Atieno is one such a person who went and adopted a child. She narrated that:

I went home and took the daughter of my dead brother. I was so sick and could not live alone. I took her when she was in class four. I have educated her and now she is in form four (oral interview on 23/1/2012 at Nyabondo, Kamgan).

Likewise Mary Auma (from Aluor) also successfully adopted three children and she is living happily with them. She reported her gladness since she has children to send and she is not even lonely. Rita Awino (from Rang’ala) is one such a person who has found fulfillment in adoption. *“Since I adopted these children, I feel as if I have my own children. When my marriage broke down, I was lonely and empty, but now I have people to keep me company, to talk to and even to send”* (oral interview on 3/2/2012 at Rang’ala). Janet and her husband Cleophas also shared their experience of adoption and said that they are living with their adopted children very well. They

are happy since these children are like their own and they do not feel that they are not their biological children. With these children they do not consider themselves childless. They joyously expressed how these children have even changed their lives from a childless couple to who they are now. They narrated this:

Since we had no children of our own, we decided to adopt four orphans who we are living with. We have taken them to school and we treat them like our own children. Anyone who does not know us well and visits our family may not know that they are not our biological children. We are also happy since they relate with us like their biological parents (oral interview on 30/10/2011 at Aluor, Kanyauma).

Rosemary Atieno (from Ojolla) admitted that adoption helped her. *“I needed a child to call me mother. At least I have one even if she is not the fruit of my womb; I have someone that I can send and keep me company”* (oral interview on 11/4/2013).

In as much as the Church encourages adoption in case of childlessness in marriages; the study revealed that adoption is not very common among the Luo. It had its various challenges that accompany it. Most couples who are childless thought of adopting a child or two to find someone who could be sent but some things impeded them like the unwillingness of some relatives of the child to let the child go out from their clan. The Luo patrilineal system makes it extremely difficult for the surviving kin members to release the children. This may make some childless couples not to attempt adoption. Caroline Akinyi (from Nyabondo) reported that adoption has many challenges. Sometimes the one with relatives, the relatives would take the child back when the child has grown. She cited a case of some orphans that she had adopted and lived with for a number of years when they were young but since they have grown things have become different. She said that:

I had two children that I adopted. The parents left a boy with his sister and I took them to live with them. The sister went to school and now is married with children and she lives in Nairobi. Now the sister sends her brother money in school and when he is on holidays he goes to Nairobi (oral interview on 23/1/2012 at Nyabondo, Dago).

Tabitha Anyango is also one such person that adoption has not worked out for. The husband did not want her to adopt any child. In as much as she needed a child even adoption could not work out for her. She shared her experience:

I used to live with my sister's child when she was still very young. She started going to school. I also had another child of my brother that I lived with. My husband decided to send these two children away that he cannot take care of other people's children since I do not profit him with anything (oral interview on 23/1/2012 at Nyabondo, Kodong'a).

Nwoye (2007) attests that even the option of adoption is always not enough for the African people in cases of childlessness. Gyandu (2007, p.453) also consents to the fact that adoption in an African situation is not always easy. He reports the experience of a prayer session where a pastor is praying for the women and says that: *"There is no way you can compare an adopted child with the fruit of your own womb. The fruit of your own womb is a sign of fruitfulness and fulfillment..."* Furthermore, the study discovered that in places like in the rural areas the option of adoption is rarely contemplated. Benjamin Ooko and his wife are such couples who never thought of adoption. They shared this:

We never thought of having a child who is not our biological child to live with. We were just living in expectation of our own and it never came, so we have to live with that reality (oral interview on 21/11/2011 at Rang'ala, Sikalame).

The study found out that some couple may avoid adoption out of fear. Milka Achieng" (from Ojolla) said that:

You know it is not easy to bring up a child that is not your very own. Deep within you know that the child is someone else's and you may not offer the love fully. The child could turn out to be troublesome. Let me just stay the way I am I have gotten used to it (oral interview on 11/4/2013).

All the FGD's agreed that adoption could be one way of solving the problem of childlessness among the couples and helping them also to remain good Christians. The SCC leaders of Rang'ala explained that: *"Here in Rang'ala we have children's home. Christian couples who are childless could be encouraged to come and adopt."* (FGD conducted on 6/3/2012). The priest of Rang'ala Parish had the following to say on adoption:

The Church allows the couples to go to baby homes and adopt children. I know of a couple who adopted children, educated them and they have become great people in this society. So a remedy would be that the couple adopts a child if it turns out after medical examination that they cannot have children. This is a good act as a Christian also because they help God's children (FGD on 6/3/2012 at Rang'ala church).

According to the priest of Rang'ala Parish, adoption in this case would be having a double effect, it would help the childless couple to have children and at the same time they will be showing



some act of charity to these needy children. The priest of Ojolla Parish on his part stressed that the Church should conscientize the couples of the possibility of having children through adoption. The priest of Aluor Parish was of the same opinion that the Church needs to advise and encourage the childless couples to adopt children. When they adopt some children it would help them overcome some of the challenges which would affect their Christian life. One of the FGD's of Ojolla SCC leaders suggested that only those who could take care of children are to be encouraged to adopt one or two. Another FGD of Ojolla suggested that if they need children badly, apart from adoption, the childless couples could sponsor children during baptism so that they have an alternative way of having God-children who may be of help to such "parents."

Callan and Hennessey (1989) adopts the cognitive model of coping which entails appraisal-focused, problem-focused and emotion-focused. Isemann (2000) gives a series of stages towards coping with childlessness which starts from the moment one is diagnosed with infertility. They have to get the shock, which is followed with hopelessness and despair, some even refuse to accept the diagnosis, and there is anger and rage together with frustrations. One may also adopt aggression and feelings of guilt and shame. Others may undergo isolation and depression. A few he observes would accept and live with it. Majority would start undergoing fertility treatment. He observes that there are three ways of coping with the challenges of childlessness; accepting to begin infertility treatment, adopting another child or deciding to live without children. Adrienne (2011) gives three strategies for coping with childlessness which is; learning to be happy in each moment, feeling the satisfaction of learning to deal with adversity and recognizing the force within us that resists change.

### **6.3 Challenges of Childlessness to the Pastoral Ministry of the Catholic Church**

The study established that involuntary childlessness influenced the pastoral ministry of the Church of Kisumu diocese. Kemdirim (1996) concurs that childlessness causes a serious pastoral problem in Africa, he says that childless couples ask themselves many questions like why me? Why is God not listening to my prayers? All the Parish Priests and the Chief catechists interviewed admitted that childlessness has challenged the pastoral ministry of the Church in that, when these couples opt to follow the traditional methods of solving childlessness, then as

Christians, their faith is interfered with. The catechist of Rang'ala Parish observed that some of the people who go for these methods have become weak in their participation in the Church. This is because most of these methods that they take recourse to are not acceptable to the Church. This concurs with what Macpherson (1970) a CSM missionary to Kenya had earlier observed and he gave the example of African customs which were considered to be unchristian like ancestral veneration, sacrificial systems, magic, polygamy and traditional dances among others. He argues that these are at variance with the Christian principles.

The priest of Rang'ala Parish concurred with the above argument when he points out that childlessness has challenged the pastoral ministry of the Church. He said that:

Marriage creates a bond that cannot be reversed yet childlessness poses a challenge because if others realize that they are not able to get forth children, they don't consider of great value the bond and so some go for second marriages, third marriage, men leave women and women leave men because they are not able to get children, so they try elsewhere (oral interview on 3/2/2012 at Rang'ala Church).

The priest saw this as a great threat to the teaching of the Church with regard to the sacrament of marriage. The catechist of Aluor Parish concurred that childlessness could lead to polygamy which is a very big challenge to the Church in Africa. It may lead to polygamy which affects the sacramental life of the family. He argued that:

Some people after entering into polygamous marriages, they end up ignoring their spiritual lives, some even stop going to Church. They stop active participation in the Church activities (oral interview on 21/11/2011 at Aluor Church).

The priest of Nyabondo Parish supported the above argument when he observed that the greatest problem that childlessness brings is polygamy which contradicts the Christian values. He said that:

This is a pastoral challenge. There is nothing we can do much but to help the couple to understand and accept the Christian values with their deeper meaning compared to the tradition (oral interview on 22/1/2012 at Nyabondo Church).

