THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

FACULTY OF THEOLOGY

DEPARTMENT OF SACRED LITURGY

THE IMPORTANCE OF *NTHEO* (EXCHANGE OF VOWS) IN AKAMBA TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE: INCULTURATED RITE OF MATRIMONY IN THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF WOTE, KENYA

BY

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MAY, 2026

NAIROBI -KENYA

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Theology in Partial Fulfillment of the requirement for the licentiate in Sacred Liturgy

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned Daniel Mbindi, hereby declare that this Thesis is a result of my personal work, original, and has not been submitted to any other institutions for the award of either certificate, diploma, or degree.

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ABSTRACT

Our work is entitled "The Importance of *Ntheo* (Exchange of Vows) in Akamba Traditional Marriage: Inculturated Rite of Matrimony in the Catholic Diocese of Wote, Kenya." The study aims at bringing the importance of *Ntheo* (exchange of vows) in the Akamba traditional marriage in order to promote an Inculturated rite of matrimony in the Catholic Diocese of Wote. The research is necessitated by the researcher's urgent experience of divorce and the tension that exists between the importance of traditional marriage and Christian marriage. The research seeks to identify the causes of divorce and the ideas that can be borrowed from traditional marriage, which can be applied or adapted to make them practical in Christian marriage.

The work is divided into four chapters. The first chapter provides the background of the Catholic Diocese of Wote, to understand its geographical location with a view of capturing the importance of traditional marriage in the Kamba community. Chapter Two gives the analysis of the Rite of the *Ntheo* (exchange of vows) in the Akamba traditional marriage. It entails the rites that are involved and the rituals. The Akamba marriage Rite is discussed, which encompasses marriage announcement, bride preparation, wedding day ritual, then Blessing and sacrifice. It also discusses the traditional marriage preparations that were very crucial. Chapter Three dwells on Church Teaching on the Exchange of Vows in Marriage. The chapter begins with the biblical teaching on marriage in the Old and New Testaments. Lastly, in chapter four, the researcher proposes recommendations that can be adopted as a contribution from the Kamba people towards an inculturated Christian marriage, touching more on the lives of the people.

The resource for the research includes personal experience, library sources, interviews, questionnaires, and online sources. The research hopes the findings and recommendations made will deepen Catholic understanding of the importance of traditional marriage, that

resulted in their long-lasting. The traditional Kamba marriage is resourceful for the Rite of matrimony simply because marriage lasted unlike today. Perhaps communal life and fidelity will be necessary if inculcated in the Rite of matrimony. This may promote the spirit of ecumenism among different Christians. Further, the research will help to promote a deeper understanding of Christian marriage in comparison with the traditional one.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my beloved parents, the late John Mbindi and Magdalene Nduku, who nurtured my faith from the early beginnings of my life, and the Consolata Missionaries for the support they gave me.

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Jesus said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee.” I appreciate the Almighty God for his love and care for me and for guiding and enabling me through this task. My special appreciation to my supervisors, Col. (Rtd) Msgr. Dr. Benjamin Maswili AJ and Msgr. John Lukwata for their tremendous enthusiasm and scholarly assistance, which helped me complete this project. I am humbled by your patience in reading my work, giving guidance and corrections in every step I made to better my work. My gratitude to all my lecturers in the faculty of Theology, specifically in the department of sacred liturgy, Rev. Dr. John Bosco Asimwe.

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LIST OF THE ABBREVIATIONS

AAS.	*Acta Apostolicae Sedis*
CIC.	*Codex Iuris Canonici* (Code of Canon Law)
CUEA.	Catholic University of Eastern Africa
KAR.	King's African Rifles
Gen.	Genesis
SC.	*Sacrosanctum Concilium*
GS.	*Gaudium et Spes*
PS.	Psalms
SAM.	Samuel
PROV.	Proverb
EXOD.	Exodus
HOS.	Hosea
EPH.	Ephesians
MK.	Mark
DEUT.	Deuteronomy
JER.	Jeremiah
GAL	Galatian
TI.	Titus
MTT.	Mathew
JUD.	Judges
ROM.	Romans
SIR.	Sirach
1COR.	Corinthians
COL.	Colossians
ED.	Editor
S.V.	Sub Verbo
VOL.	Volume
DISS.	Dissertation
REV.	Revision
TRANS.	Translated
CF.	Confer
CA/C.	Canon

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a fundamental institution at the heart of every human society, serving as a union between a man and a woman and as a social, spiritual, and communal bond that sustains family and society. Scripture affirms this when God says, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner" (Gen 2:18), highlighting marriage as God's design for companionship, mutual support, and the continuity of human community. Among the Akamba people of Kenya, marriage is deeply rooted in tradition and ritual, reflecting a rich cultural heritage that emphasizes commitment, communal responsibility, and moral obligation. One of the most significant elements in Akamba traditional marriage is *Ntheo,* the exchange of vows, which solemnizes the marital union and publicly affirms the responsibilities and expectations of the spouses.

In the Akamba tradition, *Ntheo* is not a mere verbal agreement between two individuals but a sacred and binding act witnessed and sanctioned by families, elders, and the wider community. Through *Ntheo,* the couple pledges fidelity, mutual respect, cooperation, and openness to life, values that resonate strongly with the Christian understanding of marriage. The spoken vows, accompanied by symbolic gestures and communal participation, confer legitimacy on the union and mark the transition of the couple into a new social and moral status. Without *Ntheo,* marriage among the Akamba is considered incomplete, lacking both social recognition and spiritual depth.

The Catholic Church, while firmly grounded in the sacramental theology of matrimony, has increasingly recognized the value of African cultural traditions as authentic expressions of human experience and faith. Following the Second Vatican Council, particularly the teachings of *Gaudium et Spes* and *Sacrosanctum Concilium,* the Church has encouraged inculturation, that is, the integration of positive cultural values into Christian worship and sacramental life. In Africa, this call has led theologians and pastoral leaders to reflect deeply on how traditional

marriage rites can enrich and illuminate the Christian sacrament of matrimony without compromising its essential elements.

Within this theological and pastoral framework, the Catholic Diocese of Wote provides a significant context for studying inculturation. Located in Makueni County, a predominantly Akamba region, the diocese faces the pastoral challenge of harmonizing Akamba marital customs with the canonical and sacramental requirements of the Church. Many Catholic faithful continue to value traditional marriage practices, including *Ntheo*, sometimes more strongly than church ceremonies. This situation raises important questions about cultural identity, sacramental validity, and pastoral effectiveness.

This thesis therefore seeks to examine the importance of *Ntheo* (exchange of vows) in Akamba traditional marriage and to explore its relevance as an inculturated rite of matrimony within the Catholic Diocese of Wote. It argues that *Ntheo* embodies key theological values such as consent, covenant, fidelity, and communal witness, which are central to the Catholic understanding of marriage as a sacrament. By critically analyzing *Ntheo* from anthropological, theological, and pastoral perspectives, this study aims to show how it can contribute meaningfully to an inculturated celebration of Christian matrimony.

Furthermore, the study is motivated by the need to address pastoral gaps arising from the disconnect between traditional marriage practices and Church Rites. Many couples experience tension between cultural expectations and ecclesial norms, sometimes leading to irregular marital situations within the Church. An inculturated approach that respectfully integrates *Ntheo* into the Catholic rite of matrimony may help foster deeper participation, stronger marital commitment, and a more authentic expression of faith among Akamba.

PURPOSE

To study the importance of *Ntheo* (exchange of vows) in the Akamba traditional marriage to promote an Inculturated rite of matrimony in the Catholic Diocese of Wote.

RATIONALE

Divorce in the Catholic Diocese of Wote has discouraged Christians from officiating marriages in the Church. This is because, in 2024, there have been fewer weddings in the Church based on the data collected, in comparison to previous years. In this regard, the traditional Akamba exchange of vows in marriage, in terms of commitment and exclusivity, will have an impact on modern marriage. The couple adhered to the vows and lived within the boundaries of marriage. Due to these commitments and values, such as fidelity, divorce was very rare. However, there is a noticeable difference in the obedience, commitment, and fidelity of traditional vows when compared to Church marriages. There is rampant divorce in the Diocese, and this has reduced the rate of officiating marriages in the Church

On many occasions, I have observed that young couples are experiencing a lot of challenges in keeping their vows, which has created fear among those aspiring to get married in the Church. The practice of the rite of matrimony by the clergy has declined, which has raised alarms in the Diocese. Therefore, this research intends to revisit the causes of divorce while raising awareness of the many challenges facing marriage in modern times. It will also highlight possible solutions to the problem of divorce and the opportunities or benefits that come with the exchange of vows. The divorce of families may be a result of a lack of understanding of the vows or inadequate preparation for marriage.

Therefore, adequate knowledge of marriage, especially on the exchange of vows for the couples, is of great importance. This will help couples acquire the proper and adequate knowledge, which will help in ensuring peaceful and lasting marriages. This will also help the

couples to express their consent consciously and freely. The *praenotanda* of Rite of Matrimony no. 23 states:

> The bridal couple should be given a review of the fundamentals of Christian doctrine. This may include instruction on the teachings about marriage and the family, on the rites used in the celebration of the sacrament itself, and prayers and readings. In this way, the bridegroom and the bride will receive far greater benefit from the celebration.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION OF INVESTIGATION

How can the study of *Ntheo* (exchange of vows) in Akamba traditional marriage promote an inculturated Rite of Matrimony in the Catholic Diocese of Wote?

WORKING HYPOTHESES

i Possibly a deep understanding of the *Ntheo* in AKamba traditional marriage may promote lasting marriages in the Catholic Diocese of Wote.

ii Maybe a deeper liturgical Catechesis on the exchange of vows in the rite of matrimony will promote the officiating of marriage by the faithful in the Catholic Diocese of Wote.

METHODOLOGY CONSIDERATION

In the study, the researcher will employ the research methodology outlined in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 16, which states:

> The study of sacred liturgy is to be ranked among the compulsory and major courses in seminaries and religious houses of studies; in theological faculties, it is to rank among the principal courses. It is to be taught under its Theological, Historical, Spiritual, Pastoral, and Juridical aspects. This particular methodology follows the theological, historical, spiritual, and juridical aspects[1].

Theological Investigation

[1] "Disciplina de sacra Liturgia in seminariis et studiorum domibus religiosis inter disciplinas et potiores,in facultatibus autem theologicis inter disciplinas principals est habenda,et sub aspect cum theologico et historico tum spirituali, pastorali et iuridico tradenda," (SC16); Also SC States: Ut sana tradition retineatur et tamen via legitimate progression aperiatur, de singulis Liturgia partibus recognoscendis accurate investigatio theologica, Historica, pastoralis semper praecedat,"(that sound tradition may be retained , and yet the way remain open to legitimate progress careful investigation is always to be made into each part of the liturgy which is to be revised.This investigation should be theological, historical and pastoral), Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum II, Constitutio de sacra Liturgia *Sacrosantum Concilium*, 4 decembris 1963, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 56(1964):97-138.

This investigation will necessitate the researcher to do a Scriptural analysis by examining relevant passages from Scripture that may lay down or inform the theological basis of the exchange of vows in the Rite of Marriage for better understanding and its practical application in marriage for long-lasting marriages. It is based on mysteries of salvation as articulated by the Fathers of the Church.

Historical Investigation

The task of historical investigation is not just to explore the primitive shape of the liturgy, but its origin and genuine spirit. The witness to Christ found in the New Testament is not simply the starting point of Christian liturgy; it is its genetic origin as well as its foundation. This method will explore and enlighten on the context in which the Church in Wote Diocese was established and how it evolved over the years. The key activities in this section will be the analysis of archival sources, liturgical texts, pastoral letters, liturgical commission, and other information from other texts of the parish. The reason behind this is to provide adequate information about the parish, which will help in making comparisons if there has been continuity or discontinuity.

Pastoral Investigation

This method will address the practical and concrete aspects, including the assembly, congregation, language, gestures, and pastoral methods used in the Diocese. This will help in dispelling any kind of ignorance or inadequate preparation in marriage, which will facilitate better assessment of the pastoral needs, like the liturgical evaluation, proper catechesis on the Sacrament, accompaniment of the couples, spiritual guidance, providing pastoral support, and pastoral care to act as means of employing changes and transition in their way of worship.

Anthropological Investigation

This method entails data collection through material observation that will give insights into traditional marriage in the Catholic Diocese of Wote. The method dwells on religious

experience, ethnographic interviews, human science, symbols in worship, customs, religious practices and beliefs, cultural traditions, rituals, and the worldview pattern of behaviour of the Catholic community. This is aimed at identifying areas of concern in their liturgical worship and for the unity and indissolubility of the Sacrament of marriage among couples.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

Apart from the general introduction and the general conclusion, the thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter one analyzes the background of the Catholic Diocese of Wote to create awareness of the diocese without losing focus on the importance of the *Ntheo.* The chapter will explain further its importance in relation to Christian marriage. Chapter two focuses on the rite of the *Ntheo* in the Akamba traditional marriage. This will help in integrating some of the traditional values into Christian marriage. This will hopefully lower the rate of marriage breakdown in Wote Diocese. Chapter three highlights the Church's teachings on the exchange of vows in marriage. The chapter will employ scripture, tradition, magisterium, and the rite of matrimony in enhancing the teachings. Chapter four focuses on Kamba *Ntheo* in relation to the Catholic Rite of Matrimony in the Catholic diocese of Wote. Necessary recommendations will be employed to enhance the active and long-lasting celebration of matrimony.

ANTICIPATED DIFFICULTIES

In this study, the researcher anticipates encountering several challenges including the following:

i **Trust and Relationship Building**: building trust and establishing a lasting marriage is very essential to couples for gaining support and giving oneself to each other but this may take patience in preparing them.

ii **Limited Written Records:** Depending on the religious and cultural practices of the area, there may be limited written documentation or historical records on the exact wording,

meaning, or traditions surrounding marriage vows in the Diocese. This would require more reliance on oral traditions, which can be subject to interpretation or change over time.

iii **Reluctance to Discuss Personal Matters:** Marriage, especially in rural or conservative areas, may be seen as a deeply personal matter. Interviewers might be hesitant to discuss their personal experiences, values, or views on marriage openly.

iv **Ethical Considerations:** If your research involves collecting personal stories or experiences, ensuring confidentiality, informed consent, and the protection of participants' rights can be challenging, especially in a community where privacy is highly valued.

v Cultural Sensitivity and Respect: Marriage vows can hold deep cultural, religious, and personal significance. It might be challenging to navigate these sacred practices while ensuring respect for the traditions and beliefs of the people involved.

Vi Access to Participants: Some communities or individuals might be reluctant to participate in the research due to privacy concerns, unfamiliarity with the research process, or a lack of trust in researchers

CHAPTER ONE

THE BACKGROUND OF THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF WOTE

Introduction

In this chapter, a brief background of the geographical location of the diocese of Wote will be given. The chapter then focuses on the Population Distribution and Political Aspect of Akamba. The Akamba ethnic social life, including Kitui, Masaku, and Mumoni, will then be discussed. What follows is the religious aspect, which focuses on traditional beliefs and practices, rituals, and ceremonies. The chapter then discusses the religious aspect, Kamba culture, the economic setup, and the history of the diocese.

1.1 Geographical Location

The term Akamba is in plural referring to people called Akamba or *Wakamba* who are of Bantu origin. Singular is Mukamba. The land is Ukambani, and the language is Kikamba.[2] The Kamba, also known as the Akamba, are a Bantu ethnic group or tribe that primarily inhabits the southern region of the old Eastern Province of Kenya, which stretches from Nairobi to Tsavo and north to Embu. The area called Ukambani is made up of Machakos, Kitui, and Makueni counties. They are also found in portions of Tana River County, Mombasa, Kilifi County, and Kwale County, which are along the Coast.

Akamba are the fifth largest group in Kenya. Although official census data does not always provide detailed ethnic breakdowns, the Akamba are estimated to comprise approximately 11% of the Kenyan population. This figure reflects their significant presence and influence within the country's social, cultural, and economic landscape. According to recent data from 2019, the Kamba population is 4,663,910. At the moment, the Akamba of

[2] Jones Maweu Kaleli, *Theoretical Foundations of African and Western Worldviews and Their Relationship to Christian Theologizing: An Akamba Case Study* (PhD diss., Andrews University, 1985), 2.

Kenya are 5,220000. They are also found in Uganda and Tanzania. The total number of Kamba in the three countries is 5,366,000.[3]

Ukambani is bordered to the north by the Equator and stops on the 3rd parallel south. It lies 37 to 39 degrees east longitude (refer to the map). Approximately two-thirds of the area lies at elevations ranging from 1,000 to 3,000 feet above sea level, with a few isolated hills (inselbergs) rising slightly higher. The land contains a variety of soils, including black and red loam (cotton soils), sandy types, and grey clay soils. "Ukambani can, for that matter, be described as a pediplane with a wandering hydrography, a characteristic of arid, semi-arid areas, their summits resulting from pediplanation: Machakos, Mua, and Mbaoni Hills."[4] Ukambani can be divided into three regions. Eastern Plains (300-1,000 m), which comprises more than 2/3 of Kitui District. The central region to the east, which joins the plateau, is the third region in Ukambani.

1.1.1 Climate and Rainfall

Ukambani experiences two distinct rainy seasons: the long rains, known locally as *Uua*, occur between March and May; the short rains, called *Nthwa*, fall between October and December, occasionally extending into January. The climatic condition of Kamba is essentially arid or semi-arid, except in some areas like Machakos and Kitui. According to Vincent Simuyu, notes that:

> Most of Ukambani has more than a 30 % probability of receiving less than 500 mm of rain per year, while the whole of Ukambani has, by far, more than a 30 % probability of getting less than 750 mm of rain, as compared to Nyeri or Kitale both of which have less than a 10 % chance of getting less than 750 mm of rain. Kitui District receives an average of 200-300 mm of rainfall per year, while Machakos gets an average of 500 mm. More rain falls on the Kitui and Mbaoni Hills. But the main characteristic of rainfall in Ukambani is its extreme irregularity.[5]

[3] Kamba People, *African Tribes: 101 Last Tribes*, Retrieved from http://www.101lasttribes.com. (accessed August 22, 2025).
[4] Vincent Simuyu, "Land and Politics in Ukambani from the End of the 19th Century Up To 1933," *Presence Africaine,* Vol 89. (1974): 101-146.
[5] Vincent Simuyu, "Land and Politics in Ukambani from the End of the 19th Century Up To 1933," 101-146.

From the aforesaid, the annual rainfall averages around 500 mm, but it is generally low and unreliable. This inconsistency makes farming very difficult and costly. It often leads to crop failure, drought, and famine. The climate is hot and dry for much of the year due to limited rainfall and semi-arid conditions.[6] This reflects the semi-arid climate and is why Kamba land has been experiencing a shortage of food in most places. This forces many Kamba people to adopt other ways besides farming for a living, like trade.

The vegetation of the region consists mainly of low-lying bush, acacia trees, thickets, and drought-resistant trees. Above all, not all places of Kamba land are dry; some places have been experiencing enough rainfall, like Mbooni and Kangudo, and some parts of Kilungu. In these places, farming does well, where the growth of coffee and other cash crops does well.[7] Due to the good climate, the places are densely populated.

1.1.2 The History and Origin of Kamba

The Kamba people, a Bantu-speaking community, are believed to have originated from the Congo Basin region of Central Africa, sharing strong linguistic and cultural ties with other Eastern Bantu groups such as Meru, Kikuyu, Embu, Mbeere, and Chuka. Other scholars trace their more recent migration path to the area beyond the Nyambene Hills, northeast of Mount Kenya (Kirinyaga), which is considered the original homeland of many central Kenyan Bantu communities. From as early as the 1200s, these groups began settling in the region, and by the 1500s, the ancestors of the Kamba, alongside the Kikuyu, Meru (including the Igembe and Tigania), Embu, and Chuka, gradually moved southwards into the fertile foothills of Mount Kenya. By the early 1600s, they settled around Ithanga, near the confluence of the Thika and Sagana rivers, approximately 80 km southeast of the mountain's peaks. [8]

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[6]Rose M. Mutunga, *The Akamba Traditional Religion and Christianity*. (Department of Philosophy (Master's thesis, University of Nairobi, 1994)), 26.
[7] Andrew Katalo, (80 years), interviewed by Daniel Katie: Makueni, Mbitini, August 20th, 2025.
[8] Kamba People, *African Tribes: 101 Last Tribes*, Retrieved from: http://www.101lasttribes.com. African 101: last tribes (accessed August 18, 2025).

However, there are arguments that the Kamba may have emerged as a distinct ethnic identity through the merging of various Eastern Bantu groups around Mount Kilimanjaro in the 15th century. Eventually, they settled in the Mbooni Hills, within today's Machakos county, during the latter half of the 17th century, marking the beginning of their permanent presence in southeastern Kenya.[9] From Mbooni, they migrated into the large regions now comprising Machakos, Makueni, and Kitui counties. As late as the 1840s, the Akamba were still migrating from what is now northern Tanzania, where some had been absorbed by the Pare people. Their movement was a gradual and dynamic process shaped by interactions with neighbouring communities.

Notably, the Akamba had early contact with the coastal region. Kamba People or ancestral communities may have been trading with the coast well before the modern era. In the mid-18th century, a significant wave of Kamba pastoralists migrated eastward from areas such as Tsavo and Kibwezi due to severe drought and famine, settling along the coastal areas, including Mariakani, Kinango, Kwale, and various parts of Mombasa (Changamwe, Chaani, and Kisauni). These migrations contributed to the growth of urban settlements and the integration of the Kamba into the social, economic, and political fabric of Kenya's Coast Province.[10] Today, many descendants of these early migrants play prominent roles in the region's public and professional life, reflecting the enduring legacy of Kamba mobility, resilience, and cultural adaptation.

1.2 Population Distribution

Most of the Kamba people live in Kenya, especially in the lower eastern parts of Makueni, Kitui, and Machakos. According to the Ethnology, the number of Kamba speakers is 3,960,000, which is increasing over time. This seems less in comparison with the national

[9] Kamba People, *African Tribes: 101 Last Tribes*, Retrieved from: http://www.101lasttribes.com. African 101: last tribes (accessed August 18, 2025).
[10] Kamba People, *African Tribes: 101 Last Tribes*, Retrieved from: http://www.101lasttribes.com. African 101: last tribes (accessed August 19, 2025).

census of 2019, which showed that 4,663,910 Akamba people were living in Kenya. Among the three counties, Machakos is the most populated with 1,421,932 people. Machakos County is followed by Kitui with approximately 1,136,187 residents. Makueni is the last County with 987,653 residents. Kamba people also live in the Mbeere region of Embu County, which was formerly part of Eastern Province. We also have Akamba people living in the northern parts of Kajiado, Kiambu, and the Eastern parts of Muranga Counties, Mwea region of Kirinyaga County, Kwale County, and Taita-Taveta County.[11]

According to the statistics, Kamba form the second largest demographic in the Counties of Nairobi and Mombasa. They share a border with the Masai, especially of Machakos and Makueni, and are literally separated by the Kenya-Uganda railway from Athi to the lower parts of Kibwezi. The history narrates that up to the 20th century, the Akamba and Maasai communities were involved in persistent cattle-rustling and pasture conflicts, especially in places with a lot of pasture like Konza plains. Due to this, there was an attraction of interest by the colonial government, which created a cooperative Society and later established the Konza Path and Malili Ranches, where the proposed Konza Technology City is.[12]

1.3 Political Aspect

"The smallest political unit among the Akamba was the homestead *(Musyi*) comprising three to four generations of extended family with a stockade round the home of each married man."[13] At the entrance of the homestead, there was an open space *(Thome*) where men could sit and discuss political and other matters. The political organization of the Akamba people traditionally revolved around kinship, clan systems, councils of elders, and age-set systems

[11] Kamba People, *African Tribes: 101 Last Tribes*, Retrieved from: http://www.101lasttribes.com. (Accessed August 19, 2025).
[12] Kamba People, *African Tribes: 101 Last Tribes*, Retrieved from: http://www.101lasttribes.com. (Accessed August 20, 2025).
[13] Elimu Centre, "*Socio-Economic and Political Organization of Kenyan Communities in the 19th Century*," Retrieved from: https://elimucentre.co.ke (accessed from 12th September 2025).

rather than centralized kingdoms. Below is an overview of the political aspect of the Akamba since memorial.

1.3.1 Colonialism and the 19th century

This refers to the period beginning from the 1800s when the Europeans took control of Africa, Asia, America, and the Pacific through colonial rule. Within this period, Kamba, who served as intermediaries between Arab and Swahili traders and the tribes farther upcountry, lost the coastal trade to the Arabs in the late half of 1800s.[14] Before the control by Europeans, the Kamba people were perfect guides for the caravans collecting elephant tusks, valuable stones, and some slaves for the Middle Eastern, Indian, and Chinese markets because of their trade and travel. Because of their extensive knowledge of the region and their neutral status with many of the other societies they dealt with, early European explorers also utilized them as guides on their trips to explore Southeast Africa.

British colonial officials during the colonial era considered the Kamba to be the most rooted and premier marital race of Africa. The Akamba people appeared to embrace this label by signing up in the colonial army in large numbers. They were serving in the King's African Rifles (KAR), the British East African colonial army, as loyal soldiers of the Queen during the time of the Mau Mau emergence. A press release by the East African Command went on to describe the Kamba as a fighting race. These sentiments were endorsed by other colonial observers in the 1950s who described the Kamba people as hardy, courageous, and mechanically minded. Many officials considered the Kamba people to be the best (soldierly) material in Africa; they supplied KAR with askaris(soldiers) at a rate that was three to four times their percentage of the overall Kenyan population.[15]

14Jen Finke, Kamba-Colonial History, Traditional Music, and Cultures, Retrieved from https://www.Bluecko.org (accessed September 12, 2025).

15 Timothy H. Parsons, "Wakamba Warriors Are Soldiers of the Queen," *The Evolution of the Kamba as a Martial Race,"* E*thnohistory* vol. 46, no. 4 (1999): 671–701.

British administrators freely reinforced Kamba martial traditions and stressed their history of brave soldiering under the Union Jack (British Empire). They also attempted to add that loyal service to Britain was a defining facet of Kamba identity. This attempt to manipulate Kamba ethnicity took place through the extensive use of propaganda, at a level unseen since the time of the Second World War. A growing focus on the Kamba ethnicity has emerged through some high-profile visits to the Ukambani region.

On March 2, 1953, Governor of the colony Sir Evelyn Baring delivered a notable speech near Machakos Town during a three-day tour of the region, accompanied by his wife, Lady Mary. His arrival alongside the acting chief native commissioner, the provincial commissioner, and the Machakos district commissioner was marked by ceremonies designed to highlight Kamba loyalty and their history of military service.[16] A Guard of Honor was assembled by the Kenya Police and Tribal Police, while the Lancashire Fusiliers' band played the Royal Salute. The officials were seated on a colourfully decorated platform next to a flagpole flying the Union Jack, and their speeches were broadcast through loudspeakers to the crowd of 12,000 Kamba gathered for the occasion.

The Kamba people frequently and successfully resisted the British colonialists, who wanted to seize their livestock by force, following the livestock control legislation of 1938. They fought with the British for a long time until the law was revoked. The Kamba people engaged in livestock keeping due to inadequate rainfall in their areas. Occasionally, a lack of rain in Kamba land is considered to be an event that requires prayer and cleansing. They perform a ritual dance (*kilumi*) accompanied by prayers, spiritual blessings, movements, and offerings as a way of a healing rite aimed at restoring environmental balance.[17]

[16] Myles Osborne, "The Kamba and Mau Mau: Ethnicity, Development and Chiefship," *The Journal of African History,* vol.43, No.1 (2010): 63-87.
[17] Geofry Muendo (71 years), interviewed by Daniel Katie: Makueni, Mbitini, Makueni, August 20th, 2025.

According to Kamba, *Kilumi* has been there since the beginning of their existence. The ritual stresses the symbolic dance movements as a way of achieving the goal of the ceremony. The dance is of spiritual essence that distinguishes itself from other dances of Africans and worldwide.[18] Dance rituals are of great importance since their practice enhance the transformation of people moving from one state of life to another. The ultimate goal of the ritual, through invoking spiritual intervention, is to solve the problem at hand.

Politically, the Kamba are considered to be peace-makers, and even during colonial resistance, pacification was mostly non-violent in nature. The most known Kamba leaders who resisted colonialism were *Syokimau, Muindi Mbingu,* and *Kyotune wa Kathukye*. Later leaders were Paule Ngei, Malu of Kilungu, and John David Kali. Kali and Ngei, due to their resistance, were imprisoned by the colonial government for the anti-protests. *Syotune wa Kathukye* led a peaceful protest to recover cattle taken by the British colonial government during one of their local raiding expeditions. Muindi Mbingu was arrested for the second time for leading another protest march to recover confiscated cattle around the Mua hills in Machakos County. Kali and Paul Ngei joined the Mau Mau movement to reclaim Kenya for the Kenyan citizens. It is estimated that the movement took place between 1952 and 1960. They faced charges of imprisonment in Kapenguria during the fight between the government and the freedom fighters.[19]

1.3.2 Decentralized Political System

Traditionally, the Akamba had a decentralized political system. There was no kingship or centralized authority in the Kamba community, unlike in some other African societies (e.g., Buganda or Zulu). Leadership was collective rather than individual. Instead, governance was organized around clans and councils of elders. The Akamba name for the clan was *Utui*, which

[18] James Malika and Stephen Musau (65) interviewed by Daniel Katie: Makueni, Mbitini, Makueni, August 20th, 2025.

[19] Josephine Katiti Kilonzo, "Impacts of Colonial Policies and Practices on Kamba Song and Dance Up To 1945," *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 25, no. 4, Series 5 (April 2020): 18–25,

varied in size and was grouped into 25 dispersed patrilineal units. Therefore, we have 14 major and 11 minor clans, for a total of 25.[20] Clans were led by elders who played a central role in resolving disputes, making decisions, and maintaining law and order. These elders, known as *Atumia ma Ithembo, or Ndua* were respected for their wisdom and experience. Each village or clan had its own governing council (*Kiama*)**,** which handled issues of land, marriage, conflict resolution, and rituals.

1.3.3 Age -Set System (*Nthini/Nzaiko*)

The Akamba also practiced an age-set system, which played a political and social role. In Kamba, men and women of the elder grade (*atumia*) served as political and spiritual authorities.[21] Boys were initiated into age-sets that progressed through life stages together, assuming responsibilities at various ages. The age-set system among the Akamba served both military and political functions, as members of the same age group were expected to defend the community and gradually join the decision-making councils as they aged.[22]

In the initiation into adulthood, the adolescent would be guided through a series of experiences contrived for that purpose, to learn the implications of the puberty changes.[23] After the initiation on was expected to conduct himself responsibly without degrading himself and also the family. In the Kamba community, circumcision was practised as part of the initiation rite. It was understood differently in Christianity, in the sense that to be a full member of the church did not involve any physical ordeals; it entailed catechetical preparations of conversion toward maturity in the Christian faith.

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[20] The Kamba People, *Oret,* retrieved from https://oret.africa/the-kamba (accessed 21 August 2025).
[21] Finke Jens, *Traditional Music and Cultures of Kenya*, Retrieved from https//www.bluegecko.org (accessed August 21, 2025)
[22] John Nkengasong Mugambi, *African Heritage and Contemporary Christianity*. (Nairobi: Longman Kenya Ltd 1998), 98.
[23] John Nkengasong Mugambi,1998*,* 98.

According to the Akamba, initiation rites were called "*Nzaiko."*[24] It was a process of making young men have manhood (*kusyoka Mwana waume*). The adolescents went through initiation rites at the age of 12 years, but their status became tied to age-grades, not collective age-sets. Among the Kamba, initiation is a stage that could never be skipped since it is a public recognition that the individual is now passing from childhood to adulthood and is ready to marry. The cutting of the flesh was very symbolic in that one was no longer a child and getting ready for the period of adulthood. The rite came with responsibilities and privileges at home and also in the community. They introduced the individual into adult life socially, religiously, physically, and psychologically.

Through these rites, Mukamba passed from one group to the next. The adolescence stage entails terms like junior elder (*mwanake),* medium elders (*Nthele),* and full elder (*atumia ma kivalo*), and the senior elders (*atumia ma Kisuka*). These details show that Kamba had age-grade than groups. The term *"Kisuka*" means a men's hut or council in each clan (*utui*) was constructed into six membership grades, such as the *atumia ma nzama* (judicial elders) and *atumia ma Ithembo* (Shrine elders) who held authority in legal and ritual spaces.[25]

1.3.4 Council of Elders (*Atumia ma Thome*)

The basic unit in Kamba society is the homestead (*Musyi*) grounded in *Utui,* which has its own council of elders (*Nzama*). The term *Nzama* serves as the administrative and juridical body at the community level.[26] *Nzama* has a role to play, like handling disputes, resolution, and customary law matters. It also adjudicates cases and prefers resolving conflicts through compensation rather than using punitive measures. The elders in each *Utui* operate at an intermediate territorial level. Each is *utui* or *Kivalo* run by elders progressing from lower elder

[24] Judith Mbula, *Our religious heritage* (Lagos: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd 1982), 75.
[25]John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*. 2nd ed. (London: Heinemann, 1991), 94.
[26] James Malika, (68 years), interviewed by Daniel Katie: Makueni, Mbitini, Makueni, August 20th, 2025.

grade (*atumia ma Kisuka*) to higher councils such as *Nzama* (administrative) and *Nzili* (inner council).

Regarding the roles played by the Council of Elders, a Swahili saying goes, "*Penye wazee hapaharibiki neno,"* meaning that (where there are elders, no word is lost). The Council of Elders was much respected and valued because of their wisdom, wise words, and the experience of life they had. Other roles played by the Council of Elders included the maintenance of justice and governance.[27] At the *Kivalo* level, the elder council arbitrates private offences and oversees local justice. When serious offences in the *utui* level are committed, they may invoke a customary process called *Kingoli*, similar to or practiced in the neighbouring communities.[28]

The elders emphasize restorative justice, where wrongdoings in the *utui* need compensation, irrespective of prioritizing reconciliation, intent, and community healing. Despite maintaining peace and harmony in the *utui,* sometimes they can declare war or negotiate peace, preside over religious and ritual ceremonies, console, offer communal advice, and generally govern the community. Some instances of cases within the *utui* or the community. Some cases that are of a family level are handled by the head of the family head but the unresolved cases escalate to clan elders. In a case that involves different clans, elders from both sides come together to resolve the matter. In cases where the adjudication is ineffective, a solemn oath known as the *Kithitu* serves as a powerful truth-test or curse, compelling confessions and often demanding ritual cleansing if invoked.[29]

[27] Boniface Mulu, "Why the Kamba Council of Elders exists, *Scholar Media Africa*, Retrieved from https://scholarmedia.africa (accessed August 22, 2025).
[28] The Kamba justice system. *Decolonial healing justice,* Retrieved from https//www.Gendersecurityproject.com (Accessed August 22, 2025).
[29] Stephen Wambua (69 years), interviewed by Daniel Katie: Makueni, Mbitini, August 20th, 2025.

1.3.5 Clan-Based System

The Kamba people were originally organized into around 25 dispersed patrilineal clans (*utui*) of different sizes, and these clans were often hostile toward each other. The Akamba have 14 major clans and 11 minor ones**,** making up a total of 25 clans. [30]As families grew over time, some naturally grew large enough to form independent clans, which is exactly what occurred among the Akamba. The social and territorial boundaries of these clans were quite flexible, shaped more by geographical movement and alliances than by rigid ancestral lines or fixed traditions. There was no centralized political authority, but during periods of external threats, the Kamba could coordinate military efforts across different clans for collective defence.[31]

Decisions that affected the wider community were made in clan assemblies known as Mbai, where important political matters were discussed and resolved. However, this traditional system was dismantled by the British in the 19th century, who instead introduced appointed leaders. Nowadays, elections and modern political systems have become the main sources of political leadership among the Kamba. Below is a list of the twenty-five clans of the Akamba. The 14 Major Clans are: *Akanga, Aketdini, Aketutu, Ambuane, Amoei, Amoieni, Amotei* – trappers, *Anzaone, Anzio, Asii, Atangoa, Atui* – blacksmiths, *Eembe,* and *Ethanga.* The 11 Minor Clans include: *Adine, Akeimei, Akuu, Amena, Amokabu, Amomone, Amooi, Amouti, Anilo, Aoani, Athonzo.*[32]

1.4 Akamba Ethnic Social Life

1.4.1 Family Structure and Kinship

The Akamba culture, the family, known as *Musyi,* forms the basic and most important unit of the community. It plays a central role in shaping social, economic, and cultural life. The

[30] Kamba People, *African Tribes: 101 Last Tribes*, Retrieved from http://www.101lasttribes.com. (accessed August 22, 2025).
[31]Stephen Wambua (69 years), interviewed by Daniel Katie: Makueni, Mbitini, Makueni, August 20th, 2025.
[32] Kamba People, *African Tribes: 101 Last Tribes*, Retrieved from http://www.101lasttribes.com. (accessed August 22, 2025).

extended family or clan, known as *Mbai,* consists of several related families united by a common ancestry.[33] The man, often called *Tata, Nau,* or *Asa,* is the head of the family and takes on leadership responsibilities within both the family and the society or wider community. He is typically involved in economic activities that are valued by the Akamba, such as hunting, trading, cattle herding, or farming. Meanwhile, women are primarily responsible for cultivating the land, ensuring food is there for the family. They also manage household affairs and take on the vital role of taking and nurturing children, making them central to both the family structure and community sustainability.

A woman, regardless of her husband's profession, owns the piece of land upon becoming part of his household. She cultivates the land and is primarily responsible for producing most of the food consumed by the family. Nowadays, you will often find that husbands and wives practice farming, unlike before. Common crops grown include millet, beans, arrowroots, maize, sweet potatoes, pumpkins, pigeon peas, leafy greens, cassava, and yams, particularly in the cooler highland areas such as Kangundo, Kilungu, and Mbooni.[34] As the mother plays the central role in raising the children, and even adult children, they are expected to show unwavering respect for her wishes. She is affectionately referred to as *Mwaitu* (grandmother), meaning our One, signifying her revered status in the family.