The SCC leaders from all the sampled parishes admitted that polygamy is against the Church's teaching and retards the development in the work of evangelization. In other FGD's of Rang'ala SCC leaders, it was observed that childlessness would affect the pastoral ministry of the Church. This is because childlessness may open room for things like polygamy which would affect the faith life of the couples involved. The above argument is supported by Burnett and Panchal

(2008) who in their study discovered that the problem of infertility may affect the faith of the couple in that they may feel neglected by God. This is because they may feel that their prayers are not answered by God. This they said may make the couple feel helpless and to look like failures. Kemdirim (1996) also argues out that infertility may be a possible cause of loss of faith.

In their search for a child, childless couples will leave no stone unturned. They may have to consult a spiritualist, a traditional medicine doctor (herbalist) or an orthodox doctor, and in most cases, without the desired results. They engage in ritual activities to deities and divinities whom they feel are responsible for their unfortunate condition and could help them out of their plight. In their desperation to have a child of their own, the couples will do anything even if it means backsliding in church-practice and getting initiated in occultism (p. 240).

The SCC leaders observed that the Church has not developed proper guidelines on how to deal with polygamous families. The SCC leaders of Ojolla Parish had the following on polygamy:

Polygamy is against the Church's teaching and so this affects the pastoral ministry since the Church has not yet developed any guidelines to help or evangelize the polygamous families and to incorporate them into the Church life. The Church teaches against infidelity between the couples, childlessness would lead couples to infidelity and this becomes a big problem to the Church (FGD on 27/3/2012 at Ojolla Church).

The above argument was supported by the priest of Ojolla Parish who said that childlessness poses a great challenge that needs to be addressed. He said this:

It interferes with the peace of the family, a lot of suspicion and blame game between the couples. It paves way for infidelity; the woman tries another man outside and the man also may go for another woman. Once it opens for infidelity, it may open an avenue for HIV/AIDS which may bring down the family. It may also lead to divorce (oral interview on 10/1/2012 at Ojolla Church).

The SCC leaders concurred with the priest that childlessness would lead to infidelity and this is contrary to the teachings of the Church and God's Commandments (Exodus 20:14). When the couples have been involved in infidelity then the Church has failed in her work of evangelization. Infidelity is condemned in the Ten Commandments, thus such couples would be breaking God's Law. This would be a drawback for the Church since her major work is to lead people to know and keep the Laws of God. The Rang'ala SCC leaders also observed that childlessness may lead to infidelity which will be against the Commandments of God. The SCC leaders of Aluor concurred with the above and they said that childlessness challenges the Church's work of evangelization because of the fact that it may lead to polygamy and other illicit sexual unions.

The catechist of Aluor Parish observed that in most cases some families may end up not living peacefully. He said that:

Most couples who do not have children have quarrels and blames. They feel that they have something missing in their family. This leads to counter accusations where one feels that the other is the cause of their misery. This is often between the couples who are not even ready to go for medical examination to seek professional help (oral interview on 21/11/2011 at Aluor Church).

He said that the priests and the catechists find it extremely difficult to minister to these couples because of the cultural tag which is attached to childlessness. Approaching the couples and talking about their childlessness would not be that easy; this therefore becomes quite challenging. Majority of the Church ministers would therefore opt to be silent and even avoid talking to the couples about their situation since they may not offer much help.

From the study findings, this situation cannot entirely be blamed on the childless couples. In as much as some would not open up and talk about their problem, there are a majority who would still open up and talk. If the study could find some who would open up and be interviewed, then it would not be difficult for the Church ministers to reach these affected couples. The blame could partly be on the Church; from the study findings some Church ministers did not know the actual number of the childless couples in their parishes. They did not have any particular programme for the affected couples. If the Church could come up with modalities of knowing them and reaching out to them, then they can feel that the Church is concerned about them and their problem. Otherwise they may not be going to the NRM. Apparently the NRM may be showing concern to those who have particular problems and even intercede for them by offering special prayers. These findings show that the Catholic Church is not doing much for these childless couples.

The priest of Ojolla Parish observed that another challenge is that childlessness opens avenues for the couples to go for witchcraft to seek solutions. Witchcraft and magic are some of the things that the Bible condemns and thus they are against Christian teachings (Deuteronomy 18:10, Leviticus 19:26-31, 20:27, Isaiah 8:19). To resort to diviners for such help is therefore going against Christian principles. The priest of Aluor Parish concurred with the priest of Ojolla Parish and he admitted that there are enormous pastoral challenges that comes with childlessness, he pointed out a case that he is currently handling. He narrated the following:

I have a case in my office whereby a woman told her husband to allow her to receive the Holy Communion because the man was no longer able to function. And the man told her that if that is her reason to be allowed to receive Holy Communion, then he is not going to sign any document. The man asked the wife to be patient with him that may be one day God will relieve him of his problem and be able to function. The man is still living in hope that one day he would be able to function as a man (oral interview on 21/11/2011 at Aluor Church).

The priest of Aluor Parish advised that these people need to be given hope. They should also be encouraged to seek medical aid since many couples are still ignorant of medical attention. He observed that due to childlessness, women even go to the extent of *por* (the art of going out with other men) to get a child and then come back. The husband now becomes a foster father. This he said is challenging since the women are exposed to HIV and AIDS, there is also the moral aspects of the act since it is an act of infidelity as the woman is already married.

The greatest challenge that faces the Church according to the priest of Aluor Parish is the difficulty of finding young couples wedding without cohabitation or trial marriage. The same challenge is observed by the SCC leaders of Nyabondo Parish who said that childlessness makes some people not come and wed in the Church since Church wedding will tie them in case they have no children, they feel that they can still have certain options of marrying another person. The Church teaches that cohabitation or “trial marriage” is a sin; but there are no young people who would want to marry a young woman without an assurance that she will be fruitful. This is why they cohabit before formalizing their marriage.

Paul II (1981) wrote against trial marriage and said that there can be no question of experiment and that the Church cannot approve it. Sexual intercourse is the only way in which partners give themselves to each other in a very intimate way. The Church understands trial marriage as a mere experiment of marriage but according to Bujo (2009) he clarifies that African marriage is a process where the two who are destined to marry are gradually introduced to a life already decided upon by them and the community too. The Church rejects this African model of marriage because for Catholics a marriage must be a sacrament.

Majority of young people would want to prove if the partner is capable of bearing children before final commitment. The couples would lack trust which would make it difficult for many

of them to solemnize their marriages in Church. This was supported by the priest of Nyabondo Parish when he observed that:

It is hard to find people entering into marriage before having one or two children. Luo's would enter into marriage only after having children and paying dowry to make sure that the partner meets their expectation (oral interview on 22/1/2012 at Nyabondo Church).

Bujo (2009) argues that the Church considers African marriage as concubinage because of the sexual intimacy before marriage. This has made many African Christians to have nothing to do with the Church weddings. He expresses the ideas of Lufuluabo and Mpongo who support the African model of marriage in stages. These personalities confirm that only a few Africans can accept an infertile marriage. This makes many Africans to have several sexual experiences with an intended partner in order to verify the fertility of the couple, especially of the bride before they make final decision. They say that Christians would always marry according to the traditions of the ancestors and when the marriage works out then they go to the Church to solemnize their marriage.

The African model of marriage in stages ensures stability of the marriage covenant. Bujo further says that Lufuluabo raises pastoral concern that if the wedding takes place in Church before the couple has sexual intercourse, it can lead to an unhappy marriage if the couple is found to be infertile. Meanwhile the challenge would be that these Christians who are married under the traditions of the ancestors are excluded from the sacraments for some time. The same observation is made by Cardinal Joseph-Albert Malula, that there are many young African Christian couples living in a traditional African marriage without the sacraments. He observes that: *“The danger would be that they may become indifferent to the sacraments and get on with their lives since even outside the Church they would still feel that they are really married”* (Bujo, 2009, p. 115).

Both the catechist of Nyabondo and Ojolla Parishes agreed that it is challenging working with such kind of couples. The work of the Church is that of faith, these people have proved clearly that they lack faith. Their actions they said are acts that are retarding the faith of the Christians and alienate them sometimes from the sacraments and also from the Church community. In his working experience the catechist of Ojolla Parish observed that some would decline any

responsibility in the Church especially in the lay council or being leaders of the Small Christian Communities claiming that they are busy.

The SCC leaders on their part observed some other challenges that childlessness pose to the work of evangelization. They observed that when families do not have children, then this would affect the Church which is also part of the society. There will be no new members to join the Church through birth and baptism. They added that this in turn will lead to lack of priests and religious men and women to minister to the people. The SCC leaders of Ojolla Parish had the following observations on the challenges of childlessness on the pastoral ministry of the Church:

When families do not have children, this impacts greatly to the Church because there are no future new members and also it would cause lack of priests to minister to the people (FGD on 27/3/2012 at Ojolla Church).