In Akamba society, there is little differentiation between a person's biological children and their nieces and nephews. The community places strong emphasis on extended family ties, and kinship is expressed through different terms. A maternal uncle is referred to as ***inaimiwa,*** while a maternal aunt is called *mwendya.* On the paternal side, both uncles and aunts are addressed as *mwendw'au.* When referring to paternal cousins, the terms *wa-asa* or *wa'ia* are used; males are called *mwanaasa* or *mwanaa'ia,* and females are known as mwiitu wa'asa or

[33] The Kamba people, *Oret.* Retrieved from https://oret.africa/the-kamba (accessed 21 August 2025).
[34] Elizabeth Akinyi Nzioki, *Women in Food Production: Their Work and Constraints: A Case Study in Mumbuni Location (Machakos District, Kenya)* (Addis Ababa: Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa, 1991), 26.

mwiitu wa'ia. Maternal cousins are identified as *wamwendya*, with male cousins called *mwanaa mwendya* and female cousins *mwiitu wa mwendya.*[35] Children are accustomed to moving freely between different households within the extended family. Aunts and uncles not only welcome them but also take on parental responsibilities.

In Kamba, Relatives serve as *de facto* parents, helping to raise the children and reinforcing a culture of collective caregiving and belonging within the broader family unit.[36] Grandparents are referred to as *Susu* or *Usui* for grandmothers, and *Umau* for grandfathers. Due to their age, they typically assist with lighter household tasks. These may include activities such as leather tanning, rope making, carving beehives and three-legged stools, decorating and cleaning calabashes, as well as crafting bows and arrows. Elderly women often remain active in farming, which is valued as a means of maintaining independence and financial stability. Many also engage in local market trade, though not exclusively. In the contemporary world, Akamba families, particularly in urban areas, women increasingly pursue careers in various professional fields like education, healthcare, law, administration, tailoring, and other roles aligned with Kenya's evolving socioeconomic landscape.

1.4.2 Ethnic Groups

The Kamba people, or Akamba, are one of the major Bantu ethnic groups in Kenya, with a population of 4.66 million according to the 2019 census. Traditionally inhabiting the Lower Eastern region of Kenya, the Kamba are known for their resilience, rich oral traditions, craftsmanship, and dynamic adaptation to both rural and urban environments. Over time, scholars and cultural records such as those from Oret-Africa have categorized the Kamba into three primary sub-groups based on geographical, historical linguistic, and cultural distinctions: the Masaku, Mumoni, and Kitui.[37] Though united by a common language (Kikamba) and

[35] Andrew Katalo, (80 years), interviewed by Daniel Katie: Makueni, Mbitini, Makueni, August 20th, 2025.
[36] Kamba Tribe of Kenya-*History, Culture and Traditions. Kenya Tsavo Safaris*, Retrieved from https:/www. Kenyatsavosafaries.com (accessed August 27, 2025).
[37] The Kamba people, *Oret,* retrieved from https://oret.africa/the-kamba (accessed 21 August 2025).

cultural core, these sub-groups exhibit unique adaptations and characteristics to their respective environments and historical experiences.

1.4.2.1 Masaku Sub-group

The Kamba people of Machakos and Makueni form the southern part of the Akamba community and are often referred to collectively as the Masaku. People from these two counties are referred to as Masaku simply because of their shared language, cultural traditions, and historical ties. Machakos and Makueni counties were once part of the larger Machakos District and are situated in Kenya's Lower Eastern region, Southeast of Nairobi. With a combined population exceeding 2.4 million, the Masaku and Makueni Kamba are among the most urbanized and socially dynamic sections of the Kamba people.[38] Their ease to the capital and early contact with colonial institutions facilitated greater access to education, Christianity, and political participation. Due to this proximity, many people have migrated to Nairobi and other towns, forming a large part of the urban workforce, while still maintaining strong ties to their rural homesteads (*musyi*).

Culturally, the people of Makueni and Machakos are known for their skills in making wood carving, beadwork, and basket weaving, which not only serve economic purposes but also carry cultural symbolism. Additionally, they practice traditional rites of passage for male initiation ceremonies and maintain community decision-making through councils of elders (nzama). The Masaku dialect, spoken in both Machakos and Makueni, is considered the standard form of Kikamba and is widely used in education, media, and religious texts. Despite increased urbanization and modernization, the Kamba of these regions continue to uphold their heritage through music (e.g., *Kilumi* drums), storytelling, and clan-based social systems, reflecting a dynamic blend of tradition and progress.[39]

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[38] Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, *Kenya Population and Housing Census, Population by County and Sub-County,* vol.1 (Nairobi: Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019), 45.
[39]Kenyan History. *The history and culture of the Kamba community*. Retrieved August from https://kenyary.com (accessed August 27, 2025).

1.4.2.2 Kitui Sub-group

The Kitui Kamba reside in Kitui County, a semi-arid region in eastern Kenya with an estimated population of over 1.1 million. Due to the challenging environmental conditions, the Kitui Kamba have traditionally relied on dryland farming, livestock rearing, and indigenous knowledge systems to sustain their livelihoods. Their landscape is characterized by acacia trees, dry riverbeds, and seasonal vegetation factors that have shaped their resilient and resourceful culture.[40]

This sub-group is renowned for its oral heritage, including proverbs (*Thimo*), riddles (*mivithya*), and folktales (*mbano*), which serve as tools for education and moral instruction. They also engage in crafts such as basket weaving, pottery, and metalwork, with some clans historically known as blacksmiths and herbalists. The Kitui Kamba spiritual life is a fusion of Christianity and indigenous beliefs, particularly during events such as rainmaking ceremonies (*Kilumi*) or rites conducted at sacred groves (*Ithembo*). Despite modernization, Kitui Kamba have maintained a deep sense of communal identity, often exemplified by extended family support systems and traditional leadership structures.[41]

1.4.2.3 Mumoni Sub-group

The Mumoni Kamba form the most northerly Kamba sub-group, living in the Mumoni Hills of Northern Kitui County, near the border with Tharaka and Tana River counties. Their population is estimated at around 29,000 people (2019 census). Isolated by rugged terrain and poor infrastructure, the Mumoni have retained many traditional linguistic, spiritual, and cultural practices that are now less common among their Southern Kamba relatives. Their

[40] Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. (2019). *Kenya Population and Housing Census, Population by County and Sub-County*. Nairobi. Retrieved from: https://www.knbs.or.ke(accessed 9th September 2025).

[41]Kenyan History. *The history and culture of the Kamba community*. Retrieved August from https://kenyary.com (accessed August 27, 2025).

lifestyle is predominantly pastoral and subsistence-based, with families relying on livestock, drought-resistant crops, and seasonal foraging.

The Mumoni dialect of Kikamba contains linguistic archaisms that offer insights into the older forms of the language. Cultural identity remains strong through traditional initiation rites, age-grade systems, and rainmaking rituals that are often practiced without significant Christian influence.[42] The Mumoni Kamba often serve as custodians of ancient Kamba customs, preserving oral epics, ancestral songs, and spiritual dances that link them to their ancestral past. Their isolation has also fostered a strong sense of clan loyalty and mutual support, which helps them cope with the region's economic and environmental challenges.

1.4.3 Religious Aspect

Kamba traditionally possessed a well-developed religious system. They believed in and worshipped the Supreme Being, like any other religion, like Christianity. Although traditionally the term religion was not there, they used the term *Kilumi,* which is a ritual dance. Kamba called their God 'Ngai', the creator, whose name was appropriated by the missionaries to designate the Judeo-Christian God.[43] Contrary to some early Western anthropological claims, which often misrepresented African spirituality, the Akamba did not practice ancestor worship; they honoured them through naming and libation. Instead, they had a longstanding concept of God, which they believed in even before the coming of the missionaries. The presence of missionaries had an influence on the Kamba faith afterwards. This clearly explains that the idea of God did not originate with missionaries, as many people think.

1.4.3.1 The Creed

According to Mbiti, Africans are notoriously religious, and each people has its own religious system with a set of beliefs and practices. According to Kamba religion, creed

[42] John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*. 2nd ed. (London: Heinemann, 1991), 94.
[43] Katherine Luongo, "Prophecy, Possession, and Politics: Negotiating the Supernatural in 20th Century Machakos, Kenya." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies, vol.* 45, no.2(2012): 191–216.

summarizes the individual's self-awareness, his relationship with others, and with the physical and spiritual world. The creed summarises Mukamba's way of life. The creed, which is mythologically assumed, is handed over from one generation to the other. It identifies and educates Kamba on their religious beliefs and values. The Mukamba *kivindyo* believes in God (*Ngai*) in sacrificing for rainfall, in ritual, medicine, and in misfortunes that are brought about by the evil people in the society, so that the barren woman has children. He believes and values God's blessings.[44] The central thing for Kamba people is worship of the supreme being. In most African peoples, we have the creed of self-affirmation. Among the Gikuyu, we have *Ciana-cia Gikuyu na Mumbi* (the children of Gikuyu and *Mumbi*); there is a similar creed which affirms the relationship between the people, their god, and ancestors.

The creed among the Kamba forms the foundation of their religious faith as their belief system. A portion of this creed declares that worshipping *Ngai* (God) brings blessings to humanity. Although the Akamba's concept of God is genuine and meaningful, it remains, like all human understandings of the divine, an approximation of God's true nature. The traditional creed of the Akamba summarizes the basis of their religious beliefs. This creed goes as follows in Kikamba:

> Nyie ni Mukamba kivindyo ula wisi na wikiia kana ng'ondu yi mwana. Na ninisi maundu ala matonya kuete mauthuku na ninthembeaa Ngai mbua ikaua. Na wimamya ni Mukamba Kivindyo vyu ninikiaa kana ngungu yatonywa ng'ondu ni syaa. Ninisi maundu ala me muisyo na ngamanya kana kuvoya Ngai ni kuetae uathimo na muuo.
>
> Translation in English
>
> I am an absolute Mukamba who knows and believes that purity, ritual medicine, *Ng'ondu* can bring forth a child. And I know the things that can cause misfortune, and I offer sacrifice to God for rain to fall and to know that I am an absolute *Mukamba Mukamba kivindyo.* I believe that when a barren woman is treated with purifying ritual medicine, *emutonye ng'omdu* will bring forth a child. I know right from wrong (*na wisi maundu ala me muisyo*), and know that worshipping God (Ngai) restores blessing to man.[45]

[44] Judith Mbula, *Our religious heritage* (Lagos: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd 1982), 40.
[45] Judith Mbula, *Our religious heritage* (Lagos: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd 1982), 40.

The universal concept of God, according to many tribes, is through experience, finding or experiencing that aligns with the nature and character. This is because human language and understanding are inherently limited due to a lack of sources and can only describe God in symbolic or partial ways. Even with divine revelation, human beings can never fully comprehend God, who transcends all human qualities. No matter how many ideas or words we use to describe God, they will always fall short due to our finite nature, which contrasts sharply with God's infinite nature of being.[46] Even though that African are notoriously religious, no race or religion can claim to have complete knowledge of God, but each people have their own religious systems with a set of beliefs and practices.[47] Human beings, despite their intellectual capabilities, remain finite in comparison to the infinite nature of God. We can only grasp partial knowledge of God through His creation. Revelation, such as that found in the Bible, does not offer exhaustive insight into the divine. Our limited human condition places natural boundaries on how much we can truly know about the supreme being.

1.4.4 Kamba Culture: Traditional Beliefs and Practices

"Cultures may differ significantly with respect to tightness of organization, flexibility, and capacity and readiness for change."[48] This expresses that culture is not rigid, but is dynamic. Some cultures change and fade gradually. Every culture has its own set of beliefs concerning the ultimate nature of reality, which is a metaphysical worldview. The set of beliefs forms the basis of religion for every culture. Religion is a part and forms the basis of culture. In this context, it refers to the complete range of ways in which religion's central concern is manifested. Religion takes shape and becomes visible through cultural expressions.

[46] Rose M. Mutunga, *The Akamba Traditional Religion and Christianity*. Nairobi: Department of Philosophy (Master's thesis, University of Nairobi, 1994), 108.
[47] John S. Mbiti, 1990, 1.
[48] Symmes C. Oliver, *Individuality, Freedom of Choice, and Cultural Flexibility of the Kamba*, *American Anthropologist*, New Series Vol. 67, No. 2 (April 1965), 421–428.

Traditional ethnography reporting in a presumably typical segment of a culture is taken as a representative and serves as a model for description. For the Kamba people, their own culture is expressed in language, Art, food, dance customs, traditions, and religion, just to mention. The local language is Kikamba, grounded in human interaction with reality. It serves multiple functions like a medium for expression and communication, a tool for literature and poetry, and a means to convey and articulate our deepest spiritual concerns. In each context, the language used aligns with its specific purpose. Religious language, in particular, can take on various forms, such as narrative, liturgy, prophetic speech, or poetry. In line with the aforesaid:

> My dominant impression of the Kamba culture is that it is extremely elastic. There is a great deal of give and take in it, and there is a fuzziness and lack of precision about many facets of the culture that goes deeper than the mere existence of alternative ways of doing things. There is something more involved here than the expectable differences between the rules of the game and the way the game is actually played. It is the thesis of this paper that the Kamba represent a case of (1) a looseness of basic structural orientation, (2) a shallow cultural commitment on the part of individuals, and (3) a relatively high degree of cultural adaptability. It is also characteristic of the Kamba that they show a strong emphasis on individualism and freedom of choice within broadly defined limits. The degree to which the factor of individualism forms a necessary or frequent component in this series, in the sense of a possibly widely recurring culture type of functional correlates, is an open question. Nevertheless, it is an important element in Kamba culture, and can be shown to fit with some neatness into the basic cultural matrix.[49]

1.4.4.1 Supreme Being and Creation Myth

Every tribe has its belief in the supreme being. Every tribe has a name that they use to describe their God and its meaning. The personal names given to God are very ancient and not easily traceable through language. The Maasai, who are the neighbours of the Kamba, believe that Enkai is beyond what people can know.[50] They believe that Enkai is the giver of cattle and everything that they possess. The word that Kamba use to describe their God is *mulungu,*

[49]Symmes C. Oliver, *Individuality, Freedom of Choice, and Cultural Flexibility of the Kamba*, *American Anthropologist*, New Series Vol 67, no. 2 (April 1965), 421–428.
[50] Judith Mbula, *Our religious heritage* (Lagos: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1982, 41.

mumbi, mwanguangi, or *Ngai* (the creator of everything). The personal names given to God are descriptive of his identity.[51]

Traditionally, every tribe has a myth about its origin. The myth is to them not only a source of self-affirmation but also links them with the creator. The Akamba myth recounts the following story: In the beginning, Mulungu created a man and a woman at dawn, and they were tossed by Mulungu from heaven until they landed on a stone on Nzaui Mound. They were then called *Mbai ya Mulata Ivia*.[52] He placed them on a rock at Nzaui, where to this day, their footprints, along with those of their livestock, remain visible. Following this, Mulungu caused a heavy rainfall, and from the many surrounding anthills, another man and woman emerged. These two became the founders of the *Aimo*, known as the 'spirits clan.

It happened that the heavenly couple bore only sons, while the anthill couple had only daughters. Consequently, the heavenly family paid dowry for the daughters of the anthill pair. Over time, both their family and livestock multiplied significantly. However, as their wealth grew, they neglected to offer gratitude to *Mulungu*. In response, *Mulungu* struck them with a severe famine.[53] This hardship caused the once-united family to scatter in search of food. Some among them became the Meru, others the Kikuyu, while some remained behind as the original people, the Akamba. Notably, the Akamba tradition does not specify how many children each of the original couples had.

Beliefs and customs always go together and cover all areas of life. They generally deal with religious ideas. Customs deal with what people normally approve of and do.[54] Every tribe has its own supreme creator. According to Akamba, or Kamba, they traditionally hold a monotheistic belief in a single, supreme Creator known by various names, Ngai, Mulungu, Asa (meaning "the strong lord" or "the father"), *Mumbi* ("the Creator"), and *Mwatuangi* ("the

[51] John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*. 2nd ed. (London: Heinemann, 1991), 45.
[52] Judith Mbula, 1982, 8.
[53] John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*. 2nd ed. (London: Heinemann, 1991), 156-157.
[54] John S. Mbiti, 1991, 26.

finger-divider"). This invisible and transcendent deity is believed to reside in the sky, referred to in Kamba as *yayayani* or *ituni*.

Ngai or Mulungu is revered by the Kamba as the omnipotent Creator of life on earth, the giver of rain, fertility, and moral order. He is also seen as the ultimate Protector and a merciful, though distant, divine presence not actively involved in everyday human affairs. The Kamba believe that God does only what is good for them, and therefore, they have no reason for complaint. He is regarded as both "the God of comfort" and "the Rain Giver." Rain is sometimes symbolically referred to as "the saliva of God," and for this reason, spitting particularly on a child is viewed as an act of profound blessing.[55]

As a God of consolation and sustenance, he intervenes when human help fails or is delayed. During planting seasons, Kamba prays for his blessing upon their seeds and labor in the fields, trusting in his provision for a fruitful harvest[56]. They see him not only as a distant Creator but also as a compassionate force who sustains life when it is most vulnerable. They also conceptualize the heavens and the earth as "equal-sized bowls" belonging to Ngai's (God) property by right of creation and ownership. All within them, including livestock, are believed to be his possessions. According to tradition, he once lowered this livestock from the sky and gave, or more accurately, lent it to the Kamba, further manifesting his role as both benefactor and sustainer.

1.4.4.2 Belief in Ancestral Spirits

In the beginning, *Mulungu* (creator) created the spirits.[57] Besides their belief in God, Akamba also believed in the existence of spirits known as *Aimu* or *Maimu* hold a central position in Kamba spiritual life, serving as intermediaries between the living and the Supreme Being. "Some spirits, it is believed, were created at the beginning of time to serve the creator;

[55] Kamba People, *African Tribes: 101 Last Tribes*. Retrieved from: http. African 101 last tribes (accessed August 18, 2025).
[56] James Malika (68 years), interviewed by Daniel Katie: Makueni, Mbitini, August 20th, 2025.
[57]Judith Mbula Bahemuka, (1982), 9.

the second group is made up of the ancestral spirits, while the third group are evil spirits who create trouble and go about punishing human beings.[58] According to traditional African religious beliefs, the world was inhabited by spiritual beings with whom a peaceful and harmonious relationship must be maintained at all times."[59] These beings are the spirits and are believed to affect our daily lives, varying from one community to another. The colonial and contemporary anthropological sources concur that:

> Ancestral spirits, called aimu in Kikamba, have occupied a central space in Kamba cosmology. In the early twentieth century, these spirits were regarded as residing around sacred fig trees where households-built shrines, called ithembo in Kikamba, and offered obligatory animal sacrifices to the ancestral spirits who, in turn, looked after the well-being of their living kin. Not all aimu were benevolent or even neutral actors.[60]

Rather, the identities and actions of the *aimu ya kitombo* were entangled with the highly malevolent (and highly lethal) brand of Kamba witchcraft, called *uoi in Kikamba*. *Aimu ya Kitombo* were believed to be the unsettled spirits of the Kamba people who had killed their neighbors through black magic.

Death did not mark the end of the physical existence of ancestors; it was believed that they continued to influence the lives of the people positively or negatively.[61] The Kamba conceptualizes the universe as a unified realm that bridges visible and invisible realities; death marks a metamorphosis into the spiritual world rather than the cessation of existence. These ancestral spirits are actively remembered through libations, offerings, and occasionally believed to reincarnate in newborns, thus continuing the cycle of life. Akamba believe that when someone dies become a spirit. According to Mbiti, a Scholar who conducted extensive and intensive studies on African religious heritage, claims the following about the spirits and the destiny of the soul;

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[58] Judith Mbula, *Our religious heritage* (Logos: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1982), 52.
[59]Jesse N.K. Mugambi, *African Heritage and Contemporary Christianity*. (Nairobi: Longman Kenya Ltd, 1998), 64.
[60] Katherine Luongo, "Prophecy, Possession, and Politics: Negotiating the Supernatural in 20th Century Machakos, Kenya." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies, vol.* 45, no.2(2012), 191–216.
[61]John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, (London: Heinemann, 1991), 77.

> As soon as a person dies, he becomes a living-dead is a spirit in the sense that he is no longer in the body, and yet he retains features which describe him in physical terms. He still retains his personal name so that when he appears to human members of his family, they recognize him as so-and-so. He is counted as part of the family in many ways, even though people know and realize that he has forsaken them. Part of his being survives in the memory of those who knew him while he lived, and in the children who survive him. It is primarily his family which "keeps him going", so to speak. When the living-dead appears, it is to those within his household or family, and rarely, if ever, to people not immediately related to him. But however real the living-dead may seem to those who see him, there is no affectionate warmth such as one witnesses when relatives or friends meet in this life. Socially, therefore, something has happened, something has cooled off, and a real distance between the living-dead and human beings has begun to grow.... The personal immortality of the living-dead is, for all practical purpose's dependent on his progenies. ... Human beings keep the relationship going between them and their living-dead chiefly through libation, offerings of food and other items, prayers, and observation of proper rites toward the departed or instructions from them. This process continues on a personal level as long as someone who knew the living-dead is still alive. This may be up to four or five generations. By that time, the living-dead has sunk further and further into the Zamani period, with only loose strings of memory still holding him feebly in the human Sasa period. When the last person who knew him dies, the living-dead is entirely removed from the state of personal immortality, and he sinks beyond the horizon of the Sasa period. He is now dead, as far as human beings are concerned, and the process of dying is now completed. The living-dead is now a spirit, which enters the state of collective immortality. It has "lost" its personal name, as far as human beings are concerned, and with it goes also the human personality. It is now an 'it' and no longer a 'he' or 'she': it is now one of myriads of spirits who have lost their humanness. This, for all practical purposes, is the final destiny of the human soul.[62]

Mbiti researched the traditional beliefs of the Akamba people regarding spirits and the fate of the soul. According to him, Kamba have a common belief that the living and the dead form a single life united, relying on each other. It is believed that the dead remain present among the living even though they are invisible. They may sometimes appear in vision or dreams in both visible and audible forms. These deceased individuals are ancestors and play a significant role in mediating between God and Akamba.[63]

Ancestors are remembered through libation, which is a sign of reverence. It is a constant interaction between the living and the dead. Before eating or drinking, the traditional Akamba first offer a portion to the ancestors, placing a bit of food or pouring a few drops of a drink on

[62] John S. Mbiti, *African Religious and Philosophy* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1987), 162-163.
[63] John S. Mbiti, 1987, 161.

the ground as a way of inclusion and respect.[64] These actions are a symbolic reaffirmation of the spiritual realm's importance within their universal framework. Kamba believe that death does not end kinship ties; the relationship between the living and the dead is considered ongoing and unbroken.

However, if the ancestors are neglected or forgotten, they express their displeasure through misfortunes, particularly through illness, famine, drought, or even death. When this happens, it is believed that the ancestors often communicate their desires through a chosen individual, making specific requests that need to be fulfilled. At other times, medicine men are also consulted when needs arise.[65] The request may include some practices like offering an animal or certain foods. If the demands are ignored, the problems experienced in society may persist. The living dead, through this interaction and libation, continue to exert influence on the people. Traditional Akamba God intercedes for people just like Mary, the mother of Jesus, does between the Catholics and God.

1.4.4.3 Diviners and Medicine Men

Spiritual mediators such as diviners (*mundu mue*), healers, or medicine men (*mganga or mundu mugu/mwoi*) play crucial roles in diagnosing spiritual disturbances, illness, or misfortune. They find out hidden secrets or knowledge and pass it to the people. "Minor complaints like stomach upsets, headache, cuts, and skin ulcers are normally treated with herbs and other medicines generally known by each community.[66] They use divination tools such as calabashes, cowrie shells, rods, and herbal concoctions to interpret spiritual signs. Ritual cleansings and offerings, often conducted under spirit possession, are integral to their work. *Syokimau,* a famed medicine woman, is remembered because of his prophetic guidance in times of stress.

[64] John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*. 2nd ed. (London: Heinemann, 1991), 77.
[65] John S. Mbiti, *African Religious and Philosophy* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1987), 80.
[66] John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, (London: Heinemann, 1991), 152.

1.4.4.4 Rituals and Ceremonies

"A rite or ritual is a set form of carrying out a religious action or ceremony."[67] Rituals and ceremonies take place during worship. Worship may be defined as reverence and respect paid to God. Worshipping among the traditional Akamba involved praying, giving of sacrifices and offerings, among other things. "The distinction between sacrifice and offerings is this: sacrifice involves the shedding of human beings, animals, or birds; offerings do not involve blood but concern the giving of all other things, such as foodstuffs, water, milk, honey, or money."[68] In this context, libation is done by the head of the family at the beginning of meals.

Sacrifices are done by elders when the reason arises, for instance, during epidemics, when there is drought, and famine. Some of the rituals are performed during the rainy season (rainy making) in the form of sacrifice, while others are done for cleansing but not inform of sacrifice. Kamba use a tree called *mtaa* for cleansing. Sacrifices and rituals are done by a priest (Athembi/Muthembi in singular), who offers the sacrifice. The act is called *kuthemba.* The sacrifices are done in Shrine (*Ithembo/Mathembo* in Plural). What is demanded of them is ritual purity. Other sacrifices are offered by both men and women. These are some of the solemn sacrifices done by Kamba when communicating with their creator through the spirit of their ancestors.[69]

"Through music, singing, and dancing, people are able to participate emotionally and physically in the act of worship."[70] The term for dance in Kamba people is *Kilumi,* which has therapeutic value. Functions as a therapy for those who are under the influence of a disease manifested in different ways, possessed by an evil spirit. *Kilumi* drives away the evil spirits. It is also conducted during the rainy season. Sacrifice to ancestors was accompanied by *kilumi,*

[67] John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, (London: Heinemann, 1991), 126.
[68]John S. Mbiti, 1991, 61.
[69] Judith Mbula, *Our religious heritage* (Logos: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1982), 58.
[70] John S. Mbiti, 1991, 61.

which brought socialization between the middle-aged and the elderly. The principle underlying the therapeutic value of *Kilumi* dance was faith.

Beside *Kilumi*, Kamba also had other varieties of traditional dances like, *Kamandiko* (modern disco held after wedding party), *Mbalya* or *Ngutha* (dance for young people for entertainment after daily chores), *Mwilu* (dance for circumcision), and *Mwali* dance accompanied by a song to criticise anti-social behaviours.[71] Kamba also believed in taboos, meaning to forbid and prohibition in a broad way. The concept of taboo presumes that every individual has a ritual value (cleanliness), which should not be allowed to come into contact with certain objects or persons

1.5 Economic Setup

Historically, the Kamba people were long-distance traders. Due to their strategic location between the Kenyan coast and the interior regions of East Africa, living in semi-arid areas, agriculture could not sustain them; they engaged in trade to acquire goods such as bead salt and metal tools from coastal ports, for instance, Mombasa, while supplying ivory, animal hides, and agricultural produce from the interior. Kamba served as intermediaries between Arab and Swahili traders and other tribes in the upcountry. They became skilled caravan leaders, organising groups of traders and pack animals to transport goods over long distances. Through these networks, the Akamba acted as important middlemen, facilitating economic growth and cultural exchange between the Kenyan coast and the interior regions of Africa.[72]

1.5.1 Subsistence Farming

"Kamba agriculture was mainly a subsistence agriculture. On their small plots in the Reserve, they planted millet, sorghum, cassava, tobacco, sugar-cane, and sometimes yams in

[71] Stephen Mutuku (70 years), interviewed by Daniel Katie: Makueni, Mbitini, 27th August 2025.
[72]Kenyan History. A Look into the History and Culture of the Kamba Community. Retrieved from: https://kenyanhistory.com(accessed 16th September 20225).

the Athi River Valley."[73] These are some of the staple crops grown in Ukambani. The Akamba (Kamba) people of Eastern Kenya traditionally were hunters and gatherers. As time transitioned, they started practicing semi-nomadic cattle herding. With time, they started practicing an agricultural lifestyle, especially in regions like the Mbooni Hills, where higher rainfall encouraged farming activities. "Over time, shifting cultivation became a primary means of subsistence, and as population pressure increased, the community adopted agriculture more intensively to meet some of their basic needs."[74]

During the colonial period, Akamba farmers demonstrated remarkable adaptability as a result of climatic changes. Despite environmental degradation and unfavourable policies targeting pastoralism, they came up with the deployment of ox-drawn ploughs and engaging in intensive market gardening activities. Their creativity was also deployed in soil and water conservation measures, often undertaken without government support. Moreover, environmental historians note that colonial disruption eventually accelerated the shift from traditional land-use systems toward more settled and intensive cultivation patterns, reflecting a melding of indigenous ecological knowledge with emerging agricultural skills and techniques.[75]

1.5.2 Commercial Agriculture

The Kamba people of eastern Kenya shifted from subsistence farming to commercial agriculture, supported by both county and national initiatives, depending on the climatic conditions. For instance, in Makueni County (Kibwezi), sisal farming has grown due to its drought resistance and profitability, with local governments providing decorticators to support

[73]Vincent Simuyu, "Land and Politics in Ukambani from the End of the 19th Century Up To 1933." *Présence Africaine,* Vol. 89. (1974), 101-146.
[74]Jens Finke, *Traditional Music & Cultures of Kenya*, Retrieved from https://www.bluegecko.org(accessed August 2025).
[75]Lydia K. Muendo and Edwin Gimode, "Movement, Settlement and Land-Use by the Akamba of Machakos County up to c.1895 in Kenya," *Edition Consortium Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Studies* 4, no. 1 (February 10, 2022): 346–360.

processing. This has helped the farmers to earn a living. In some parts of *Makueni, Kangundo, Tala, Misyani, kinyui* and *Thika,* coffee farming is being revived through the distribution of seedlings, the strengthening of cooperatives, and the modernization of processing infrastructure.[76] This has helped in the growth of the economy, thus uplifting the status of the people In some parts of Makueni, cotton cultivation is being revitalized in some parts of Makueni through the supply of hybrid seeds, which offer higher yields and better pest resistance.

Moreover, in Makueni**,** orange farming has also become an important commercial venture, benefiting from the region's semi-arid climate and rising demand in both local and export markets. Beyond field crops, the region is advancing in fruit-based agro-industrial ventures. Even though Citrus does well in Makueni, currently, farmers are struggling with giant dodder that attaches itself to the plant.[77] In Emali, watermelon farming and fresh juice vending have become increasingly profitable for local traders.

The most notable development is the Kalamba mango processing plant in Makueni, which has expanded from producing mango puree to ready-to-drink juice sold under brands like "Makueni Juice" and "Kalamba Juice. It was officially launched during mashujaa celebration at Matiliku by Governor Mutula Kilonzo Jr October 20, 2024. With a capacity to process thousands of liters daily and full certification by the Kenya Bureau of Standards, the factory supports both local consumption and export.[78] These developments illustrate a broader shift among the Kamba toward diversified, climate-resilient commercial farming and value addition, which continues to transform rural livelihoods across Ukambani.

[76] Stephen Muthoka, (65 years), interviewed by Daniel Katie: Makueni, Mbitini, 1st September, 2025.
[77]Justus Mulinge and Gilbert Ndutu Munywoki, "An Explorative Survey on Challenges Facing Citrus Farmers in Makueni County, Kenya." *IASR Journal of Agriculture and Life Sciences.* Vol 2, no.2 (March-April 2020), 1-10.
[78]Government of Makueni County, "Ready to Drink Kalamba Juice Launched," Makueni County Government. retrieved from https://makueni.go.ke(accessed from 5 September 2025).

1.5.3 Trade

Originally, the Kamba were hunters and gatherers, like many Bantu groups. The Akamba were originally long-distance traders, but later adopted agriculture due to the availability of the new land that they came to occupy. Central to this transformation was the trade in elephant ivory. Akamba not only acted as traders but also as skilled elephant hunters, supplying local merchants and caravan traders.[79] Alongside ivory, they traded locally produced goods such as brass amulets, cane beer (sugarcane wine), brass tools, weapons (spears and poisoned arrows), clothing, beads, millet, and cattle, among others. This was termed the barter trade with the Kikuyu, Maasai, Meru, and Embu People in the interior, and the Mijikenda people of the coast practiced it before the arrival of the Arabs.[80]

The Akamba played a central role in the expanding northern coastal caravan trade, taking on key roles such as porters, caravan leaders, and organizers. In response to growing commercial opportunities, they adapted their social and political structures to support trade. This shift not only enhanced their economic position but also increased their influence in regional trade networks.[81] Their trade networks spanned a vast region from the Indian Ocean in the east to Lake Victoria in the west and northward to Lake Turkana. This extensive commerce helped the Akamba buffer against the frequent droughts and famines experienced in their homeland, strengthening their economic resilience.

Beyond trade, the Akamba are also renowned for their artistic talents in wood carving, basketry, beekeeping, and pottery crafts that continue to thrive and are displayed in galleries and craft shops across Kenya.[82] Among the Kamba people of east-central Kenya, decorating calabashes either by carving with knives or stippling with awls was once a widespread tradition.

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[79]Edward I. Steinhart, "Elephant Hunting in 19th-Century Kenya: Kamba Society and Ecology in Transformation," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 33, no. 2 (2001): 335–349.
[80]Judith Mbula, *Our Religious Heritage* (Lagos: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1982), 2.
[81]Edward I. Steinhart, "Elephant Hunting in 19th-Century Kenya: Kamba Society and Ecology in Transformation," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 33, no. 2 (2001): 335–349.
[82] Dora Lambrecht, "New Basketry in Kenya," *African Arts* Vol 15, No. 1 (November 1981): 63–66.

Today, these intricately carved calabashes remain highly sought-after items in Nairobi's fast-growing art and handicrafts market.[83] Among the prominent descendants of the Kamba people are notable businessmen, politicians, and professionals who have made significant contributions to the region's development. Today, the Akamba people represent a dynamic community that successfully bridges their rich historical legacy with modern economic and social realities across Kenya.

1.6 History of the Diocese of Wote

1.6.1 Establishment and Inauguration of the Diocese of Wote

The Catholic Diocese of Wote was officially established on 22 July 2023 by Pope Francis, covering an area of about 8,009 km². It was erected as a result of an increase in the growth of pastoral needs. It was carved from the diocese of Machakos and placed under the ecclesiastical province of the Archdiocese of Nairobi. It marked a significant milestone in strengthening the Church's presence and mission in the region of Ukambani. Rt. Rev. bishop Paul Kariuki Njiru was appointed the first bishop after its erection.[84] St. Joseph the Worker became the Cathedral of the diocese of Wote.

The diocese was officially inaugurated on 30th September, where Bishop Kariuki was canonically installed at St. Joseph the Worker Catholic Church, Wote. The installation ceremony was presided over by Archbishop Hubertus Matheus Maria van Megen, the Apostolic Nuncio to Kenya, and attended by bishops, clergy, religious, and lay faithful from within and outside the country.[85] The ceremony marked a historic milestone for the catholic church in Makueni County. It symbolised a new dawn to the peoples of Wote in terms of pastoral care, evangelization, and ecclesial identity, thus enabling the Church to respond more

[83] Stafford Kay, "Peter Nzuki: Calabash Carver of Kenya," *African Arts* Vol 12, No. 1 (November 1978): 40–41.
[84] Vatican News, "Pope Francis Erects New Diocese of Wote in Kenya and Appoints Its First Bishop," Retrieved from: https://www.vaticannews.va(accessed 14th January 2026).
[85] Holy See Press Office, "Resignations and Appointments, 22 July 2023," Vatican City, retrieved from https://press.vatican.va(accessed January 7th, 2026).

effectively to the needs of the Christian spiritual and social. One of the pastoral needs that has to be met with immediate effect is the breakdown of families.

During his term, bishop Paul Kariuki developed some health issues. Due to his incapacitation, Pope Francis appointed Bishop Norman Kingoo on 28th September as the Apostolic Administrator of the Catholic diocese of Wote. Later on, 5 July 2025, Pope Leo XIV appointed bishop peter Kamomoe as the auxiliary bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Wote. He was officially installed on Saturday,23 August 2025. He was appointed as apostolic administrator on 18th September, and He assumed the office on 21 September 2025.[86]

1.6.2 Pastoral Setup and Influence on Christians in the Diocese of Wote

Since its establishment, the Catholic diocese of Wote has pursued a strong mission of evangelisation and pastoral care to deepen the faith of the Christians. Christians have been encouraged to participate actively in the Eucharist celebration. In addition to that, the parishes became the centre of the sacramental life for the Church. A plan was put in place to build the capacity of a pastoral agent for the training of the catechist. The strong mission underway is to respond to the growing population and the pastoral needs. According to the information provided, the pastoral setup of the diocese has 31 parishes, but this may not be the exact number of parishes at the moment. These parishes are administered by the clergy, religious, and catechists who conduct timely sacramental ministries, especially Eucharist, baptism, and confirmation.[87]

[86]Holy See Press Office, "Resignations and Appointments, 22 July 2023," Vatican City, July 22, 2023, retrieved from https://press.vatican.va (accessed January 7th, 2026).
[87]Elizabeth Asasha, "KENYA: Catholic Faithful Elated as Pope Francis Erects New Diocese, Appoints Pioneer Shepherd," AMECEA News (AMECEA Social Communications), July 28, 2023, Retrieved fromhttps://communications.amecea.org (accessed January 7th 2026).

Conclusion

Wote Diocese is the newest Roman Catholic dioceses in Kenya. It was officially opened by Pope Francis on 22 July 2023. It was carved from the diocese of Machakos. The nature and the climatic rainfall of the place have been tackled, where in Ukambani we have two distinct rainy seasons: long rain and short rain, known as *Uua* and *Nthwa* respectively. The focus has been the Kamba people, a Bantu-speaking community believed to have originated from the Congo Basin region of central Africa, sharing strong linguistic and cultural ties with other Eastern Bantu groups such as Meru, Kikuyu, Mbeere, and Chuka. Eventually, they settled in Mbooni Hills, within today's Machakos county, during the latter half of the 17th century. From Mbooni, they migrated into the large regions now comprising Machakos, Makueni, and Kitui. From the recent statistics, the population of the Kamba speakers is about 3,960000.

The family formed the social basic unity among the Kamba. Kamba are divided into three ethnic groups: Masaku, Kitui, and Mumoni. They are notoriously religious, and each ethnic group has its own religious system with a set of beliefs and practices. Some of the practices included the age-set system, like circumcision. They believed in one supreme being called Ngai, and their religion was *Kilumi.* According to them, creed summarizes their religious way of life. Kamba expressed their culture through language, art, food, dance customs, and traditions, among others. Kamba believed in spirits called *Aimu.* In the next chapter, we are going to discuss the Rite of *Ntheo* in the Akamba Traditional marriage

CHAPTER TWO

THE RITE OF *NTHEO* IN THE AKAMBA TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE

Introduction

In this chapter, the definition of *Ntheo* and concept of exchange of vows in the Akamba Rites of Passage as well as Akamba Rites of Passage is discussed. Under the elements of the Akamba Rite, the chapter will discuss childbirth and naming, initiation, isolation, and reintegration. Marriage and family life in Akamba have been discussed. The chapter then discusses traditional marriage preparation and customs, focusing on choosing a partner and courtship, negotiating the bride's price, and the wedding ceremony. The chapter delves into marriage rituals and ceremonies, the challenges facing marriage, and the Conclusion.