Above sentiments were also shared by the SCC leaders of Nyabondo Parish who said that childlessness would hamper the growth of the Church in terms of new members and thus no people to be administered sacraments to. Another FGD of Ojolla SCC leaders observed that childlessness really poses a big challenge to the pastoral ministry of the Church because those who are childless would tend not to be active in the SCC since when people meet for weekly prayer meetings, they may not attend because they would be always worried about their homes and what they have left behind since they do not have anyone to attend to them. They have observed that some of the childless couple may not accept the SCC leadership due to their low self-esteem. Others who accept may also be ridiculed because some may doubt their leadership abilities. Childlessness therefore may lead to laxity and not being active and this would affect the work of evangelization.

Field data indicated that another challenge is that some Catholic childless couples leave the Catholic Church to seek help from other churches. Some members of the Church may opt to leave the Church as they look for other methods that could help them have children since most of the solutions used by the Luo traditional society are not accepted by the Church. Monica Awino (from Ojolla) had the following to say:

I have really suffered because of being childless. I have prayed to God but nothing has happened. Now I leave it for Him. Many people have even advised me to leave the Catholic Church but I have refused because I cannot leave my Church (oral interview on 12/12/12 at Ojolla, Kapuonja).

This was supported by the priest of Aluor Parish who said that:

Sometimes the Church faces a great challenge of losing her members to the new movements and denominations which often preach what appeals to the problems of the people. These couples would leave the Catholic Church to seek help from these churches since they preach instant solutions to people's problems (oral interview on 21/11/2011 at Aluor Church).

Gyandu (2007) corroborates this when he said that most couples in Nigeria and Ghana who are childless join New Religious Movements (NRM) or Independent Churches which promise instant help. He observes that majority of those who visit these Pentecostal or Charismatic churches are women who seek healing services hoping to have biological children. He points out that most of the founders of these African Initiated Churches come into the limelight because of their ability to pray for the gift of children. The argument by Gyandu (2007) is supported by Togarasen (2006, p.165) who observes that many people are attracted to the Pentecostal Churches because of the ability of the founder to deal with childlessness. He says that: "*Ezekiel Guti of Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA) was initially known to deal with childlessness*".

It can be concluded that so long as the Church is ignoring issues related to childlessness, it would still be a great source of challenge to the pastoral ministry of the Church. This is because many Luo couples would still find it difficult to adhere to the teachings of the Catholic Church due to the fact that they do not have a choice within the Church. Mugambi (1990) supports this argument by saying that the African culture will one day reassert itself and adapt to the prevailing social challenges however long it takes. Ndung'u (2008) observes that the challenge the Church is facing is that she condemns the cultural practices and rituals without offering a suitable substitute. This therefore results into a vacuum which leads the African Christians into hypocrisy whereby they perform these rituals secretly. Mugambi (1990) concurs with this and says that:



If Christians chose to detach themselves from the challenges of the society in which they live, the Church to which they belong will appear to be a cultic club with exclusive membership, which is irrelevant to the needs of the contemporary society (p. 91).

This therefore is a wakeup call to the Church leadership to look at these issues of childlessness and Luo cultural heritage with a lot of keenness so as to assist the childless couples overcome the challenges and to make the Church too effect the work of evangelization; otherwise these cultural practices would not come to a halt at once. Ndung'u (2009) points out that Christianity has survived in Africa for many years and the cultural practices are still so strong. Even after being condemned by the western missionaries. This is a proof that Africans attach great importance to these cultural practices.

The last objective of the study was to examine the influence of the challenges on childlessness to the pastoral work of the Catholic Church in Kisumu diocese. It is evident from the study findings that childlessness does not only pose challenge to the lives of the childless couples; but it also impacts to the life and the work of the Church. This is why it is necessary for the Church to address the plight of these couples. Otherwise the Church's effort and her work would be greatly undermined. Chamie and Mirkin (2012) argue that the governments of the developed countries are worried about the trend of voluntary childlessness. They have therefore developed modalities to influence childbearing. Some of these include; maternity and paternity leave, childcare, part time employment, job security, cash allowances, tax credits and other financial incentives. These governments are worried and are finding solutions to the problem of voluntary childlessness. This is because of the influence of the effects of voluntary childlessness. The Catholic Church therefore needs to come up with ways in which involuntary childlessness can be tackled so as not to negatively influence the work and her efforts toward evangelization.

## **6.4 The Church's Response to the Problem of Childlessness**

### **6.4.1 Guidance and Counselling**

The study found out that the Church cannot remain silent and unmoved with the people's plight. Given that the Church is part of the society and these being her members, the Church needs to come out to address some of these challenges that are associated with childlessness. Kemdirim

(1996) consents to this fact and he says that the Church should urgently look at the problems faced by Africans since this would make them comfortable within the Church. The priest of Aluor Parish consented that these childless couples need a lot of support. He said that:

Childlessness is always unfortunate for the couple that is why I personally minister to them directly. I must make them feel that they are in the greater family, the Church. Not having a child is quite challenging and so I think they need a lot of spiritual support (oral interview on 21/11/2011 at Aluor Church).

Majority of the couples interviewed admitted that the Church has done little when it comes to addressing the plight of the childless couples, though a few who approached their priests and shared their problem with them got some help. For example, Tabitha Anyango (from Nyabondo) shared her experience how she was helped by her priest when she went to share her problem. She said this:

When I went back home I thought of going to tell my priest. He told me that he is going to pray for me. He asked me to come for mass every day in the morning and pray sincerely. After three days father asked me to take a letter to my husband. Since we were not talking, he told me to put the letter where he will get it. When he came back he got the letter and asked who brought the letter and I said it was me. So he agreed and we went to see father the following day. Father asked him if I am his wife and he agreed and he was told to allow me to receive Holy Communion. He agreed and we finished (oral interview on 23/1/2012 at Nyabondo, Kodong'a).

Field data indicated that most priests did not even know how many childless couples they have in their parishes. The priest of Ojolla Parish admitted that he does not know the total number of the childless couples. He said that:

It is not easy to know the exact number of the childless couples in this parish mainly because some couples do not want to come to the limelight to be known that they are affected (oral interview on 10/1/2012 at Ojolla Church).

The priest of Aluor Parish also admitted that he is yet to know all the childless couples in the parish. He has struggled to know a few. This was the same with all the priests; they could not exactly state the total number of the childless couples in their respective parishes. Even some of the childless couples have admitted that they did not share their problem with their priests. Maureen Atieno (from Nyabondo) said that their priest did not know their problem. *“We did not see it as a big problem, it was only his mother that had a problem but with us we did not have a problem between us”* (oral interview on 23/1/2012 at Nyabondo, Kamgan).

The study discovered that there is a gap that needs to be filled. The Church needs to find a mechanism on how to reach out to her faithful who are affected by this problem of childlessness. Susan Achieng' (from Rang'ala) suggested that the Church through the clergy need to offer counselling sessions and also once in a while bring the open sharing for such couples so that they feel cared for and not feel that they are discriminated against. She said that childlessness has led some couples into depression since they do not have the mechanism of coping with their predicament. The priest of Ojolla Parish realized that the Church has a very important role to play in settling this dilemma. He said that a lot of counselling is necessary so as to enable the couple to understand and accept their condition. He also suggested that the value of the sacramental life needs to be stressed so that people would not turn to ways that may hinder them from receiving the Holy Communion. This was supported by the catechist of Aluor Parish who said:

The Church can do guidance and counselling. Therefore the Church needs to train counselors to help these couples. The Church also needs to include them in the wider Christian family (oral interview on 21/11/2011 at Aluor Church).

The priest of Aluor Parish on his part saw that the problem should not just be addressed in marriage, that the Church should be serious in doing pre-marital counselling. He said that:

I think the Church needs to advise the couple before marriage of the possible challenges so that they marry out of love. The Church may advise the childless couple on adoption. The Church can carry out pre-nuptial inquiry which involves medical checkups. There should be a good pastoral care for the childless couples, counsel them to let them live in love. The Church should also act with love towards these couples, especially the husband who does not want to throw the lady out of marriage, yet he needs children. Some of the scientific inventions like surrogate motherhood are good but quite challenging since no Luo would want to separate conjugal act from conception. None would want to donate a sperm for conception to be done somewhere else (oral interview on 21/11/2011 at Aluor Church).

The catechists of Ojolla Parish, Nyabondo Parish and Jenifer Ooko concurred that the Church must come close to the childless, listen to their story in order to guide and counsel them since they undergo a lot of problems. The SCC leaders said that majority of the couples need guidance and counselling for them to be staunch Christians and to avoid some of the traditional remedies to childlessness since some end up in these situations due to lack of guidance. The SCC leaders of Nyabondo Parish were of the same idea that these couples need to be counselled by the Church and that the Church should also help them with their material needs especially when they are old and have no one to assist them. Burnett and Panchal (2008) in their research reports that,

involuntary childlessness may lead to a crisis that may eventually call for counselling. Molock (1999) in her discussion of religious factors in infertility counselling, reported that infertility may precipitate a spiritual crisis. This would call for guidance and counselling.

The catechist of Rang'ala Parish also suggested that the Church should be there for these couples. He said that:

The Church should identify these couples then bring them closer to give them more teachings that would strengthen their faith. If they are left on their own and in the midst of those who despise and laugh at them, then they may end up being lost and the church would have lost in her work of bringing people close to God (oral interview on 3/2/2012 at Rang'ala Church).

The priest of Rang'ala Parish admitted that childlessness is a serious problem that the Church needs to come out openly to address. He suggested ways in which the Church would work out to help these couples. He had the following advice:

I think the Church would advise couples who find themselves in this kind of situation to go for thorough medical examination/check-up. Sometimes childlessness may be due to sickness that can be treated. It is good to consult the right doctors so that they can be helped. But I think because of ignorance, sometimes people live in a situation of not getting children yet that can be corrected. The Church talks about family planning, there are people trained to help couples to get children, but this must be according to the principles of the Church (oral interview on 3/2/2012 at Rang'ala Church).

The priest continued to say that, the Church should help these couples by availing various methods which are accepted by the Church to assist such kind of couples. He said that there are some couples who have used these methods and have succeeded in getting children. The Church, he said, has no problem when the couples seek medical attention. But there is a problem when they use methods which are against the dignity of marriage and the dignity of getting children. The Church encourages the childless couples to go to baby homes and orphanages to adopt children. He stressed that such is a good gesture of charity towards these vulnerable children in the society by giving them homes and showing them love. This will give the children another opportunity to have parents. In conclusion, he said that this should be done after such couples have undergone a medical examination and established that they cannot have children biologically. This would be helpful to the couples since the Church must come out clearly to help couples even in the choice of medical treatment. Burnett and Panchal (2008) support this when they say that ideological and religious influences may affect couples seeking medical treatment

of infertility. They report that couples of Roman Catholic faith may face difficult challenges when seeking medical treatment. This is due to the fact that there are some medical treatments that are not acceptable to the Church.

The priest of Rang'ala Parish challenged the agents of evangelization to instruct the faithful through catechism. The Church needs to deepen the faith of the Christians and to re-emphasize the importance of marriage which is meant for companionship. Marriage can be blessed with children or not, but the marriage remains. The Church has to Christianize the culture in such a way that the ways of viewing marriage must not be pegged to children as the Luo would view it. He insisted that the Church needs to catechize the Luo culture. Such catechesis should be ongoing. Perhaps this could be conducted even in the institutions of learning, such that as young people grow up it would be important for the Church to instill in them the value of marriage. This would be able to change some of the cultural worldview. He advised the agents of evangelization that they must make outreach programmes. They should not wait for people in the Church but go out there in the baraza's and in their different associations to enlighten the people and transform them.

The priest of Nyabondo Parish observed that the Church cannot remain indifferent to the plight of these couples. He said that one of the solutions is to reach the couples and share with them, interact with them. The Church needs to give them special attention. He said this:

Given that childlessness is considered a private affair and many would not want to come out of the open so that people can know they have a problem. The Church can have a special pastoral programme to encourage them (oral interview on 22/1/2012 at Nyabondo Church).

The catechist of Ojolla suggested that the Church needs to come up strongly to reinforce her teaching that marriage is not for begetting children, but for love and companionship. The Church can also encourage the childless couples to go for adoption if they need children. They could also take a child from one of their close relatives. The SCC leaders concurred with this that the Church can encourage adoption among such couples who have established that they cannot have children. Japheth Owino was of the same opinion that the Church needs to do something. He said that:

The Church really needs to help these couples. One cannot really pray well when in a problem. For such kind of people to be free to pray well, the Church need to relax her laws for some of these people. There are those who want to marry another wife for a grave reason. There are also those who marry many women without any reason just for pleasure. The Church can look keenly on each case and handle them separately. This would be the only way in which these couples would be able to live their Christian lives well (oral interview on 22/2/2012 at Ojolla, Karateng’).

The SCC leaders suggested that since some of these couples may face some needs as they grow old, the Church can step in and support them materially. This would encourage the ones who fear old age loneliness and lack of support since among the Luo, the children are the ones who take care of their parents in their old age. Once the Church is able to support them, they would be able to feel some relief from their burden. This was particularly observed by the SCC leaders of Rang’ala who comparatively experienced a great number of childless couples who were elderly and needed a lot of material support.

The SCC leaders of Aluor suggested that the Church should bring these couples close and the SCC also should be close to them, visit them in case they miss weekly meetings and try to understand what they go through. Perhaps the stigma that is associated with childlessness may make them miss the meetings and withdraw from the rest. Burnett (2003) supports this saying that the stigma associated with infertility affects couples’ self-relation and familial identities. Diamond et al. (1999) corroborates this saying that such couples feel anxious, helpless, confused and ashamed due to their inability to have children. These leaders also suggested that the Church need to propagate the faith to enable people to grow deep in faith and understand the true meaning of marriage whether they are childless or not they would still love each other.

The SCC of Ojolla in one FGD suggested that these couples need to be visited to be strengthened. The Church should be close to them to listen to their problems and challenges. The SCC need to be outstanding in this since it is a neighborhood Church. Members of the SCC need to be there for them as part of their family to make them feel that they belong to a family. Diller (2004) observes that fertility problems may reflect a lack of balance between the natural world and the individual. This is the reason for visiting them to encourage them since this imbalance may overwhelm them to an extent that they cannot live a balanced life. The Church could also

advise them to adopt some children if they can take care of them. The SCC leaders of Rang'ala supports that the Church can advise the childless couple to adopt because there are so many abandoned children and orphans in baby homes like Rang'ala baby home.

Apart from the actual help and the guidance that the Church could give the childless couples, the Church needs to look critically at the cultural values of the Luo without biases so as to help the couples live an integrated Christian life. This therefore calls for deeper studies of the Luo culture so as to pave way for a proper inculturation. Inculturation has been in the Church circles for almost two decades now, but it is still critical and should be seriously re-considered. Studies from the Philippines shows how the Church is close to the childless couples. Gomez (2002) shows how the Church encourages these couples to be prayerful. There is a prayer specifically designed for the childless couples to seek God's intervention.

#### **6.4.2 Inculturation**

Inculturation could be one way in which the Church can help address the challenges associated with childlessness. This is because, through inculturation, the Church will look at the Luo cultural values and attempt to integrate them into her teachings. This would make some of the cultural values that are considered alien to the Church be accepted. Once these values are appreciated by the Church then the childless couple would seek for solutions without fear of going against the Church's teachings and therefore they will live integrated Christian lives. All the Parish Priests that were interviewed observed that there is need for inculturation as a way forward to addressing the problems of an African Christian.

The priest of Ojolla Parish described inculturation as an attempt by the Church to integrate the African values into her teachings. Paul II (1982) refers to this as, the Africanization or indigenization of Christianity. It is an attempt to incarnate the message of Christ. According to Okure (1990) inculturation is the finding of suitable symbols or rituals from a given culture to express the Christian faith. Sarpong (1988) equates inculturation with incarnation. He points out that a genuine inculturation should be based upon the mystery of incarnation. Incarnation he says presupposes two distinct realities, the divine reality and the human reality. These two are united

to form a new and unique reality in Jesus of Nazareth. Neither reality is destroyed, down-graded or absorbed. Each reality is enriched and transformed by the other. *The Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops* also called *The African Synod* (10 April — 8<sup>th</sup> May, 1994) focused on evangelization viewed from the perspectives of proclamation, inculturation, dialogue, justice and means of social communication. The Synod Fathers' main concern was the situation of the Church in Africa. One of their objectives was how to solve the many problems facing the Church in the vast continent (Kemdirim, 1996).