2.1 The Concept of Exchange of Vows (*Ntheo*) in the Akamba Rites of Passage

Ntheo is a foundational Kikamba word referring to the traditional Akamba customary marriage ceremony. It is essential, official seal ceremony that validates the marriage in the eyes of the community and elders. It signifies that the bride officially belongs to the groom. In the African cultural heritage, marriage between a man and a woman was understood as a means of cementing or initiating the union of the households and clans from which the couple belonged.[88] According to Dr. Westermarck's history of human marriage, Africans, like any other people in the world, have never attached any thought of buying or selling wives to the considerations which suitors and bridegrooms have ever given for their fiancée and brides.

Among the Kamba community, the concept of traditional exchange of vows is not conducted through spoken words, as in the Rite of Matrimony, but through symbolic acts and cultural rituals, with questions of intent led by elders, which express commitment. It is during the ceremonial *Ntheo* where the exchange of vows takes place, a ritual held privately at the

[88] Jesse Nyaga.K. Mugambi, *African Heritage and Contemporary Christianity*. (Nairobi: Longman Kenya Ltd, 1998), 95.

home of the bride, involving parents of the couple to be, elders with moral authority from both clans, and other distinguished members of the society.[89] Although done in a private setting, *Ntheo* is communally done. During this time, core values like fidelity, communion, and love, among others, are emphasized. The exchange of vows is seen as a formalized way of solidifying these commitments, not only between the husband and wife but also between their families.

Before the exchange of consent, bride wealth or price is paid to the girl's parents, beginning with the first goats (*Mbui sya Ntheo*). The traditional marriage practices among the Kamba community describe the commitment and seriousness involved when the groom's family offers the two goats. The goats represent the beginning of the process of negotiating the dowry, which is much respected which peacefully and unanimously done. During this sacred rite, one goat is slaughtered, and its blood is poured on the ground, which had a significance. This is more than just a marriage between a man and a woman; it is a marriage between two families and their ancestors.[90]

The ancestors of the Kamba are spiritually present in their lives and have to witness and accept all major events in their life. The sprinkling of blood on the earth, which is considered a dwelling place of ancestors and a source of lineage, is a way of presenting the couple to their ancestors for their acceptance and blessings. The blood represents life itself and is a symbol of a covenant in marriage, standing for permanence, unity, and bloodlines. The offering of a male and female goat symbolizes the aspects of complementarity, fertility, and the need for offspring who would bear the family name. The ritual also symbolizes the bride's full acceptance into the groom's tribe, making her a subject who is under the protection of the groom's ancestors and integrating her into the community structure spiritually and socially. In

[89] John Kyule (65 years), interviewed by Daniel Katie: Nairobi, Langata, April 5th, 2025.
[90] Christopher Wambua (68 years), interviewed by Daniel Katie: Makueni, Mbitini, 24th February, 2026.

a way, the ritual emphasizes marriage as a divine, communal, and ancestral covenant between the parties involved, rather than just a union between two individuals.[91]

On the night after the *mbui sya Ntheo,* the parents of the girl had sexual intercourse. The symbolism of sex was to bind the couple together. A sign of the unity that was expected of them. On the following day, the strap that had tied the goats is returned to the boy's parents' home. This is a symbol that the boy has been accepted. What followed was that the parents of the boy then brought two calabashes of beer to the parents of the girls. In this event, the father is usually accompanied by three other elders who act as eye witnesses. Arriving at the home of the girls, one calabash of beer is placed at the mother's *wii* (sleeping place). The elders drink this beer, taking the first calabash and leaving the one at the sleeping place. The wife pours out some beer for her husband and some for the suitor's father. "This pouring out of beer, taken from the mothers, is a sign of consent to the marriage of their daughter to this elder son."[92] After the beer was all taken, the fathers of the spouses both spat each in turn at their chests and stomachs, which is a sign of blessings for the couples. After this, the parents address each other as *syitawa* (affines).

2.2 Elements of the Akamba Rites of Passage

2.2.1 Child birth and Naming

The rites of the passage were communal ceremonies that were performed as a person passed from one stage to another: at birth, adolescence, adulthood, and death. "The life of an individual *Mukamba* follows a complete circle from birth, through the initiation rites, marriage, birth of children, death, and finally entry into the community of the ancestor."[93] This resulted in recognition and becoming a full member of the Mukamba community. African people concentrate more on the life journey from before birth to after death. They want their life to be

[91] John Kyule (65 years), interviewed by Daniel Katie: Nairobi CUEA, February 20th, 2025.
[92]Judith Mbula, *Our religious heritage* (Lagos: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1982), 41.
[93] Judith Mbula, 1982, 64.

full of happiness, safety, and satisfaction. There is great joy when a wife finds out that she is expecting a child, unlike when the woman is barren and disrespectful in the community.

According to Judith Mbula, as soon as a woman notices that she is pregnant, she warns her husband to avoid sexual intercourse to prepare for the birth of the child. In African traditional ways of life, as a woman was preparing to give birth, there were elderly women called or who acted as midwives during the time of childbirth. These are experienced women who gave aid to the pregnant woman to deliver well. "The arrival of a child in the family is one of the greatest satisfactions."[94] The newborn brought joy and happiness to the family and society at large. After the birth of the child, the community of belonging accepted the child. The parents would spit on the chest of the child as a way of blessing the child. The midwife and those present would do likewise. The spitting on the child symbolised openness to life, good luck, and good fortune in the child's life. When the child was born, in some communities the placenta is thrown into a running stream or dried up and kept for ritual, while in other communities it is buried nearby or in the fields. The placenta is looked at by many people as a religious link between the mother and the child.

Traditionally, in the Kamba community, the birth of a child is marked by ceremonies and rituals. This feast was called *mavoko,* and it symbolized that the child was accepted into society. According to Kamba, on the third or fourth day, friends and relatives gathered at the child's home to celebrate the newborn. The mother of the child was congratulated and helped to restore her health by bringing food and drinks and temporarily relieving her from. daily chores. During the feast, beer was shared, and the child was given a name that symbolised newness to life. The sharing of the beer was a symbol of harmony and friendship, not only for those present but also for the spirits and ancestors.[95] In naming a child, there are many customs

[94] John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*. 2nd ed. (London: Heinemann, 1991), 87.
[95] Judith Mbula, *Our religious heritage* (Lagos: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1982), 65.

in Africa; in some places, the name is chosen before the arrival of the child: in other it is given after the arrival and without a ritual or ceremony[96]. In other communities, the child was named according to the established customs of the community. For instance, a child may be named after an important event that had taken place during the time of birth, after the season, or the time of the day in which the child was born.[97] The child may be named after a relative, a grandfather, or a mother, or names reflecting the feelings of the parents, for instance, when a child is born after many years of marriage, she may be called Mercy since God has shown mercy or heard their petition. Other names describe the habits of the child or the background, like a child who likes keeping cattle, or given names of kinsmen. After naming the child, the parents offered their child a gift. The father hung an iron necklace called *ithaa* around the neck of the child to protect the child against the evil spirits, evil people, and as a sign of beauty.

The birth and naming of a child were events that were marked with religious feelings, and the Kamba community observed them with great solemnity. From the aforementioned, it was accompanied by rituals. During the meals, libation was offered accompanied by chanted prayers. The occasion was marked by the slaughtering of animals with rituals. “These rituals are for purification, protection, and thanksgiving purposes.” [98]This is done in many communities since the child is considered to have a sense of impurity, thus cleansed by rituals. This purification is also done to prepare the mother for the next child, ensuring that there is a flow of life.

Other rituals follow to give protection to the baby as it begins its long journey in life, to bring good fortune to it, and commit it to God’s care. Traditionally, many believe that the child needs protection against magic, witchcraft, sorcery, the evil eye, disease, and malicious spirits, among others. The ritual is performed by the local medicine man or diviner, who also

[96] John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*. 2nd ed. (London: Heinemann, 1991), 92.
[97] Jesse Nyaga.K. Mugambi, *African Heritage and Contemporary Christianity*. (Nairobi: Longman Kenya Ltd, 1998), 96.
[98] John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*. 2nd ed. (London: Heinemann, 1991), 90.

performs the purification ceremony. Other ceremonies that follow are to thank God for the arrival of the baby and a blessing upon his life. Once a child is born, a special prayer is said which states:

> O creator who creates all human beings, you have given us a great gift by bringing us this little child. In this and similar prayers, people recognize that children are created by God and then given to them. For that reason, he is called the Giver of children and the Owner of people.[99]

The prayer was to ask God to make the child grow up and become a useful member of society. Rituals dealing with the birth of a child were culturally different from those that came with Christianity. This is because prayers of thanksgiving were addressed to the deity, spirits, and ancestors.

2.2.2 Initiation, Seclusion, and Symbolism

In the African context, there are no particular ceremonies or rituals performed after those that mark the birth and naming of the child until the person is much older. Once the boy or the girl is older, other rituals follow. These rites were performed when the young people showed some signs of maturity. After the first rites, young people were given time to grow. As the baby grew, new food was introduced to him or her, beginning with liquid or soft food like porridge, fruit juice, and pre-chewed food. For instance, "adolescence marked outwardly by the physical changes of puberty, was another stage at which a rite of passage would be performed."[100] At this age, the community expected the person to conduct himself well without degrading his status or that of the community. The rite included a physical ordeal that the adolescents were expected to endure courageously as proof that they were ready to leave childhood behind and enter adulthood.

In some communities, circumcision was practised as one of the main rites of initiation. These rituals were performed in events like socialisation, marriage ceremonies, and at the death

[99] John S. Mbiti, 90.
[100] John Nkengasong Mugambi, *African Heritage and Contemporary Christianity*. (Nairobi: Longman Kenya Ltd 1998), 98.

of young people. Some of the tribes in Kenya have initiation rites for both men and women. Looking at the Maasai community, "one of the main initiation rites is that of circumcision for boys and clitoridectomy for girls."[101]They believed that one had reached maturity and was ready to assume responsibilities. For the Kamba community, circumcision was practiced for males. It was rarely practiced for girls, unlike other communities.

For the Akamba in Kenya, boys were circumcised as a rite of passage into manhood, involving isolation, endurance, and moral instruction. Girls, however, were not part of this process. The circumcision of girls was not a major initiation rite of passage for women; instead, Kamba girls became women through a process of social instruction, mentorship, and recognition rather than a dramatic physical act. These initiation processes are applicable and practical today. As Kamba girls enter puberty, older women, such as grandmothers and aunts, take charge of instructing girls in the ways of adulthood. This process of instruction involves teaching girls about sexuality, expectations in marriage, fertility, respect, domestic management, and proper behavior in both their natal and future marital homes. The focus is on equipping girls for their future roles as wives, mothers, and keepers of marital and familial harmony.[102]

Puberty was socially acknowledged. When the girl had her first menstruation, it was a sign that she was ready to learn more about womanhood and marriage in the future. Though there was no public rite like the one that circumcises males, there was acknowledgment of the process in the family. There was a heightened sense of guidance during this period. There were instances where there were some festivities like songs, advice sessions, or the company of women, but these were not public endurance rites. Marriage, especially in traditional practices like *Ntheo*, was the ultimate acknowledgment of social change to womanhood.[103] Through the

[101] John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*. 2nd ed. (London: Heinemann, 1991), 96-97.
[102] Christopher Wambua (68 years), interviewed by Daniel Katie: Makueni, Mbitini, 24th February 2026.
[103] John Kyule (65 years), interviewed by Daniel Katie: Nairobi, CUEA, February 20th, 2025.

process of paying bridewealth, praying, and being taken in as a member of the husband's clan, the woman was acknowledged as an adult in society.

Circumcision for young men involves cutting off the foreskin of the male organ, while for young girls, it involves clitoridectomy, a surgical removal of the clitoris either partially or completely. The process is done by qualified people of the same gender as the initiates. In both cases, there is a blood split, and the act is very painful, where there is no use of any medicine, according to some tribes. "The blood which is shed during physical operation binds the person to the land and consequently to the departed members of his society."[104]The individual is born again through the rite and is tied to the community and people. The shedding of blood is a covenant, and it is through this that an individual joins the truly one society. The process is communal and may take place annually or biannually. All the necessary preparations are done on time, and the initiates are told on time to prepare mentally and psychologically.

Initiation rites were very important in the lives of young people because, through them, a person was educated on how to conduct themselves in a way that appeals to society. "The fundamental significance of initiation for the total African cultural life was not fully realised by early missionaries."[105] Some believed that these rites were unnecessary and caused great suffering to the adolescent. Contrary to this view, is that the education and training that was given to the adolescents was very important for the community's maintenance of its self-understanding and providing opportunities for every member to learn what the community expected of them. It was of great importance since the initiation is a gateway to marriage. For instance, in Gikuyu, such rites introduced the youth to the age grades, while in the Maasai, the rites introduced the young men and women into the society.

[104] John Nkengasong Mugambi, 1998, 98.
[105] John Nkengasong Mugambi, 1998, 98.

According to Kamba, "these rituals introduced the individual to adulthood socially, religiously, physically, and psychologically."[106] It is a very crucial step in the lives of young people in the Kamba community. Initiation is a bridge from childhood to adulthood. Naming among the Kamba depended on cultural, social, and situational cases or factors. For instance, during the rainy season, a male child was called *wambua*, while a female child was called *Mumbua.* These rites marked the changes from a passive life in the community to active membership. It is one of the vital moments in their lives where members of the group participate actively.

Among the Kamba, a person must undergo the rites of initiation to be recognized in society and acknowledged as having reached maturity.[107] He is allowed to move out of his father's house and build his own in the compound. For Kamba, nowadays it is very rare to witness circumcision for girls, unlike before, though it was not common. The initiation rites in Kamba were called n*zaiko*, and there were three, like the sacramental initiation. According to Judith, he states that:

> The first circumcision took place during the hot months of August and September. This is because the two months are usually *mbivyu* (very warm) in Ukambani. *Nzaiko* Nini (the small circumcision) was the real circumcision, where an operation was performed on the sexual organs of the youth. The parents brought their boys and girls, aged between eleven and sixteen, and gave them over to *muuwiki (*a special tutor), who prepared the initiates for *kwaikwa* (the operation).[108]

Three days before the operation, the parents of the initiates brew beer, *uki wa kunoa wenzi* (beer for sharpening the operating knife). The first operation was to cut the skin known as (kutilwa Makoko), which took a short time. The cutting of the foreskin for men and the removal of the clitoris for females was symbolic in that they were cutting themselves from their childhood. The cutting of the skin was the highlight of life, qualifying the person to become a complete Mukamba. The skin was cut once and for all as an act of doing away with the mark

[106] Judith Mbula, *Our religious heritage* (Lagos: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd 1982), 75.
[107] John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*. 2nd ed. (London: Heinemann, 1991), 99.
[108] Judith Mbula, 1982, 76.

of childhood and leaving a scar that was symbolic of adulthood to completeness. [109]The initiates were to show bravery by enduring the pain and without flinching as a sign of readiness for responsibilities in society.

Traditionally, after two days of circumcision, the parents of the initiates performed ritual sexual intercourse. This is because it was believed that if the parents failed to perform this act, the initiates would bleed to death. The sexual act was believed to bring a healing effect on the initiate's sexual body organs. On the third day of the initiation, the whole village would gather somewhere to celebrate and welcome the new initiates into the society.[110] The celebration was coloured with beer and dancing. As part of the dancing, the initiates could sing a special song that showed the determination of the youth. It was during this time that people of goodwill made personal arrangements occasionally to pay a visit to the child in the village by presenting their gifts. This circumcision was a preparation for the subsequent ones.

The second initiation rite was called "*nzaiko ya kuatha mbusya*" (circumcision for killing the rhinoceros). During this initiation, the initiates entered a seclusion period called *kavonokya*, lasting several weeks. "In fact, one of the features of initiation is the period spent in seclusion, during which they are taught many things concerning the life of the people, its history, its traditions, its beliefs, and above all, how to raise a family."[111] The initiates were instructed on how to behave as mature people in society. Each candidate during this time was given a tutor who stayed with him or her during the training. Through storytelling, songs, and proverbs, the initiates were taught to respect elders, protect the community, and prepare for marriage and family life.

Secrets and mysteries of marriage were revealed during this time of seclusion to prepare them for marriage. Since it is the gateway to marriage, one is allowed to marry after

[109] John S. Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background: A Study of the Encounter Between New Testament Theology and African Traditional Concepts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 122.
[110] Judith Mbula, 1982, 76.
[111] John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*. 2nd ed. (London: Heinemann, 1991), 99.

this act and raise a family. It was believed that hunting and shooting of the rhinoceros symbolised the expected hardships and suffering, especially in marriage. There was also symbolism that the disappearance of the animals during hunting signified that even though the process is painful, the initiates need to have perseverance and courage to face the act.[112] Graduating from childhood to adulthood was a step that showed that the initiates were ready to embrace responsibilities in life. The fulfilment needed both moral and physical change. After hunting and all that they went through, the initiates returned home as adults, assuming responsibilities. "Upon completion of their seclusion, the young men returned to their homes. It is often a great occasion of rejoicing and feasting in the community. Returning home is like being born afresh into a new life."[113]One was now a full member of the family and society.

During the process, the boys and girls were placed in separate huts and enclosures, and food was brought to them by their parents. At the homestead of the *Mwaiki*, the community built special huts for elders to use in preparing medicine for the initiates. On the fourth day of the process, each candidate was presented to the *mwaiki* by the special tutor. At the end of the ritual, parents presented gifts to the initiates. The gifts were in the form of goats or cows and were called *kuulukilwa.* "This meant that the parents had finished their duty towards their son or daughter, who was now an adult member of society." [114]

The third initiation took place later in life and was only for men. It was meant to prepare the Akamba men to be fearless warriors by defending the country from external attacks. This ritual was called *mbavani/nzaiko ya aume.* The men lived in the forest hunting for the imaginary animals. The initiates staged mock fights with the imaginary animals under special supervision

[112] Judith Mbula, 1982, 78.
[113] John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*. 2nd ed. (London: Heinemann, 1991), 102.
[114] Judith Mbula, 1982, 79.

by the elders. After one month of their fight in the forest, they joined their families at home. This action qualified them to be warriors.[115]

2.3 Marriage and Family Life in Kamba

According to the African way of life, marriage seems to have the same purpose. Among the traditional Kamba people of Kenya, marriage and family life were central pillars of society, shaping social order, moral values, and community continuity. Marriage, according to Kamba, especially the traditional one, is not merely a personal relationship but a sacred and communal union among families, clans, and even ancestors. An adult was expected to be married and have children because, through procreation, life continued, and the community remained connected to its ancestors. "Failure to get married is like committing a crime against traditional belief and practices."[116] In the Kamba community, courtship often began at communal gatherings such as market days and dances and but the process of marriage involved both families and elders, who ensured that the bride came from a respected clan of moral standards.

In the Kamba community, building a family was the supreme goal of marriage. The Kamba family was patrilineal, with inheritance and lineage traced through the father's line.[117] The father served as the head of the family, responsible for protection and promotion, while the wife managed domestic affairs like farming and child-rearing. Polygamy among the Kamba was accepted, especially among men who were rich enough to support multiple wives, where each wife maintained her own household within the extended family.[118] As the family functioned as a social and economic unit, children gradually were introduced to physical activities, such as farming, herding, and raising the children. Children were source in the family of blessings, symbols of continuity, and barrenness was viewed as a misfortune or curse that required rituals to restore fertility and family harmony. Children sealed in a marriage that

[115] Judith Mbula, *Our religious heritage* (Lagos: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd 1982), 79-80.
[116] John S. Mbiti, 1991, 110.
[117] John S. Mbiti, 1991, 110.
[118] Christopher Wambua (68 years), interviewed by Daniel Katie: Makueni, Mbitini, 7th November 2025.

breaks down due to barrenness could not happen. Their presence of children in the family prolongs the life of their parents and, through them, the name of the family is perpetuated.