Inculturation therefore entails that the two realities, the African culture and the Gospel values meet. They are not destroyed or absorbed but each remains distinct and they enrich each other, in the long run they leave transforming each other. The African culture is to come into contact with the Gospel then each is transformed and they join together into a new reality which can be understood and accepted by an African person. In the same way that the divinity of God came down to earth and united with human beings and there arose a new reality in the person of Jesus Christ; so the Gospel and the culture unites together and a new reality is brought forth which can be understood and accepted by Africans. Gumo (2004) supports this by arguing that when the Gospel is transmitted and received within a culture, one would appreciate the nature and the contours of a Christian approach to that culture.

Okure (1990, p.59) supports the argument that the two realities, that is the Christian faith and the African cultures are united and mutually enriched. This she says would happen in such a way that Christ assumes the African culture so as to become substantially part of it, to enrich and be enriched by it and to transform it from within. She says that the African culture cannot be redeemed, if it is not assumed by Christ. Therefore inculturation is the process by which Christ becomes the native of the African culture or he is incarnated in particular African cultures. Gumo (2004, p.162) notes that, the Gospel should start by taking people as they are when it encounters them and continue to transform their worldview, their habits and activities and relationships into the image of Christ.

In order for inculturation to take root, certain elements need to be identified which Christianity could adopt or adapt, ennoble and purify some elements it must reject. The priest of Rang'ala



Parish suggested that some of the values that ought to be considered for inculturation could be honesty, hard work, and respect for elders, team work, love and commitment. He observed that:

Among the Luo, commitment is seen in the way they carry out their duties, one is dedicated to accomplish a task; a Luo is dedicated in doing good. Above all, commitment in marriage could be a value to inculturate. In as much as they permit polygamy a man who is polygamous is committed to all the wives and the wives are also committed to their husband (oral interview on 5/7/2013 at Rang'ala Church).

According to the priest of Ojolla Parish, the communal aspect of marriage could be ideal for consideration in inculturation. He said that:

Today marriage has been individualized. Marriage is just between the two who are marrying. But in the traditional Luo society, marriage is a communal affair where everyone is involved and has a part to play. The whole community of the Church could be involved since the Church is a wider family where all belong (oral interview on 2/7/2013 at Ojolla Church).

Inculturation would effect a more adequate presentation of the Gospel. This would help the Church have deeper roots in the African soil. Njenga (1986) stresses that, African tradition should not be accepted without qualification nor should it be rejected totally. He suggests that young people should be grounded on the traditions of the ancestors and the Church regulations. Nkurunziza (2008) in his view argues that African Church must rely on African values to become authentic. He likens Africa to a mother that must nurse her child with her own breasts. He says that Africa must look at evangelization from her own perspective and not Euro-centric. In this endeavour, the African society is to be analyzed and perceived in a new way. This means that evangelization in Africa should not use European values and way of life. Nkurunziza maintains that Africa needs a new paradigm of evangelization to give Africa a new hope toward a better understanding of humanism based on African indigenous values and the Gospel.

Gumo (2004) warns that inculturation should be handled with a lot of keenness because cultural interactions may lead to undermining of religious beliefs and values found in God and the sense of sin. Such she says may diminish human sensibility itself and promote violence and vice versa. Inculturation is not a new concept that is beginning with the African problem. Okure (1990) illustrates that inculturation is as old as the history of the Church. She says that inculturation was a concern of the Early Church. The Church faced a major crisis of the inclusion of the Gentiles into the Church. Some of the Apostles and early Christians felt that the Gentiles must undergo

the rite of circumcision to become Christians whereas others like Paul felt that it was unnecessary since circumcision was a Jewish culture which was not part of the Christian doctrine. This problem led to the first Council of Jerusalem which resolved the crisis (Acts of the Apostles 15).

Paul II (1982) states that inculturation is necessary for authentic evangelization. This is corroborated by Arinze and Fitzgerald (1990) when they observe that inculturation would help Christianity be presented to Africans in a more suitable way and thus effect a deeper evangelization. It would help the Gospel to be understood and well lived by the African people. He says that inculturation would help the African culture to resist against the attacks from atheism and other foreign ideologies. The Pope reiterated that unless the people of Africa do not feel Christianity as part of their own flesh and blood, their own soul, they will not be disposed to defend the faith.

According to Arinze and Fitzgerald (1990), inculturation would be necessary to enable the Africans live authentic lives. They observe that many African Christians at critical moments in their lives have recourse to practices of the traditional religion or where they feel that certain elements of their culture are more respected. Inculturation would therefore help in controlling such cases and enable the African Christians to live authentic Christian lives. Okure (1990) states that there are two conditions for effective undertaking of inculturation, that is, to have a sound knowledge of the scriptures and an in-depth study of the African cultures. This, she says, is to enable the Gospel to be more relevant and meaningful to the people so as to transform their lives and cultures in a profound manner. Sarpong (1988) notes that inculturation primarily has to do with transforming people; hence the study of culture would effect evangelization. Gumo (2004) suggests that proper inculturation calls for dialogue. The two cultures should listen to each other and come to a convergence or a common horizon of truth.

On the methodology of carrying out inculturation, the priest of Ojolla Parish suggested that it could be done perfectly in the Liturgy of the Church. He had the following to say concerning the above subject matter:

African way of worship is communal and this could be depicted in the Church where the whole assembly comes together to worship. The joy of the African celebration can also be manifested in the Eucharistic celebration. It shows the joy of sharing a meal together. He says that even when it comes to reconciliation, African symbolism can be used where one is brought back to the community after going astray (oral interview on 2/7/2013 at Ojolla Church).

Those are some of the areas where inculturation could be initiated to effect evangelization in the Church in Africa. Okure (1990) suggests that inculturation could be undertaken through dramatizing some Gospel stories using African settings which are similar to the situations depicted in the Gospel. It could also be done using traditional, social celebrations the way Jesus did; especially as the natural contexts for celebrating the sacraments. For example celebration of baptism at cultural naming ceremonies, Church weddings conducted in the context of traditional wedding ceremonies, etc. This she says, would enable the African Christians celebrate the sacraments in a culturally contextual way which would ensure that they see their lives as one integrated whole as it used to be in the traditional African society instead of living in a compartmentalized world of the Church and culture.

The priest of Rang'ala Parish observed that inculturation is a process that needs to be undertaken deeply. He said that the Church in Kisumu diocese has started doing it in areas such as: The changing of the language of worship from Latin which was originally used to Dholuo. This has even made it possible to translate the Bible and other books used for worship into Dholuo. He said that there is also the use of African tunes and musical instruments in worship. The Church has adopted the story telling method as a way of teaching the doctrine. The Church is using peer evangelization where the youth come together and involve themselves in evangelizing fellow young people. Lastly is the use of modern technology in building up the faith and in evangelization. From these findings we could conclude that inculturation in marriage would be extremely necessary and the Church should work towards this. Perhaps it could help the many marriages that are breaking today. Inculturation would also help in effecting the work of evangelization.

### 6.4.2.1 Relevance of Inculturation

Inculturation is an essential element of the African Church. The Church in Africa can only be truly authentic when inculturation has taken root. Ndung'u (2008) observes that the Church in Africa cannot claim to be authentic as it is still burdened by the western theological and cultural baggage which was left behind by the western Christian missionaries who planted the Church in Africa. The Church in Africa can only claim maturity in Christian faith if it is fully rooted in the African cultural experience. Magesa (2004, p.126) supports the argument saying that: *"The Church in Africa is like a 'potted plant living in a foreign soil'"*. On the same note, Nkurunziza (2008) argues that missionary evangelization in Africa was superficial since it undermined both the African culture and the African person. This he says made Jesus foreign to an African person. Gumo (2004) in the same line argues that the Gospel cannot be transmitted to or from people independent of their culture.

The field data revealed that the challenges of childlessness that face the Church in Kisumu diocese in her pastoral work can be overcome by inculturation. According to the priest from Yala, the Church should inculturate African marriage. The concept of marriage as it is today is quite western. He pointed out that in Luo understanding of marriage, polygamy is not viewed as infidelity or concubinage. All the wives he said have equal rights, privileges and a special bond with the husband. He narrated the following:

God works even in the polygamous families. Most of the clergy in Kisumu diocese come from polygamous families. This show that even in these families, God can still be experienced (oral interview on 16/2/2013 at St. Mary's School Yala).

The priest of Ojolla Parish concurred that there is a great need for inculturation because it may help solve the conflict of culture and religion. He admitted that not much has been done on marriage, though polygamous families can now participate actively in the life of the Church, they still do not receive Holy Communion, therefore a lot still needs to be done concerning marriage. The priest of Rang'ala Parish said that inculturation would enable the African Christians to live their faith fully and honestly. He explained that:

They will be true to their faith and there would be no double life. Today you find that people go to Church in the morning and at night they visit diviners and witchdoctors. This is a sign that religion is still not relevant to them. There are some cultural values that they feel are not addressed by religion. This is the reason they take recourse to the cultural ways of doing things. But once some of these values are identified and incorporated into Christianity, then they would have no reason to go for the cultural practices in private (oral interview on 5/7/2013 at Rang'ala Church).

Bujo (2008) supports the above argument that the Church should therefore inculturate African marriages to avoid all dichotomies that separate African and Christian marriages. Mulago (1981) corroborates Bujo's sentiments that the Church should be present and active in the lives of the Africans to replace the genuine African practices with the Christian ones. Bujo (2009) presents Lufuluabo's argument that the solution to the challenge of childlessness would be if the Church can make sterility an impediment to marriage. Malula (1997) concurs with the above that the Church should take into consideration the fact that African marriage is not just sexuality but rather it is fertility that is the essence of marriage. Bujo (2009, p.112) supports this argument and points out that: *"In Africa; a marriage is only considered consummated when a child is born"*. Malula (1997) is of the idea that a study of the cultures of African Christians could be done to develop an alternative theology to the western one. Otherwise there will be the transfer to Africa a foreign cultural interpretation. He suggests that this would help on distinguishing between marriage "de facto" and the validity of marriage. This perhaps would therefore be the way forward towards inculturation.

Kemdirim (1996) is of the same opinion that the Church should study the African cultures and undertake a process of inculturation that would benefit the African Christian. He observed that in the scriptures there are many incidences where people are admitted into the Church without conditions that they must abandon their culture. They were admitted basically on their faith, for example the Roman Centurion in John 4:46-53, even in the Acts of the Apostles, the early Church admitted many to the Church, Acts 10:1, Acts 11:14, 16:15, 31-34. Kemdirim (1996) warns that:

The exclusion of some Christians and the barring of heathens from becoming members of the Church because of irregular marital situations or polygamy would seem to negate making Christ and His message of salvation relevant to the people of every culture, locality and time. It would, therefore, be appropriate for the

Church in Africa to initiate a painstaking and organized research in the African family system at this point in time (p. 242).

To experience authentic inculturation, Nkurunziza (2008) explain that the Church should present itself no longer as a closed, finished reality, to be implanted, but as an open reality to be constructed through dynamic experience of faith, lived, celebrated and expressed concretely and authentically in the different cultures of the Christians. Otherwise this was the mistake that was done by the European missionaries; they brought Christianity as a finished product to be consumed by the African as it was presented. The African person and culture were considered by these missionaries as something barbaric to be evangelized and transformed.

The study established that the couples were living dual lives. Whereby they wanted to live as Christians and at the same time were reverting to the traditional Luo practices. Majority of the couples were not satisfied with their state of being childless and they made efforts to overcome it even if the means was against Christian teachings. Ndung'u (2008) supports this dichotomy that is realized in the lives of Christians that most African Christians are divided by two centres of influence, that is, the Christian teachings and their African culture. He continues that during moments of crisis in an African person's life, they easily revert to the traditional customs for solutions.

Bujo (2008) goes deeper to say that the Church should not just come to replace the African customs by Christian practice, but the Church should be present in the lives of the people to avoid the dichotomy between the 'African' and the 'Christian African.' He says that African customs should not be replaced or adapted if they do not contradict the Gospel. This he says would make a Christian grow in faith through all the life. In the case of inculturating marriage, Bujo says that African marriage is rooted deeply in the faith of One God. He says that this would bring about double religiosity. According to Ndung'u (2008), measures ought to be taken to correct the imbalances that exist which inhibit African Christians from leading fulfilled lives based on their cultural environment and values. These imbalances therefore can only be addressed through proper inculturation.

Nkurunziza (2008) is in agreement with the above and he says that inculturation is the authentic means of evangelization through which the Church in Africa will one day witness a liberated African Christianity. This he says can only be achieved if the Gospel becomes flesh in Africa, it must become a reality that is lived. This implies that there must be an African contextual interpretation of the experiences of the encounter with the Gospel. The question is whether Africa has Africanized Christianity or Christianity has Christianized Africa. Kinoti (1994) emphatically supports this that the Church is foreign.

... there is a sense in which Christianity in Africa is the white man's religion. The denominations we belong to, the liturgies we use, hymns we sing, the theologies which govern our lives and conducts be they liberal or evangelistical are all made in the west (p. 34).

Magesa (2008) raises similar concerns that western theology brought by the missionaries has been perpetuated even when it is not relevant to African issues and spirituality. He says that:

This is seen easily in the celebration of Christian liturgy where African symbols and images are rarely used. It is also evident in Christian prayer where many of the prayers are translations from elsewhere. The celebration of Christian sacraments follows the same foreign pattern. For a Church that needs to inculturate the faith, this is a cause for grave concern (p. 163)

In other words, if the Church can make the Gospel the way of life for African Christians, then these couples would live a fulfilled life since the Church will be able to address their issues effectively. Ndung'u (2008) supports the above argument that it is important and urgent to correct the imbalances that exist which inhibit African Christians from leading fulfilled lives based on their cultural environment and values. He says that this could only be possible if Africans shed off the foreignness they inherited from the western Christian missionaries and to adopt a holistic life. This he says would make Christianity not to be a part-time religion, a Sunday religious cult to a total way of life for the African Christians.

The danger of not inculturating Christianity is that the faith would just be at the periphery and not grounded in the lives of the people. Nasimiyu and Waruta (2008) in their research found out that when the Gospel message does not cover all aspects of people's life, the Church never survives. This is seen from the Portuguese missionaries in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century along the coastal peoples of Africa. He also cites North Africa where the Church existed for nearly six centuries but it was swept away by Islam in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century except in Egypt. Bujo (2003) confirms the

need for inculturation and he says that the quest for grounding the Church and the gospel of Christ in the cultures of African people is on and concepts have been designed like indigenization, contextualization and inculturation.

#### **6.4.2.2 Misconceptions in Inculturation**

Majority of people have misinterpreted the meaning of inculturation. This has led to rejection of inculturation altogether yet it can be a solution to problems facing the faithful and the Church. Some people view inculturation as secularizing the Church. They see it as a deviation from and a betrayal of the universal, one, holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Others also view inculturation as an attempt to nationalize or indigenize and Africanize the faith. It is viewed as an attempt to seek independence in terms of faith as seen in political and economic spheres. In such circumstances many see it as an impossible endeavour.

There are also a section of Africans who perceive inculturation as an attempt to adopt wholly everything African. This is done by replacing everything that is European with everything African. For example, some people think of replacing the use of the Church vessels which are of European origin with African utensils like calabashes. They look at it in terms of using traditional liquor in the celebration of the Holy Communion instead of using wine.

They want European vestments to be replaced by African style vestments. Such misconceptions have either hindered inculturation or interfered with the real meaning. Due to such misunderstanding, some have completely rejected inculturation and are not willing to effect the recommendations. Others have not gone into the deeper meaning where they study the true life of an African; inculturation should go deeper than dressing, singing, drumming and vessels. It should touch the soul of an African person. Majority think that if they can sing, clap, dance and ululate in Church services then all is done with inculturation. The priest from Ojolla Parish (oral interview on 2/7/2013 at Ojolla Church) said that inculturation should not water down the true meaning of faith. The same idea is expressed by the priest of Rang'ala Parish who said that inculturation is not complete annihilation of faith.



Ndung'u (2008) observes that inculturation of the Gospel message should go beyond the cosmetic level and address the core issues that pertain to African spirituality, identity and integrity in the contemporary globalized world community. He says that inculturation should be extended to other cultural practices with a critical and positive approach. This could be the only way in which true inculturation can be achieved. Otherwise, inculturation would still remain a mirage and the Gospel message would still remain in the periphery of the African culture.

#### **6.4.2.3 Challenges of Inculturation**

The greatest challenge to the attempt of inculturation is the multi-cultures of Africa. Kenya alone comprises of forty-two (42) ethnic communities which have distinct cultures and languages. It would therefore be extremely challenging to come up with one way of worship that would truly express such composite cultures that would be acceptable to all. This would discourage some people in undertaking such an adventure.

Another challenge to inculturation would be to establish the extent to which African culture would be considered traditional African culture. When the contemporary African society is considered for inculturation, it would be challenging the content to consider for inculturation. This is because establishing the authentic traditional African culture would be difficult. Also there are some African Christians who are not well versed with their traditional cultures due to the missionary influence and modern education.