Family among the Kamba people was a basic cell that had a deep religious significance. In every stage of marriage in Kamba people, from courtship to childbirth and naming, was accompanied by prayers and rituals to invoke blessings from God (*Mulungu*) and the ancestors (*aimu*). The family served as a uniting link between the spiritual and physical worlds, with elders acting as moral guides and mediators between the living and the dead. The elder instilled values such as respect for elders, responsible, cooperation, honesty, and hard work in the children at a tender age. Through marriage, individuals achieved full social status and personhood. They gained recognition in society, which allowed them to assume responsibilities. Marriage and family life in the Kamba community were two sacred institutions that ensured social harmony and relationships, continuity of life, and the preservation of communal values.[119]

2.4 Traditional Marriage Preparation and Customs

Traditional custom marriage was a culturally recognized union between a man and a woman, often involving the families of the groom, bride, uncles, relatives, and community. It was a marriage of negotiation between the two families and the community, where the young people involved did not choose their partners, and their marriages were strong and long-lasting120. It goes beyond a personal relationship since it is a communal affair, serving as a formal agreement that establishes social, cultural, moral, and sometimes economic bonds between the families. In many African societies, including the Kamba, traditional marriage involved specific rituals and customs such as the giving of bride price termed as *Ntheo*, which symbolizes respect, commitment, and the beginning of a new life. Long-standing cultural

[119] John S. Mbiti, 1991, 111.
[120] Aylward Shorter, *Christian Family Power in Africa: An Abridgement of African Christian Marriage* (Kenya-Nakuru: Gaba Publications,1977), 2-3.

values guide these marriages and are essential for the legitimacy of the relationship in the eyes of the community.

2.4.1 Courtship and Intention to Marry

"Courtship, with its lovely novelty, the excitement of getting engaged and married, is for many the quintessence of happiness. Courtship means two people preparing together for marriage."[121] The success of the partnership depends on their effort toward their marriage. Happiness is not by chance; they seek it. In many parts of Africa, parents choose marriage partners for their children. "A good choice of a partner is important for the individual happiness of both, for the well-being of the children and of the society."[122] For Africans, a good choice depended purely on clan relations, history, and character.

Participation or the involvement of the parents in choosing a partner ensured that they found someone to marry and of good character. In other parts, the choice is made by the relatives of the young people. Another custom is for young people to find the person they wish to marry and then inform their parents or other relatives.[123] The opportunities to do this are provided by social gatherings, dances (*kamandiko*), and communal work, as well as by getting to know other people in the neighbourhood. Generally, according to Kamba, parents started betrothal arrangements when the boy was at a tender age; however, he couldn't be allowed to marry until he reached the age of puberty, which is between the ages of 18-27, and after undergoing pre-marital rituals. [124]Once he reached the range, he was allowed to marry.

In African marriage, marriage is not a contract between a boy and a girl, but it is a mutual and friendly agreement between two families. Marriage in Africa does not consist of

[121]Josef Heinzmann, *Love Is Your Calling: A Book on Marriage for the Faithful*, trans. Dame Mary Groves, O.S.B. (England: St. Paul Publications, 1993), 23.
[122] Josef Heinzmann, *Love Is Your Calling: A Book on Marriage for the Faithful*, trans. Dame Mary Groves, O.S.B. (England: St. Paul Publications, 1993), 18.
[123] John S. Mbiti, 1991, 107.
[124] Magdalene Ndoti, (70 years), interviewed by Daniel Katie: Makueni, Mbitini, 10th October 2025.

only a man and a woman with or without children, but it is composed of father, mother, children, uncles, aunts, and cousins. Secondly, parents, upon the counsel of grandparents, great-grandparents, grand-uncles, grand-aunts, and so forth.[125] Traditionally, when a Kamba man was choosing a partner, the decision was mostly guided by his parents and elders rather than himself. The man rarely chose for himself a wife. This underscores the reason why marriage lasted.

According to the Kamba people, there were regulations put in place when a family was looking for a wife. The clan system helps in many parts of Africa because often a person is not allowed to marry from the same clan. The family looked for a woman from a respected clan, and one could not marry into a clan related by blood kinship and marriage relations. They knew their relatives and whom they could not marry. The woman was to be of good character and a family free of curses or taboos. Other important factors included the woman's reputation, her family's history, and the compatibility of clans to avoid forbidden marriages. "This was done because most of the African families believed in retaining some ideas and guarding against assimilating certain undesirable traits, physical and mental."[126] According to Mbiti, he states that:

> A girl is espousable at any age, from one year old upwards, when she is looked upon as the future bride of a boy who is always a few years older than his fiancée. While child betrothal is permissible by custom, and gives concern and responsibility to the families of both children, actual nuptial arrangements are not concluded until children attain the age of puberty. (generally, in the case of the boy from 23-27, while in the case of the girl from 18-22).[127]

In modern times, many Kamba men choose their partners themselves based on love and personal connection. Mostly, this happens at the age of 18-27, for boys, while for girls it happens at 18-22, though the age may vary sometimes, no longer fixed like before.[128]The

[125] John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, (London: Heinemann, 1991), 157.
[126] John S. Mbiti, *African Religious and Philosophy* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1987), 156-157.
[127] John S. Mbiti, 1987, 157.
[128][128] Christopher Wambua, (68 years), interviewed by Daniel Katie: Makueni, Mbitini, 10th October 2025.

communal and parental participation is no longer there, and this is the reason we have family breakdown in large numbers. For both cases, when a boy goes through the rite of initiation, he is in a position to have a family immediately afterward.[129] Traditionally, in Kamba customs, under rare circumstances when a man found a partner on his own, he still involves his family. Family approval, background checks, and respect for cultural customs still play an important role. This is because marriages traditionally occurred within the Kamba community, respecting clan boundaries and avoiding intermarriage with certain forbidden clans.

In the Kamba community, marriage is of mutual agreement between the families. Customarily, parents chose partners for their boys for marriage since personal choice was rare. A man could not marry in a forbidden clan. "It was believed that marriage to a forbidden person would result in misfortune, perhaps in the death of couples or more often of the children."[130]Anyone who disobeyed would cut himself from the social group and may be regarded as the cause of any misfortune that may befall the community and relatives. Thus, while the man's choice is more personal today, traditional values about age, family, and clan continue to influence the process. Whatever method is followed in choosing the marriage partner, the families and relatives of the two sides must be involved before the marriage can take place.

2.4.2 Bride Price Negotiation and Engagement

Bride negotiations began with introduction meetings. After the agreements between the suitor, parents, uncles, and relatives, family visits were set to commence. Before the visits began, an elder was sent to the family of the girl to deliver the good news of the visit, including the date and time. After this, a series of meetings were held, during which the families went through traditional steps, starting with the family introduction meeting, known as *kuthii kwoo*

[129] John S. Mbiti, 1987, 99.
[130]John S. Mbiti, *African Religious and Philosophy* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1987), 157.

(literally meaning "to go to her home"). This is the first formal visit the man's family makes to the woman's home to introduce themselves and express serious intentions.[131] This first meeting is composed of his parents, uncles, and respected elders, who accompany him. The woman's family also gathers a few relatives to receive them.

During this first meeting, no major negotiations took place; it was simply to introduce the families, share light food and drinks, and declare the intention to get married. The sharing of the beer *uki wa kuatiia* (the beer which follows the goats) during the first visit was to strengthen the bonds. Friendship is formed between the families, and the two parents can address each other as "*syitawa*" (affines). Marriage was not an affair of two families but also of relatives. This underscores the philosophical statement which says, "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am."[132]

After the first meeting, there was a second meeting for bride price negotiation between the two families, led by the family of the bridegroom, accompanied by other relatives. The parents of the groom approach those of the girl and establish an engagement relationship for negotiations.[133] During the second visit, there was also drinking of beer, known as *uki wa kuthambya nzele* ("the beer for cleaning the calabash"), and the fixing of the bride-wealth. Negotiations are finalized at this stage. After the second meeting, a third meeting was held to affirm what was discussed in the previous meeting.

During the third visit, beer was also taken called *uki wakukinya musyi* (the beer for walking to the homestead). The father of the suitor invites the parents of the girls to come to his home to see where their daughter will be married. In contemporary times, money may be given by the bridegroom to cater for all expenses and the bride's wealth.[134] Traditionally, the bride price included livestock, especially 5 to 12 goats, and sometimes a cow, depending on

[131] Christopher Wambua (68 years), interviewed by Daniel Katie: Makueni, Mbitini, 10th October 2025.
[132] John Mbiti, 1991, 108.
[133] John S. Mbiti, 1991, 107.
[134] Judith Mbula, *Our religious heritage* (Logos: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1982), 90.

the status and wealth of the bride's family. Other items, such as clothes for the bride's mother, food items, and even a cock (rooster**)**, were also included as symbolic offerings.

The bride-wealth was not considered a payment for the bride but rather a way to show honour and commitment, and to gain full recognition of the marriage. [135]It showed that the man was ready to have a family and meet his responsibilities. In a nutshell, traditionally, there are usually three main meetings: the first is for introduction *(kuthii kwoo),* the second is for the pride price (*ngasya*), and the third is for the final agreement and blessing *(kuthia mbesa or kwika mbesa*). In some cases, more meetings may be added depending on family preferences or unresolved issues. Each step is conducted respectfully, with elders playing a key role in guiding the process and ensuring cultural expectations are followed. After the bride price negotiation, what followed was the actual payment of the bride price.

2.4.3 Bride Price/*Ngasya (Ntheo*)

Bride price came after the negotiations and agreements between the families involved in the marriage. In the Old Testament, Judges 14:11 and 1Maccabees 9:37-39 mention negotiations that precede the marriage by several months. Tobit 8, Genesis 24, and 1 Samuel are aware that exceptions exist when the future marriage offers guarantees that it is in accordance with God's will. Among these negotiations is mentioned the *Mohar*, the money paid by the groom to the girl's father (Gen 34:12; Exod. 22:16; 1 Sam 18:25; Hos 3:2). Bride price or simply gift negotiations, known as *Ngasya*, are a key part of traditional marriage. Bride wealth in Kamba is simply the goats, cattle, or other property handed over by a prospective bridegroom to the father or male relative of a girl whom he intends to marry. The gifts are normally delivered to the bride's father or guardian, who remains primarily responsible for their return should the intended marriage fail to materialize or, in some societies, to endure. "Among many matrilineal societies, for instance, the *Bakongo, Yombe, Puni, Kunyi,* Kamba,

[135] John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, (London: Heinemann, 1991), 109.

Sundi, and Mbata of the Lower and Middle Congo, this role is played by the bride's maternal uncle or the head of the Matri-lineage."[136]

Bride wealth is paid before a couple is allowed to marry among the Akamba. The gifts are given to the girl's family and relatives. The first gift (*Mbui sya Ntheo*) is taken to the parents of the girl. [137]Traditionally, Kamba gives out at least three goats, one of which is a he-goat and an uncastrated one. However, one may give more than three goats, but the rule is that the number of the animals given must add up to an odd number. The slaughtering of the he-goat by the groom or his brother or relatives and spilling of the blood on the ground on the actual day of the traditional wedding is believed to signify that the groom officially owns the bride.

Other gifts given to the girl include: a certain amount of money, other goats, cattle, sheep, foodstuffs, clothes, blankets, just to mention. "If the marriage eventually breaks down, many of these gifts are returned as a sign of failure." However, the breakdown of families was very rare, which is why marriages lasted. Bride-wealth among the Kamba depended on the status of the family; however, the three goats were mandatory. They represented respect, appreciation, and a formal bond between the two families.[138]

2.4.4 Traditional Wedding Ceremony (The Rite)

Wedding ceremonies vary from person to person. In some parts of Africa, it is the custom for the groom to go with his friends and stage a mock on the people of the bride, so that they capture her and take her away to become his wife. In other places, when the date for the wedding is arranged, the groom's people go to those of the bride and receive her ceremoniously or even without any form of ceremony. In other places, it is accepted for a man to run away with an engaged girl as if they were eloping. In the Kamba community, there are customs put in place for acquiring a woman. According to Christopher Wambua, Kamba negotiation for a

[136] Daniel David Nsereko, "The Nature and Function of Marriage Gifts in Customary African Marriages*," The American Journal of Comparative Law.* Vol 23, no. 4 (Autumn 1975): 682–704.
[137] Judith Mbula, *Our religious heritage* (Logos: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1982), 90.
[138] John S. Mbiti, 1991, 108.

bride is termed as pre-wedding, where all that is needed for the actual ceremony to occur is provided on time. It is time for engagement.

After the bride negotiations, wealth and payment were done, the rites followed of taking the girl home. The first and which was very common, is when the parents of the suitor brew beer called *uki wa kwitya mwiitu* (the beer for claiming the bride), known as *kalivu*. On this occasion, she is not allowed to go with her husband-to-be.[139] On the actual day when the girl is to marry, two women relatives of the groom accompany him to the girl's home. The suitor and a few of his friends go along with the women. The father of the suitor sends three calabashes of beer to the parents of the girls to be used that day. One of the beers is kept in the bedroom of the bride's father for the ritual. The beer is for the blessing of the bride and the groom's marriage to be fruitful. There were additional blessings done verbally by the elders after paying the bride price. For a longer or shorter time, the two lovers have been carefully preparing for their life's vocation, and one day it has come to this: they finally decide on one another.[140]

During this occasion, the special beer kept in the bedroom of the bride's father is shared by the mother of the girl by first by pouring it for her husband, then for the father of the suitor. It was a sign of consent to marriage, and the girl was free to walk away with the suitor. [141]Mostly, the father of the bride shared the beer first by pouring for the father of the suitor, then for himself. Before they took the beer, the girl was questioned by her father and other elders, whether she was ready to marry her partner. The elders then questioned the boy about whether he was ready to marry her partner. If their response was confidently yes, then they were expected to live in respect, to build a family together, and honor the union as the elders

[139] Judith Mbula, *Our religious heritage* (Logos: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1982), 92-93.
[140] Josef Heinzman, *Love Is Your Calling: A Book on Marriage for the Faithful*, trans. Dame Mary Groves, OSB (England: St. Paulines Publications, 1983), 31.
[141] Judith Mbula, 1982, 93.

had before.[142]The covenantal agreement between the couple to be parents and elders sealed the marriage. It was high time for them to exchange vows in a pattern of questions led by elders. They were not expected to bring shame to their families. The elders drank the beer not just as a drink but as a sign of unity, trust, communal life, commitment, and the beginning of a new family.

This happens in a special meeting held in the family of the bride. An equal standard of education during this time was given for the good of marriage. "Too disparate an education can make it difficult to achieve a harmonious marriage. Parents do well, however, to put forward cautious objections to an unsuitable son or daughter-in-law."[143] The suitor was free to walk away with the girl, accompanied by the two women at the front. The women went ahead of the couples to announce that the bride was coming home. Occasionally, songs were sung to accompany them. On reaching home, the mother of the suitor welcomes the bride, and then she smeared ghee on her neck. It symbolised that the bride is special and she has been accepted as a member of the family.

The second method of taking the bride home is when a man, after paying part of the bride -wealth, asks to be given the bride, then the rest of the bride to be paid later. The third method is when the girl takes the initiative and asks the man to take her to his home. "If she wishes to marry her lover, however, she may do so, and he must pay for her by instalments as soon as he is able. If the bride dies unexpectedly before the bride price is fully paid, the groom is not allowed to bury her unless he completes the payment first.

"The dowry among the Akamba consists of three to five heads of cattle, paid to the father, and in the case of the woman running away from her husband, has to be returned to him

[142] James Malika (68 years), interviewed by Daniel Katie: Makueni, Mbitini, October 10th, 2025.
[143] Josef Heinzman, *Love Is Your Calling: A Book on Marriage for the Faithful*, trans. Dame Mary Groves, OSB (England: St. Paulines Publications, 1983), 21.

again."[144]The payment is not fixed since it can vary depending on the status of the family. The payment of the bride in instalments is not common, though it happens. It only happens when the girl notices that the father is mean, and he will not allow her to get married before paying the bride price. When the man takes the girl home, he sends one of his male relatives to inform the bride's parents where she is.[145]

2.4.4.1 Rituals and Ceremonies

Generally, feasting and celebration follow the wedding ceremony. In many areas, this lasts several days, during which time relatives pay their visits to the couple and other formalities are fulfilled. After the wedding, it was the custom for the wife or both wife and husband to be secluded for several days after the initial wedding. It was symbolic that the couples are born into a new life, that they are coming out of the womb (of the house). [146]Their birth into married status is greeted with jubilation, and people join in wishing them well. Rituals and ceremonies follow the occasion. The aim of these is to pray for the welfare of the new couples, to bless them so that they bear children, and give them instruction and rules on how to conduct themselves as married people. At these rituals, God and the living dead of the family may be called upon to witness the occasion and to give their blessing to the new husband and wife.

During these rituals and ceremonies, the bride and the groom are dressed to symbolise a new phase of life into which they enter. One of the highly valued moments is when the girl is found a virgin by relatives and neighbours. There was rejoicing, and she and the family were highly respected and praised. If a girl was found to have lost her virginity, the marriage was dissolved there and then, to the shame of the girl's relatives. In the past, the girl might even have been killed. After the marriage, it was the obligation of the newlyweds to have children.

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[144] Harry Russell Tate, *"Notes on the Kikuyu and Kamba Tribes of British East Africa," The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* Vol 34 (January–June 1904): 130–148.
[145] Judith Mbula, 1982, 93.
[146] John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, (London: Heinemann, 1991), 109.

Elders, parents, uncles, and relatives wished the couple a good life in their marriage. Marriage expresses its meaning by fulfilling the obligation, the duty, and the custom that every normal person is entitled to have children.[147] Through this, they acquired status in society. There were additional customs found in African societies, such as marrying several wives, in inheriting the wife of a deceased brother. In the Kamba community, men had the freedom to marry more than one wife. Polygamy was practiced, but the inheritance of the women was not practiced.

Other ceremonies and rituals play a vital role in the Kamba community in strengthening community ties and preserving cultural traditions are as follows. Naming is one of the most joyful and highly celebrated events in the birth of a child, which brings the community together. "The birth started long before the actual physical birth of the child., The spirit of the ancestor fashioned the foetus, that is, the unborn child, in the womb of the mother."[148] Some ritual followed where the parents and midwives spit on the child to bless him or her on the fourth day of childbirth.

Relatives and friends, and other neighbours came to drink beer, celebrate the child, and name the child. It was observed with great solemnity. Before people gathered to share meals, libations were offered accompanied by prayers. The prayer addressed to *Ngai* (God) was to let the child grow up well and become a useful member of society. It was a celebration that was well prepared and celebrated. The family kinship and all people of God will come to sing, dance, and congratulate the parents. Names given to the child were symbolic of the role the child was to be entrusted with in society. The beer was the symbol of harmony and friendship among the present, the invited, and the ancestors. It was also symbolic of a long-lasting marriage. It was communally done. After naming the child, what followed was gifting the child by the parents, an iron necklace by the father. Concerning this initiation and ceremony, three

[147] John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, (London: Heinemann, 1991), 110.
[148] Judith Mbula, 1982, 64.

things were considered very vital: “spitting, which symbolised openness of life, good luck and blessings; the second was the necklace, a symbol of beauty that never fades; the third was the name, which symbolised newness to life.”[149]

Another important ceremony that took place in Kamba is the circumcision of the child. “It is practiced in many parts of Africa and is highly treasured in traditional life.”[150] It marks the transition from childhood to adulthood. During this period of circumcision, boys are taught social values, respect, and responsibilities in life. Traditional marriage among the Kamba, that is *Ntheo,* was another major celebration that united not only two individuals but entire families. It was a communal celebration that involved courtship, dowry negotiations, and a wedding ceremony filled with songs, dancing, and communal meals.