The priest of Ojolla Parish observed that the greatest challenge to inculturation is that most people are not ready to accept the change. The Church has a tradition and most people have been used to these traditions and therefore they find it difficult to adopt and accept the new changes that may come as a result of inculturation. He said that even though some people may be reluctant to accept these changes, with time they will have to accept them since change is inevitable. He observed that some of these people are the African clergy themselves who are not ready to initiate and undertake the process of inculturation. Nasimiyu and Waruta (2008) support the argument that such clergy are zealous to guard what they received from their European

masters. They reject all attempts to venture into new theological thinking that would benefit African needs.

The priest of Rang'ala Parish supported the argument by saying that such people are fixated in the olden days. Their mind and attitude is fixed on olden days and they do not accept new ideas. These people he said are not honest with the work of inculturation. They are not ready to venture into it. Despite the fact that they talk about it, they are not willing to live it. He observed that such people will be forced to accept the new things since the Church is in the age of renewal. The priest outlined more challenges like inadequate finances which may be needed for training the agents of inculturation, translating the texts and buying the instruments of the modern technology. He said that another challenge is lack of skilled manpower. These are trained personnel who can spearhead the work of inculturation. Emphasis has not been laid on empowering people on issues of inculturation. He said that there is no proper organization structure that has been put in place to effect the work of inculturation. There is still a lot of beauracracy and all the decisions concerning inculturation must undergo a lot of consultation.

The above exposition therefore informs that much is needed in order for inculturation to be real and to take effect within the Church. The Church leaders should be honest and open to new ideas. They should be able to accept change. They should be at the forefront to spearhead the work of inculturation. The Church should also set aside finances that can be used for inculturation. Given that inculturation calls for deeper studies into the African cultural values, the Church should empower people by taking them for studies and research on African studies which would enable the people concerned to know which values could be inculturated and how to undertake the whole process of inculturation.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

#### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the summary of the main findings of the study, the conclusion and the recommendations that are suggested for further research in the related fields of study.

#### 7.2 Summary

The mandate of this study was first, to establish the contextual meaning of childlessness and its causes among the Luo. Second, was to assess how the teachings of the Catholic Church on childlessness differ with the traditional Luo worldview on childlessness. Third, was to determine how the socio-religious challenges that the Luo childless Catholic couples face affect their lives. Finally, it was to investigate the influence of childlessness to the pastoral work of the Catholic Church in Kisumu diocese.

The study established that among the Luo, involuntary childlessness means more than having completely no child. Those couples having only female children or only a single male child are also considered childless. This is because male children among the Luo are preferred over the female ones and they are viewed to be of greater importance than the female ones. Having only one child is considered risky since if in any case the child may die, then one would easily become childless. Therefore among the Luo, involuntary childlessness is more than having no child. The study also established that childlessness has many causes such as witchcraft, curses, breaking of taboos, punishment from ancestors, and sickness among others. These causes are attributed to both natural and supernatural forces.

The study found out that the teachings of the Catholic Church differ with the traditional Luo worldview on involuntary childlessness. Whereas the Catholic Church does not see any problem with involuntary childlessness in the marriages of the Catholic couples, the Luo find this quite challenging since children are important for the cementing of the marriage. Without children

among the Luo, marriage becomes meaningless. Therefore on one hand these Catholic couples would want to remain faithful to the teachings of the Church and on the other hand, the pressure for children would make them resort to the traditional Luo practices which are not compatible with the teachings of the Church. The study revealed that this conflict of worldviews put the Luo Catholic couples in a big dilemma since most couples find it difficult to remain staunch Catholic Christians without children. Therefore, majority of the Luo couples will find themselves trying to remedy their childless marriage through marrying another wife, the woman may bring a female relative to the husband to give birth, the couple may try to find out if they are fertile through an illicit sexual affair, they may seek help from the traditional medicine people and some may go to the diviners.

The study established that the couple would go for the traditional remedies due to the intense pressure that they face from the family, relatives and clan members who have a lot of interest in the marriage and the children since in Africa, marriage is a community affair. This pressure is enormous such that even if the couple would want to remain true Christians and to follow the Christian teachings, they may end up “succumbing” to the demands of the community. These two worldviews leaves the childless couple in a dilemma. There are the demands of faith on one side and on the other side the demands of the Luo traditional culture.

The findings of the study showed that the differing worldviews between the teachings of the Church on involuntary childlessness and the traditional Luo community made the childless couples face great challenges. These challenges are both social and religious and they affected the lives of these couples in a tremendous way. These couples are mainly alienated or stigmatized by the clan members. They are despised by the members of the family; specifically women are despised by the in-laws and the clan members of the man. They are humiliated by their in-laws and even other village women. The man may be put under pressure to marry another woman by the family and even clan members.

The problems these couples undergo within the society may make them live in isolation. The study found out that sometimes even the SCC members may be involved in such attitude and this causes great distress to the couple which may even necessitate their abandoning of the SCC

meetings and the Church community in general. Childlessness also brings instability in the marriages of some of the Luo couples. Some men end up abandoning their wives for a second wife or some women end up leaving their husbands. Sometimes there is the general lack of peace in the family even if one does not abandon the other.

The study also revealed that the childless couple may suffer loneliness which comes with lack of children in the home. Their homes will be quiet with no children playing in them. This loneliness reaches its peak in old age. They will lack someone to send especially in the villages; it is the children who are sent to the local shops to buy the commodities that are used daily in the home. In their old age, the couple would not have any source of help. In Africa, and specifically among the Luo, it is the children who help their parents in their old age if not the grandchildren. This causes the childless couple great psychological distress.

Another challenge that these childless couple have is that they will be facing “immortality” problem. In Africa, children are named after their grandparents or after their dead ancestors who died long ago. These childless couples will not have any trace that they ever existed since there will be no one to be seen as their offspring when they have died. This is both a social and a religious challenge that they have to battle with.

Lastly, the study established that the problem of childlessness in the marriages of the Luo Catholic couples affects the pastoral work of the Catholic Church in many ways. Due to the fact that the Catholic Church teaches that marriage is permanent and divorce is not permitted. The problem of childlessness will make the young people fear wedding in the Church because this will make them commit themselves in a lifelong relationship which cannot be dissolved whether there are children or not. They will mainly want to cohabit or live in trial marriage until they ascertain that the partner is fertile and that is when they will be able to commit themselves in a Church wedding.

The study found out that some couples remedied their childless marriages using the traditional Luo methods. For example, some of the men who were childless went for a second wife. This method is not compatible with the teachings of the Catholic Church. This impacts directly to the pastoral work of the Church because polygamy is considered by the Church to be retrogressive

and those who live in polygamous marriages are to be evangelized to become true Christians. Most of these men who live in polygamous unions and even the second or third wives in these unions are alienated from the Church's life; due to this, they tend to alienate themselves from the Church as if they have decided their fate. They tend to behave like this because they think that since the Church has rejected them, God too may reject them and so they are candidates of eternal damnation. The Church considers these unions sinful. Furthermore, the Church has yet to come up with the guidelines on how to incorporate the polygamous families into the Church's life. They still feel abandoned, alienated and completely out of the Church. The Church is against visiting of diviners since the Church teaches that such acts are sinful and shows lack of faith in One God.

Involuntary childlessness influence the pastoral ministry of the Church because majority of these childless couples stop attending SCC meetings or even completely abandon the community gatherings for various reasons such as stigmatization, lack of time to attend the meetings because they are busy in their homes since they are alone. One with children would easily assign some duties to the children when away in the SCC meetings but since the childless ones have no one to help them, they would not find it easy to go for the weekly SCC meetings. Some find religion not relevant in their situation since they feel that God is not answering their prayers or they feel abandoned by God and so they may easily stop going to Church. In other words, they would not see the need of religion and the need of going to Church. People need a religion that fulfills their aspirations and desires. One would not go to Church or pray if the Church cannot address their problems and needs. In general, involuntary childlessness may cause laxity to the affected. Childlessness may also lead many couples into infidelity which is against the Bible, the Commandments and the Church's teaching. Due to childlessness, some Christians may end up living under trial marriages and cohabitation without going for Church marriages. Childlessness may impact on the life of the Church in terms of lack of future members and that there will be no people to become future ministers of the Church.

In as much as involuntary childlessness is challenging to the couple and the Church, there are some couples that the study found out that have overcome the challenges associated with childlessness. They have accepted their state and have refused to remedy their childlessness

using the traditional Luo methods. Instead, they have opted for adoption and they live happily with the children that they have adopted. They are active in the Church activities such as attending the SCC meetings regularly and going to Church among others.