The Kamba also held harvest celebrations to thank God (*Ngai* or *Mulungu*) for providing rain and a bumper harvest. During these occasions, people share food, drink traditional beer (*kaluvu*), and dance to express gratitude. The beer is a sign of unity and friendship. People shared it when they had discussions with similar opinions or matters. *Kimee* is the container of the unifying factor.[151] The religious and ritual ceremony, known as *kilumi,* is practiced especially when people are seeking blessings, healing, or rain, involving music, drumming, and communal participation. This practice accompanies sacrifice and offering. “Mukamba does not sacrifice unless there is a reason for the sacrifice.” Other ceremonies are the funeral, in which people gather to console the bereaved family, honour the deceased, and mourn with the family by sharing meals. Through these varied celebrations, the Kamba people express respect for life stages, unity, and a deep connection to their community and traditions.

Consummation refers to the first conjugal act between the spouses, carried out humanly and open to the procreation of life. Traditional consummation happened when all the customs

[149] Judith Mbula, 1982, 65.
[150] John S. Mbiti, 1987, 97.
[151] John S. Mbiti, 1987, 60.

and rituals were met by the bridegroom. The bridegroom could not take the bride to his house unless all requirements were met. *Ntheo* and wedding among the Kamba crowned everything. Living together after the traditional wedding consummation was presumed. [152]According to the teachings of church, A valid marriage between baptized persons is called *ratum tantum* if it has not been consummated, and *ratum et consummatum* if the spouses "have humanly performed between themselves a conjugal act which is suitable in itself for the procreation of offspring, to which marriage is ordered by its nature and by which the spouses become one flesh" (Can. 1061 §1). The Code further notes that if the spouses have lived together after the celebration of their marriage, consummation is presumed until the contrary is proven.[153] Consummation is not considered merely a physical act but a symbol and realization of the spouses' full communion. The interpersonal communion and giving one another were aimed at procreation.

Integration may be termed as the matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life (*totius vitae consortium*) which is naturally ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of children. (1055). This "partnership of the whole of life" conveys the meaning of integration canonically, that is, the total and permanent union of the spouses in all aspects of life, emotional, physical, spiritual, and practical. Integration, thus, means that the husband and wife are united not only by law but by a shared life that encompasses mutual love, fidelity, and cooperation.

Canonically, integration begins with valid matrimonial consent, as stated in Canon 1057 §2. This canon defines consent as "an act of the will by which a man and a woman mutually give and accept each other through an irrevocable covenant to establish marriage." Through this consent, the spouses are integrated into a single juridical and sacramental bond.

[152] James Malika (68 years), interviewed by Daniel Katie: Makueni, Mbitini, October 10th, 2025.
[153]Joseph P. Zwack, *Annulment: Your Chance to Remarry Within the Catholic Church: New Code of Canon Law*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 89.

This bond, naturally, is perpetual and exclusive, consecrating the spouses to live out the duties and dignity of marriage. The church calls Integration, *communio vitae et amoris coniugalis*—a shared communion of life and conjugal love.

2.5 Challenges Facing Current Marriage

2.5.1 Lack of Adequate Preparation in Marriage

In comparison with traditional marriage, contemporary marriages are facing many problems due to a lack of proper preparation. It is crucial for young people engaging in marriage to prepare themselves thoroughly and adequately. Unlike before, there is no counseling and education given at all by their elders and parents about marriage and what it entails, and also how to overcome the difficulties. Failure to equip themselves with adequate knowledge, the couples to be will not be in a position to embrace the values associated with the family, like cohesion, caring, love, solidarity, fortitude, respect, and responsibility[154]. Communion is part and parcel of this value since traditional marriage was communal. Problems facing young couples, especially in the diocese of Wote, are due to a lack of proper preparation. During a wedding, the couple at the altar exchange their consent forever, till death do us part. [155]However, within a very short time, a marriage breakdown occurs due to inadequate communication. The assumption is due to a lack of proper preparation. Often, it is assumed that the ministers rarely understand what the promise involves.

Traditional values that ensure marriage is stable have been weakened by the modern world and secularism. Couples of nowadays enclose themselves in caves with the spirit of individualism and with the view that no one is entitled to interfere with their affairs. Parents of the current generation rarely listen to advice from elders. Due to this, the elders of the families

[154] Kwamena Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction* (Accra: Sankofa Publishing Co., 1996), 90.
[155] Josef Heinzman, *Love Is Your Calling: A Book on Marriage for the Faithful*, trans. Dame Mary Groves, OSB (England: St. Paulines Publications, 1983), 23.

have no role to play nowadays since marriage is left to individuals without experience. This results in separation.

2.5.2 Influence from the Secular World

Stability of the family is not an easy thing to achieve. This has to be done by the couple for the stability of the marriage and the family. Influence from the secular world has been one of the problems facing contemporary marriages, especially the media and knowledge. Owning the new ideologies and replacing the traditional and cultural values has been one of the great problems of modern marriages. Peer influence from others has resulted in misunderstandings in families, which has resulted in separations.[156]

2.5.3 Family planning

Family planning programs have been described as "an organized effort to assure that couples who want to limit their family size and space children have access to contraceptive information and services, and are encouraged to use them as needed."[157] It also entails not having a child at all for some couples. It has the selfish Western kind of life, where a couple can stay childless. The result of this is going for contraceptives since the couples are not ready to have children. This kind of lifestyle has been embraced by many People in the diocese of Wote, where many end up without having a child when needed most. Failure to have a child due to the use of contraceptives has resulted in misunderstandings and fights in families. The use of contraceptives and such practices could not be witnessed in Kamba traditional marriage. It is against the teachings of the Catholic Church simply because it does away with the primary and secondary ends of marriage, respectively, procreation, education of children, and mutual

[156] Ernest van Eck, "A Theology of Marriage: A Biblical or a Cultural Construct?" *Theological Studies* 76, no. 4 (2020), 1-10.
[157] Amy Ong Tsui, "Population Policies, Family Planning Programs, and Fertility: The Record," in *Global Fertility Transition*, ed. Rodolfo A. Bulatao and John B. Casterline (New York: The Population Council, 2001), 184–204.

help, the remedy of concupiscence (Canon 1013). Doing away with the use of contraceptives and adopting the natural method of family planning may help cope with many problems.

2.5.4 Infidelity

Infidelity, in the context of a dyadic relationship, refers to "a partner's violation of norms regulating the level of emotional or physical intimacy with people outside the relationship."[158]In addition to the aforementioned, Marital infidelity is a leading cause of divorce, spousal battery, and homicide. "Infidelity is the most often reported reason for and the strongest predictor of divorce."[159]In the diocese of Wote, this is one of the strongest predictors of marriage. It is one of the most challenging concerns for marital therapists since it causes not only ethical and practical difficulties, but also complicated types of grief and anguish in betrayed spouses.

The reason why infidelity is alarming in the diocese of Wote is a result of a lack of commitment, respect for marriage and one another, moral advice from elders, keeping family bonds, and emotional dissatisfaction, among others. These are the core values that ensured the sustainability of marriage traditionally, according to the Kamba people, and they were highly honored and practiced. Many couples are not sacrificing, and they end up drinking water from others' cisterns, and that is why we have many challenges affecting marriage. These values and issues need to be addressed to all couples and those planning to marry. Drinking from one's cistern has to be encouraged, which has to do with physical passion, love, interaction, and material possession. Infidelity is morally wrong, and couples should work to prevent it through

[158] Stephen M. Drigotas and William Barta, "The Cheating Heart: Scientific Explorations of Infidelity," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 10, no. 5 (2001): 177–80.
[159] Joris Lammers, Janka I. Stoker, Jennifer Jordan, Monique Pollmann, and Diederik A. Stapel, "Power Increases Infidelity Among Men and Women," *Psychological Science* 22, no. 9 (2011): 91–97.

communication, forgiveness, and respect for one another.[160] The spouses must direct their passion, attitudes, and feelings toward one another.[161]

2.5.5 Unemployment

Another problem affecting marriage is a lack of capital to sustain families due to unemployment. Many couples are not in a position to raise their children well, especially by providing the basic needs, due to a lack of capital. Many families in Wote practice seasonal subsistence farming due to little rainfall. Though there is a shortage of rain, farmers depend on the rain for the growth of their crops. Climate change in Kamba land has affected farmers since many of them depend on the farms for the sustenance of their families. The small businesses run by most of them cannot sustain the family throughout. Many people do casual jobs for their living and the education of their children. Unemployment has been a serious problem in the area because it has led to many conflicts and misunderstandings in families. Women have high expectations for their husbands to sustain the families, thus becoming challenging since casual jobs are not always available. For the sustenance of their families and improvement of their status, they need to work. Above all, the county government is not in a position to create employment for every person to earn a living.

The quality of the work done by every society determines the status of life. The kind of work done by the Kamba people in small-scale farming has determined their standard of living, which is not to their expectation. In our modern times, many families are breaking down due to a scarcity of capital, and the upcoming generation of girls has lost the focus of marriage since many values materialism over the essence of coming together. One may find himself in a position of not having a wife if he has nothing to offer or provide, which may precipitate one to engage in immoral behaviors.

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[160]Nicholaus Segeja and Emmanuel Wabanhu, eds., *The Echo of Amoris Laetitia in Africa: Living the "Joy of Love Experienced by Families" in the Church* (Nairobi: CUEA Press, 2017), 18.
[161]Arniekie Ravhudzulo, *Riding the Wave of the Sting of Infidelity in Marriage*, vol. 1 (Bloomington: Xlibris Corporation, 2012), 2–3.

Men are expected to be hardworking, as they are often the primary breadwinners of their families. men provide for their wives and children, as well as extended family in need, with a decent quality of living.[162]There is a normative expectation that it is the duty of the man to provide for the family, where a large number of men find it hard. Spouses' ought to support each other in sustaining the family and bringing up the gifts of the children God has blessed them with. The women have the duty to secure jobs that can sustain their families and cater to their personal needs. They have to awaken from their caves and work for their families.

The reason why many women find it very difficult to cater to the minor responsibilities of their families, like buying salt, is that they don't engage themselves in work. In other scenarios is that, work may be there, but the pay is very little, or there is no work at all. It is the right of the workers to get just pay according to the teaching of the Catholic Church, Rerum Novarum. Today, workers find it extremely difficult to make ends meet on their pay or wages, owing to the sudden and frequent increases in the costs of commodities and services, which far outstrip the rise in incomes and wages.[163] In our modern error, many families are in trouble due to lack of unemployment, which has led to the breakdown of many.

2.5.6 Forced Marriage

"There are some marriages in which either or both parties were unjustly forced to marry or married because of a realistic, substantial fear, and then, because of human unpredictability, made their marriage good, healthy, and productive of joy and healthy children."[164] This does not always happen; sometimes it is very chaotic in forced marriage, and there is no provision in the church law for the annulment of forced marriage. Difference comes between arranged

[162] Stanley L. Saxton, Patricia Voydanoff, and Angela Ann Zukowski, eds., *The Changing Family: Views from Theology and the Social Sciences in the Light of the Apostolic Exhortation Familiaris Consortio* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1984), 128.
[163] Stanislaus Muyebe, C. and Alexander. *The African Bishops on Human Rights: A Resource Book* (Nairobi: Paulines Africa, 2001), 182.
[164] Stephen J. Kelleher, *Divorce and Remarriage for Catholics?* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), 129.

and forced marriage. It is important to understand the motivations that drive parents to force their children to marry; it does not mean we should accept justifications for denying the right to choose their partner. [165]This issue of forced marriage should not be used to stigmatise people.

This has been one of the major problems in modern times. In forced marriage, the outcome is not encouraging many times. It happens when a man is forced to marry a girl because he impregnated her. It happens because of fear and force resulting from the affected party. There is a lot of pressure that arises from forced marriage.[166] The man marries out of his will because he is forced to do so. It caught the man unaware and unprepared for marriage. Without any option, the man has to carry the cross by marrying the girl, where life is all about struggle, since they were not ready for it. It has been noticed that the aim of forcing marriage in the Kamba community and other communities is to take care of the baby and the mother. It has been confirmed that out of many forced marriages, the end is separation.

2.5.7 Early Marriage

Early marriage is when at least one of the partners is under the age of marriage. It also has to do with the immaturity of the partners. In early marriage, the couples are insufficiently prepared for marriage, their character is little formed, often studies or courses are not completed, they may have economic crisis, have little experience of marriage, and many parents are against too early friendship and courting.[167] The Kenya Marriage Act of 2014 set eighteen years as the minimum age of marriage for brides and grooms. This law, for the first time, established a uniform minimum age for all types of marriage, regardless of the type of marriage contracted, including Christian, Hindu, Islamic, customary, or civil.[168] This means

[165] Ralph Grillo, "Marriages, Arranged and Forced: The UK Debate," in *Gender, Generations and the Family in International Migration*, ed. Albert Kraler, Eleonore Kofman, Martin Kohli, and Camille Schmoll (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 77–98.
[166] Stephen Mutuku (70 years), interviewed by Daniel Katie: Makueni, Mbitini, 5th January 2026.
[167] Josef Heinzmann, *Love Is Your Calling: A Book on Marriage for the Faithful*. Translated by Dame Mary Groves, O.S.B. (England: St. Paul Publications, 1983), 24.
[168] Annie Bunting, Benjamin N. Lawrance, and Richard L. Roberts, eds., *Marriage by Force? Contestation over Consent and Coercion in Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2016), 89.

that entering into marriage under the age of eighteen is an offense. African elites, missionaries, and government officials have stressed this.

However, many people have gone against this law by marrying young girls with the claim that the girls are mature physically. They may appear mature physically, but they are not in a position to handle family matters. Other times, you find that even at the age of eighteen, a young lady is not in a position to raise a family. It has been confirmed that those who enter into marriage at an early age often end up separating. One of the problems causing family breakdown among the Akamba community is early marriage.[169] This is because many are not in a position to handle family matters diplomatically and responsibly. Young couples have inadequate knowledge and skills for marriage, which is why they end up separating.

2.5.8 Alcoholism

Excessive use of alcohol has led to the breakdown of many families in Kamba. This is because a lot of money that is to be used in developing and educating the children has been used in alcohol.[170] Excessive use of alcohol leads to addiction and makes one lose appetite for food, leading to a weak physical body. Excessive alcohol consumption makes one irresponsible because one is not in a position to fulfill his duties. Women run away from men simply because they are unable to meet their duties of the family and of marriage. Not only has this problem taken root in Kamba, but also taken root in many communities. This is one of the problems leading to the breakdown of many contemporary marriages.

Apart from the aforesaid effects of alcohol, it has addiction has many effects. In many families where alcohol is heavily consumed, there is no peace and harmony because of conflicts. In such situations, "Religious norms are a barrier to marital dissolutions, especially among Catholics and conservative Protestants, and religious communities may encourage

[169] Stephen Mutuku (70 years), interviewed by Daniel Katie: Makueni, Mbitini, 27th August 2025.
[170] Joan K. Jackson, "Alcoholism and the Family," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 315, no. 1 (January 1958): 90–98.

couples to try to resolve their difference rather than divorce."[171] Many families in Wote have broken down simply because of the abuse of alcohol. alcohol consumption must be addressed with immediate effect since the outcome or the results of it are many, and those who are greatly affected are the youth and young couples. Excessive use of alcohol leads to diseases like chronic diseases and other serious problems, including high blood pressure, stroke, liver disease, and heart disease, just to mention a few. "Alcoholics who voluntarily seek treatment at clinics affect the lives of more people than jailed alcoholics."[172] The family status diminishes due to expenses, leading to poverty.

2.5.9 The Fading Away of Traditional Customs

There is a decline in traditional practice in the Kamba community. For instance, marriage, according to Kamba, is not an individual event or occasion but rather communal. Traditionally, there was an aspect of betrothal led by the parents of the groom. To some extent, they chose a girl to be married by the groom and from a clan that was respectable, recognized in society for its moral and behavioral standards. A good clan was free from all kinds of vices and abnormalities. Traditionally, elders feared marrying in a clan whose moral standards in society were not recognized. They ensured that pre-marital preparations went well. For instance, traditionally, betrothal and courtship were very important in ensuring that a girl for marriage was worthy, and that was brought morally.[173] The spouses were guided by having sections for imparting knowledge to them. These studies for traditional marriage held by elders were very crucial for the couple to be.

Both parents and elders participated in the marriage practices. The involvement of the parents ensured the smooth running of the marriage and did away with all kinds of doubts. From the aforesaid, it has been watered down by the current generation. Marriage is not like

[171]Timothy B. Heaton and Stan LeRoy Albrecht**,** "Stable Unhappy Marriages," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 53, no. 3 (August 1991): 747–758.
[172] Joan K. Jackson, 1995, 90-98.
[173] John S. Mbiti, 1991, 110.

before, simply because of doing away with traditional practices that prevented marriage from breaking away. Doing away with the traditional practices of marriage has increased the rate of family breakdown in the Diocese of Wote. Marriages nowadays in Wote Diocese are done in secret, and many times, elders of the family, relatives, and uncles are not involved.[174] They are no longer recognized by spouses to be.

Conclusion

Among the Kamba community, the concept of traditional exchange of vows is not conducted through spoken words, as in the Rite of Matrimony, but through symbolic acts and cultural rituals, with questions of intent led by elders, which express commitment. The symbolic acts and rituals happen during the climax of one of the family's visits to the wedding ceremony. The exchange of vows during the occasion solidified the commitment. Before marriage, there were rites of passage that were communal ceremonies that were performed as a person passed from one stage to another: at birth, adolescence, adulthood, and death. Bride wealth or price was paid before the exchange of consent to the girl's parents, beginning with the first goats (*Mbui sya Ntheo*). This custom allowed the fiancé to own the bride. Other customs included bride price negotiations, ritual and ceremonies, courtship and engagement, among others. In comparison with traditional marriage, there are many problems affecting current marriage, like early marriage, alcoholism, and unemployment, among others. The following chapter will focus on Church teaching, mainly on the exchange of vows. Teachings on marriage, especially those aspects found in traditional marriage, such as communion and fidelity, will be addressed. This may help in overcoming the current challenges of marriage.

[174] Cleophas Mutie (70 years), interviewed by Daniel Katie: Makueni, Mbitini, December 19th, 2025.

CHAPTER THREE

CHURCH TEACHING ON THE EXCHANGE OF VOWS IN MARRIAGE

Introduction

This chapter begins with a discussion of the biblical teachings on marriage in the Old Testament, Marriage arrangements in the Old Testament, Marriage and the Old Testament prophets, and the Formation of children. In the New Testament, Jesus' teachings on marriage and the Catholic Tradition will be discussed. The chapter delves into a discussion of patristic fathers: St. Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 313-386AD), St. Ambrose (c.340-397 AD), and St. Augustine (c.354-430AD), on commitment to marriage. The chapter delves into a discussion of selected popes: Pope Paul VI (1963-1978), Pope John Paul II (1920-2005), Pope Benedict (2005-2013), and Pope Francis (2013-present).