On the side of the Church, the study established that the Church can respond to these challenges through guidance and counselling and inculturation. This is where the Church would interact freely with the traditional Luo cultural values to have a middle ground. The Church should appreciate the Luo cultural values and this would make Christianity relevant to the Luo people. Once some of these values are accepted and appreciated by the Church, the couple would not suffer due to the dilemma and the difference between culture and religion. Inculturation is one way in which the difference that exists between the teachings of the Catholic Church and the Luo world view can be minimized.

### **7.3 Conclusion**

The following conclusions can be drawn from the study:

1. Involuntary childlessness is broader in meaning among the Luo. It does not mean complete lack of children in a marriage. It could also mean having only female children or having only one child. The Luo find it difficult to appreciate female children only. When a couple gives birth to female children only, they still feel that they have not had enough. They would try as much as possible to have at least even one male child among the females. This would satisfy their desire because when the female children are married off it is only the male one that would remain to assist them at home and to take care of the home. On the other hand if they have only one child then they find it risky since one child can die and they remain childless. The study established that childlessness is as a result of both natural and supernatural forces.
2. The teachings of the Catholic Church on involuntary childlessness differ with the traditional Luo worldview on childlessness. The two worldviews look at childlessness in different ways. The Catholic Church does not have a problem with childlessness in the marriages of her adherents since according to the Catholic Church, marriage is not only

for procreation, but procreation is a fruit of marriage; while from the perspective of the Luo community, children are the main purpose of marriage. Without children, marriage does not achieve its main objective.

3. Childlessness causes the couples to face many socio-religious challenges. These could be in the form of social alienation and stigmatization, loneliness, being despised, shame and guilt. These may make them not to attend SCC meetings and thus interferes with their participation in the activities of the Church.
4. The study established that childlessness influence the pastoral work of the Church. The traditional remedial measures are contrary to the work of evangelization of the Church. The Church can respond to the challenges that these couples face and the challenges childlessness pose to her pastoral ministry through providing guidance and counselling to the couples and through undertaking inculturation.

#### **7.4 Recommendations**

The following recommendations have been derived from the study:

1. The findings of the study indicate that childlessness means much more than having no child. According to the Luo, it includes having only female children or even having only one child. In order to avoid the misunderstanding, the Church should re-think on how to accommodate the Luo understanding of childlessness.
2. The study also revealed that there is a difference between the teachings of the Church and the Luo worldview on childlessness. Given that the Church is a vehicle of salvation, she needs to understand the pain and agony that the childless couples undergo. The Church should be accommodative and be a home to these childless couples. The Church should re-examine and review her teachings on childlessness and her attitude toward the scientific technologies which could be used to help the childless couples get children.
3. Childlessness comes with many socio-religious challenges which affect the lives of the couples and also the pastoral ministry of the Church. The Church should come up with



strategies of helping the childless couples overcoming these challenges. The Church should be at the forefront in condemning discrimination against these her affected members. The other Christians should change their attitude toward those suffering from the problem of childlessness. The childless couples too should be ready to visit the health facilities to establish the cause of their childlessness. Some of their problems could be addressed medically. This could also help them avoid blaming each other since they would know the cause of their childlessness. And in turn it could help them live in peace.

4. Childlessness influenced the pastoral ministry of the church. The Church therefore should come up with modalities of addressing the problem of childlessness. The Church theologians should work out ways in which the Luo values could be assessed to ensure that inculturation achieves its objectives among the Luo.

### **7.5 Suggestions for Further Research**

This study has exposed the difference in the understanding of childlessness between the Catholic Church and the Luo community in Kisumu diocese. Therefore the study recommends that studies be undertaken in the following areas:

1. This study was restricted to establishing the contextual meaning of childlessness among the Luo, it would be necessary to study how other Kenyan communities understand childlessness.
2. The mandate of the study was on involuntary childlessness and how it challenges the lives of the Catholic couples. It would be necessary to study African approach to voluntary childlessness.
3. More studies are needed on indigenization of the faith or inculturation. More dialogue is needed between the Christian faith and the Luo culture. This would help lessen the divergent worldviews and many other issues that are still making many African Christians to find Christian faith alien to them. In order for these African Christians to

adopt Christianity without syncretism this dialogue would be necessary at all levels and in all Christian faiths not only in the Catholic circles.

4. It would also be necessary to undertake studies on the Luo marriage so as to study the Luo marriage values in depth to understand them so as to enable the Church not to reject these values without examining them.

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**APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM**

**The differing worldviews on childlessness between the Catholic Church and the Luo  
Community in Kisumu Diocese-Kenya**

*If you are willing to participate in this study please complete and sign this form.*

1. I confirm that I have understood the objective of this study and therefore am willing to participate in it.
2. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that am free to withdraw at any time without giving reason.
3. I understand that the interviews and the discussions will be audio-recorded.
4. I agree to the use of anonymous quotes.
5. I agree that the data collected may be passed on to other researchers.
6. What I will hear during the Focus Group Discussions I will not share with anyone.

I therefore agree to take part in the above project.

Name of the Participant.....

Date .....

Signature.....

## **APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PRIESTS AND CATECHISTS**

### **The differing worldviews on childlessness between the Catholic Church and the Luo Community in Kisumu Diocese-Kenya**

1. How long have you been working in this parish?
2. Are there cases of childless couples in this parish? If yes, how many?
3. How can you describe their marriage?
4. How do they participate in the Church's activities?
5. What is the Church's teaching on childlessness?
6. Is the Church's teaching helpful to the couples? Give reasons for your answer.
7. What are some of the challenges these couples face?
8. Is the childlessness of these couples a challenge to your pastoral ministry in the parish?  
Explain your answer.
9. Do you think there are some possible solutions that the Church can offer these couples?
10. Do you have some couples who have resorted to sororate or polygamous marriages due to childlessness?
11. How do you handle the cases of Catholic couples who resort to the traditional Luo ways of solving childlessness?

## **APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR CHILDLESS COUPLES**

### **The differing worldviews on childlessness between the Catholic Church and the Luo**

#### **Community in Kisumu Diocese-Kenya**

1. How long have you been married?
2. When did you realize that you cannot have children?
3. Have you tried to establish the cause of your childless marriage? If yes, what is it? If no, why?
4. What was your reaction when you learnt that you cannot have children?
5. How do you relate with each other in your marriage?
6. Do you think your childless condition threatens your marriage? Explain your answer.
7. How do you relate with the other family members and the clan in general?
8. Have you ever tried or thought of any remedy to your childlessness? If yes, which ones? If no why?
9. Which options would you have in solving your childless condition if you were not Christians?
10. Are those options acceptable and in line with the teachings of the church?
11. If you were not Christians would you have more or better options to solve your problem? Give reasons for your answer.
12. What is your relationship with your church community?
13. Is your priest aware of your problem? If yes, what help/advice has he given you?
14. Is your childlessness affecting your participation in the church? Give reasons.
15. In your opinion, is there any way the church can assist you in your childlessness?

16. What are some of the challenges that you encounter as childless couple?

## **APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR SCC LEADERS**

### **The differing worldviews on childlessness between the Catholic Church and the Luo Community in Kisumu Diocese-Kenya**

1. How do you define childlessness in the Luo community?
2. What are the causes of childlessness?
3. Do you know the number of the childless couples that are in your Small Christian Community?
4. Do they participate actively in the Church? Explain.
5. In your opinion is childlessness affecting the way the couples live their faith? If yes how?
6. Does their childless life affect the life of your community?
7. Are there couples in your community that have solved their childlessness?
8. If they are there, which methods did they use?
9. Was there any reaction of the Church toward these couples who solved their childlessness?
10. Do the childless couples face any challenges in the society and even in the church?
11. Do you think childlessness poses a challenge to the pastoral activity of the Catholic Church? If yes, how?
12. What are ways in which the Catholic Church can help solve childlessness?

## **APPENDIX E: OBSERVATION GUIDE**

### **Components to observe**

#### ***1. Characteristics of the participants***

- i. Gender, age
- ii. Attitude toward the subject, about self, others and marriage.
- iii. Statements about interests, commitments and values.

#### ***2. Physical surrounding***

- i. The structure and general appearance of the homes/houses of the childless couples.

#### ***3. Non-verbal behaviour***

- i. Facial expressions, gestures, postures.
- ii. Mood of the respondents, for example sad, happy, crying

#### ***4. Interactions (Participation in the Church activities)***

- i. Level of participation in the Church and SCC.
- ii. Do they attend SCC meetings regularly?
- iii. Which other activities are they involved in within the Church.
- iv. Participation in the community affairs in general.