The chapter then discusses selected documents and Councils: The Council of Florence, the Council of Trent, *Casti Connubii*, and Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*. Marriage in the first three centuries and the Rite of Marriage in the West will be discussed. The Rite of Matrimony, focusing on the current Rite of Matrimony, and the Rite of Matrimony during Mass, the exchange of vows in marriage, and its commitment will follow the discussion, then the conclusion.

3.1 Meaning of Marriage Vows

A vow is a solemn promise that partners make to each other during the wedding ceremony. Vows are sacred or solemn, voluntary promises that couples commit themselves to in matrimony. They are seen as central and sacred oaths that define the whole marriage journey.[175] It is not just some ceremonial language; it is an oath that determines all aspects of

[175] David M. Thomas, *The Christian Marriage: A Journey Together* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1983), 100-103.

the marital relationship. They are oaths in which the partners vow to live out their life as one for a specific purpose, through self-giving based on the love of Christ that is patient, sacrificial, and eternal. John Paul II describes the exchange of vows as "the basic moment of faith of the couple."[176]

"The exchange of vows expresses a profound mutual commitment of faithful love in the present and for the future." It also expresses their intention to marry and faith towards the sacrament. However, ritualising marriage in the Catholic Church by the couple nowadays may be affected by pastoral issues like not living a Christian faith, and is often referred to as baptised non-Christians engaging in marriage. Because of this, the Church insists that the couple must live in the Christian faith by virtue of their baptism. John Paul II argues the case in the following:

> Nevertheless, it must not be forgotten that these engaged couples, by virtue of their baptism, are already really sharers in Christ's marriage covenant with the church, and that, by their right intention, they have accepted God's Plan regarding marriage and therefore at least implicitly consent to what the church intends to do when she celebrates marriage. Thus, the fact that motives of a social nature also enter into the request is not enough to justify refusal on the part of pastors. Moreover, as the Second Vatican Council teaches, the sacraments by words and ritual elements nourish and strengthen faith: that faith towards which the married couple is already journeying by reason of the uprightness of their intention, which Christ's grace certainly does not fail to favour and support.[177]

Thomas makes it clear that in marriage, these vows have a permanent, unconditional quality meant to remain no matter what circumstances arise, such as poverty, sickness, or difficulty. Thus, marriages are a covenant relationship and should be understood as such by the Christian man and woman. It is for this reason that the married couple is expected to fulfil their vows by forgiving each other, offering support, humbling themselves, and remaining faithful in the face of the challenges that they may encounter as a result of their marriage.

Furthermore, marriage vows create an obligation of both moral and spiritual nature not only among the two people getting married but also before God. This obligates them to work,

[176] John Paul II, On the Family, Section 50.
[177] John Paul II, On the Family, Section 50.

develop, and depend on their faith continually. It is clear from the text that love in marriage is not only a feeling but also a decision and a way of life that depends on grace and determination. "The mutual consent expressed in the marriage vows, while sufficient for establishing Christian marriage, is augmented by a sealing or completion in sexual course." [178]

3.2 Biblical Teaching on Marriage

The Bible is the word of God that guide, teaches, and directs people. According to Dei Verbum, 9 states that:

> Hence, there exists a close connection and communication between sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture. For both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way, merge into a unity and tend toward the same end. For sacred Scripture is the word of God in as much as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit, while sacred Tradition takes the word of God entrusted by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit to the apostles, and hands it on to their successors in its full purity, so that led by the light of the Spirit of truth, they may faithfully preserve, expound, and spread it abroad by their preaching. Thus, it is not from sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. Therefore, both sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence." [179]

Vows act as a moral guide for how the spouses should treat each other. Love, loyalty, respect, and support should be paramount. The Bible teaches, Husbands, love your wives (Ephesians 5:25) and teaches the young women to love their husbands (Titus 2:4). Unlike any other relationship, love in a marriage can be both deeper and more selfless. Jesus demands this kind of love from His disciples, and it is the quality that couples most need. Marital love is about covenant, not about feeling. The promises made in exchange for vows by the spouses should be reflected on God's faithful love to Israel, thus mirroring unconditional and unending love. Since the vows express that commitment and love by the spouses in marriage. According to Amoris Laetitia, 163 states that:

> Love is not merely a feeling; it is a decision, a choice. It consists of seeking the good of the other, of feeling responsible for his or her life, and of accepting the challenges

[178] David M. Thomas, *The Christian Marriage: A Journey Together* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1983), 104.
[179] Second Vatican Council. *Dei Verbum* (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation). November 18, 1965. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 58 (1966): 817–835.

> that come with this commitment. In this way, love gives itself freely, offering a stable and reliable framework for married life.[180]

"The fundamental theme of marriage vows is the unconditional promise to love one another under all conceivable circumstances."[181] The purpose is to create an "intimate community of life and love, which is the very essence of Christian marriage, as defined by Vatican II. Thus, they must be put into practice daily in marriage through love, sacrifice, and fidelity.

In a letter to the Roman Catholic Church, Paul writes, "Do you not realize, brothers and sisters, because I am speaking to people who understand the law, that the law has authority over someone only for the duration of that person's life," (Romans 7:1). For instance, a married woman is bound to her husband by law as long as he is living, but upon his death, she is released from that obligation. If she has sex with another man while her husband is still alive, she will be considered an adulteress.

3.2.1 Old Testament

The Old Testament portrays marriage as a covenant but not as a contract. The exchange of vows is covenantal and is made before God. The term covenant makes the vows holy and binding. The image portrayed by God toward Israel of divine love and fidelity is the same image that should be between spouses. Marriage requires connection on all levels: spiritual, emotional, and physical. According to the teachings of the Old Testament, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24), man and the woman are called for companionship (Gen 2:18), and God is the source of marriage. This ensures stability and permanence in marriage. It also provides security during difficult times. In every manner, married couples are supposed to be one. An expression of love, sexual closeness makes a marriage happier and more cohesive. Additionally, it is the

[180] Francis. *Amoris Laetitia*: The joy of love. March 19, 2016. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 108 (2016), 311–446.
[181] David M. Thomas, *Christian Marriage: A Journey Together* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1983), 100-101.

ability that enables married people to "multiply, and replenish the earth" (Genesis 1:28). Intimacy is a gift that can result in youngsters experiencing unfathomable joy as members of the everlasting family.

Through the Old Testament, marriage has been portrayed or understood in a juridical nature. Contracts were part of marriage. It is through the prophets and by the use of images that light has been shed on marriage. Marriage is usually portrayed as a covenantal commitment, with betrothal acts, bride-price, and consummation. Covenantal commitment and faithfulness are portrayed in the Negotiations mentioned the *Mohar*, the money paid by the groom to the girl's father (Gen 34:12; Exod. 22:16; 1 Sam 18:25; Hos 3:2).

The creation of marriage expresses lifelong commitment in times of joy and suffering. One of the concrete examples is between Jacob and Rachel, whose marriage teaches that genuine love must have commitment and sacrifice. (Gen 29:18-28) Love by itself is not enough to build a healthy relationship or marriage. According to Jacob and Rachel, true love is patient and willing to endure hardship. Jacob loved Rachel and proved it by serving and working for fourteen years, after Leah marriage. Deception or dishonesty, as portrayed by Laban father-in-law of Jacob, reveals a danger, pain, and disorder that he brought into the family. (Genesis 29:25; Proverbs 12:22).

The experience of Jacob who once deceived his own father, reminds us that sinful actions often return to us until they are corrected (Genesis 27:35; Galatians 6:7). Polygamy is not allowed in the Roman Catholic Church since in reference to Jacob it brough jealousy, favourism, and emotional suffering, demonstrating that God's design for marriage is a faithful union between one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5–6). Even when man failed, God remained faithful and worked through this broken marriage to accomplish His motive, portraying that His grace can redeem even unfaithful relationships (Genesis 29:31; Romans 8:28).

However, in the Old Testament, divorce was allowed for women and more for those who were not able to give birth; it was not encouraged, since it did not reflect God's original design of marriage. At other times, a barren woman could become the second wife or be married by one of her servants who acted as her deputy and became her husband's concubine.[182] The aspect of polygamy is portrayed in the Old Testament. For instance, Hagar was thus known as Keturah because, even though Abraham sent her out and she roamed in the wilderness, she remained a virgin and chaste when he brought her back. (Gen. Rabbah 61:4). Biblical examples narrated about men having more than one wife are termed as a disaster.[183]Monogamous marriage helps the Christian to have long life commitment to each other. This also ensures faithfulness and keeping of the promises.

In the Old Testament, though divorce and polygamy were accepted, the relationship between the spouses was of great importance. It did not reflect God's original design of marriage. Men and women were very diplomatic in choosing their partners for life. "With three things I am highlighted, for they are pleasing to the lord and to men: Harmony among neighbors and the mutual love of husband and wife."[184] (Sir 25;1) A good wife is a special blessing from God. "He who finds a wife finds Happiness; it is a favor he receives from the lord" (Prov 18:22).

The bible presents marriage as a sacred covenant instituted by God. God instituted marriage for a man and a woman to live in unity, love, commitment, faithfulness, and mutual responsibility (Genesis 2:24; Ephesians 5:25–33). This is reflected in the story of Ruth and Boaz, which illustrates this principle in practice in detail. In Ruth 3:9–13, Ruth humbly requests Boaz to "spread your garment over me," which symbolizes her consent and desire for him to

[182] Martin Francis, "*Marriage in the Old Testament and Intertestamental Periods" and "Marriage in the New Testament, In Christian Marriage, In Christian Marriage:* A Historical Study. (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001), 2.
[183] Martin Francis, 2000, 3.
[184] Martin Francis, 2000, 4.

act as her kinsman-redeemer. Boaz responds with integrity, promising to obey the law. In Ruth 4:9–10, publicly, Boaz declares at the city gate that he will redeem and take Ruth as his wife to preserve the name and inheritance of her deceased husband, Mahlon. This affirms that marriage is confirmed through mutual consent, covenant, and community recognition. The agreements made during the consent make the marriage. The two passages illustrate that marriage is both covenantal and relational, involving social and familial responsibilities, reflecting God's faithfulness, love, and providential plan, rather than being based solely on ceremonial vows. Marriage as a shared journey, vows mark the beginning of a lifelong path.

3.2.1.1 Marriage Arrangement in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, marriage was an arrangement that involved two families. Parents participated in making decisions for the children's engagement in marriage. (Gen. 21-21, 24:34-5 Judges 1.12-13.2 Chronicle 24:3). Parents decided for their boys planning to get married, and the boys could obey. The creation of these marriages promoted a lifelong commitment since all the parties participated in decision-making. The bridegroom-to-be ought to pay a dowry to the girl's parents for the marriage to take place. "The *mohar* is an ordinary sum of money which the fiancé has to pay to the father of the girl."[185] A period of employment similar to Jacob's could be used to substitute the dowry (Gen 29:15-30) and that of David (1 Sam .18:25-25). The man had authority over the spouse after the dowry was paid. According to Korir, this was a sign that the girl belonged to a particular husband even without sexual intercourse.

Jews were unique in their marriage practices because of their religious meaning, strong legal structure, and ethical framework. The Israelites forbade marriage outside the country,

[185]Cornelius Korir, "The Nature of Christian Marriage in the Context of Traditional Marriage Among the Kipsigis of Kenya." (PhD diss., Nairobi, 2016), 49-65.

purportedly to protect against religious corruption but also to avoid alienating the land that was given to Israel by Yahweh (Exod. 34;12-16; Deut. 7:3-4). Marriage among the Israelites was for stability and permanence. The dowry was for compensation and the acquisition of the right over the woman. Stability in marriage in the first Testament was centered on God, in which He created man in his own image and likeness. God blessed them by saying be fruitful, increase in number, and fill the earth (Gen1:28). Eve, coming from the rib of Adam, symbolized the unity and indissolubility of marriage in the Old Testament.

3.2.1.2 Marriage and the Old Testament Prophets

In the books of the prophets, we have insight into interpretations of the covenant according to the manner of human marriage. Marriage in reference to pre-exilic times of the prophets was centred on Israel's fidelity to God's Covenant, since there was a lack of faithfulness, love, obedience, and trust. Prophets conceive the idea of YHWH as the husband of Israel in their attempt to portray God's election of Israel and their consequent covenant. With reference to vows, they reflect God's faithfulness to the Israelites. Marriage between God and the Israelites is an exemplary marriage to all couples in and intending to get into marriage, that faithfulness and commitment are paramount.

Marriage in the Old Testament has been highlighted by several prophets who should be credited for that. They portrayed covenantal marriage between YHWH and Israel. Yahweh is portrayed as a loving and faithful husband, unlike Israel. God reveals himself as the only lover who powerfully loves his people. The bride here is depicted as sinful. Israel has not been faithful to God. It reminds the faithful/couples that unfaithfulness, like committing adultery, is an offense in society and in marriage, warning is given against adultery, shame, and corrupted marriage relationships (Prov 5:1-23), (Prov 7:4-27). Man, not only offends his parents' rights but also "dishonours his marriage bed" (Sir 23:19). These highlight the consequences of not keeping the vows in marriage.

Prophets, through images, remind the people of the covenant that they made with God. They expressed the commitment made before God. They spoke on behalf of God to remind the people about the covenant they made with God and their infidelity with God. Faithfulness to the covenant made and divine love should be embraced and practiced in marriage. Jeremiah reminds us, "I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the desert, through a land not sown. (Jer 2:2).

In Hosea, symbolically, he uses his personal experience of marriage to draw a parallel between covenant and marriage. His own marriage with his wife Gomer is elaborately connected with his meditation on Israel's marriage with YHWH. In Hosea 1:2-3, there is a renewed commitment by Hosea. God commanded Hosea to remarry Gomer. This is also depicted in chapter 3:1-3, where he takes Gomer again and his wife. This reflects God's continued love and commitment. It is a commitment made to God. Hosea is against the idea of marriage as a contract of ownership through which a woman is nothing more than the property of a man. This is because marriage is a shared journey of exchange of vows, expressing covenantal love and commitment towards each other.

The old nature of the marriage has been annulled, and a new one has been re-established, which is of unconditional covenant rooted in righteousness, justice, steadfastness, mercy, and faithfulness. God's covenant with Israel is a model for Christian matrimony. According to John Marshall, states that

> But marriage seen primarily as a relation and not as a legal contract will be a direct return to the utterances of both the Old and the New Testament, in which marriage is seen and described in terms of the relation between God and the people in the Old Testament, and between Christ and his Church in the New.[186]

After the exilic time, the prophets developed the theme of indissolubility, faithfulness based on monogamous of marriage. In other terms, they came up with properties of marriage. Serious warnings against adultery have been described since it weakens the morality of marriage.

[186] John Marshall, 1969, 37.

Faithfulness in marriage is paramount. In life, in union with God sustained by prayer, create the bond of unity. The vows mirror the enduring love all along and the unconditional love manifested by God. By imitating God, couples are encouraged to keep and honour the vows made before Him during the celebration of the matrimony.

3.2.1.3 The Formation of the Children

By very nature, the institution of matrimony, itself, and conjugal love are ordained for the procreation and education of children, and find in them the ultimate crown."[187] This expresses the lifelong commitment; they promise commitment and love no matter the circumstances. Love in marriage generates life. Children in the first Testament were a sign of God's blessing in marriage (Ps 128). According to the wisdom literature, three aspects of marriage are outlined: the education of the children, respect among the members of the family, and the awareness that children's behavior in a family brings honor or shame. The bible teaches that, hear your father's lesson, my son, and do not reject your mother's guidance (Prov 1:18). Respect for children and obedience are also among God's commandments. Honor your father and your mother (Ex 20:12). The promises made by the couples in matrimony must be kept and be models for the upcoming generation and society. For instance, respect for one another.

3.3.1 Marriage in the New Testament

Unlike in the Old Testament, the centrality of marriage in the New Testament is Jesus. Marriage ceremonies during Jesus' time began with betrothal or promises. Betrothal took place before the fiancé could take the bride. People married at ages 14-18 due to life expectancy. In one of the Gospel accounts, the sacred writer carefully states that Mary was "betrothed" to Joseph before they came together (Matthew 1:18–19). Jesus' teaching on marriage reflects His desire to restore God's original intentions. By going back to the account of the creation of the world, Jesus taught that God's original intentions for marriage were faithfulness and lifelong

[187] David M. Thomas, *Christian Marriage: A Journey Together* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1983), 65.

marriage grounded in the love of God. He showed concern for marriage in the wedding at Cana when he did the first miracle (John 2:1-11). It was an affirmation that marriage was good. A lifelong commitment established by Jesus of permanence and faithfulness. The first miracle that Jesus did at Cana in Galilee showed the importance of marriage and that marriage is to be respected. [188]This illustrates the creation of the marriage where the vows taken emphasize the foundation of the covenant. It is a moment where a couple celebrates and officially becomes married in the church.

God instituted marriage as a union between a man and a woman (Matt 19:5). Marriage in the New Testament is a prefiguration of the Old Testament, and this has been affirmed by Jesus Christ. Marriage is a permanent relation (Matt 19:6). This reflects the vows that are for life in times of joy and happiness. It is indissoluble that a man and woman ought to live together for life in unity. In the first Testament, Jesus is the new law in relation to marriage that divorce is against the unity of the marriage. In addition, Paul emphasized the importance of couples living together as a family.

3.3.2 Jesus' Teaching on Marriage

Jesus' teaching on marriage emphasized the unity and indissolubility of marriage (Mt. 19:1-9). The vows taken in marriage are for life and indissoluble. Commitment between the spouses takes precedence unless death separates them. The implication of this is that marriage ought to be permanent and stable. Examining the four Gospels, Jesus is in rigid opposition to divorce. "Christian marriage is a God-given, life -long community, created to ensure the most appropriate conditions for the promotion of life, the life of the children, and that of spouses."[189] The aspect of the contract has been ruled out. The permanence of marriage has been practiced through commitment. The consent in marriage is for life.

[188] Judith Mbula, *Our Religious Heritage* (Lagos: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1982), 97.
[189] John Marshall, ed. *The Future of Christian Marriage* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1969), 26.

According to Pauline's interpretation of the command of Jesus, there are exceptions that we call Pauline's privilege.[190] "But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so; in such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved, God has called you to peace." (1Cor 7:15). "God himself has joined together man and woman, bestowing upon their free choice a consecration which goes beyond them. They are one flesh in His eyes."[191]Jesus stressed the commitment that should be there in marriage. (Mathew 19:4-6).

According to the Western Church, great emphasis has been placed on the fact that marriage is a lifelong commitment that cannot be broken. The term bond has been used to put this teaching across.[192] "Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior." Jesus explains the sacrificial and relational commitments in (Eph 5:22-23). In this verse, Commitments here have to do with our mutual care, devotion, and attention given to one another. The way Christ loved the Church, husbands should love their wives. Christ's love for the church, which must be reflected in spouses' commitment toward each other, is the model for the vows.

> God is love, and in himself he lives a mystery of personal loving communion. Creating the human race in his own image and continually keeping it in being, God inscribed in the humanity of man and women the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility of love and communion. Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being.[193]

"Christian marriage is a symbol of love between Christ and his church."[194] The bride is the Church, and the bridegroom is Christ. The love of Jesus for the church was unconditional and thus should be imitated. Every genuine act of love within or outside marriage is an act of God. It is a reflection of God's love that couples need to embrace in their communion. "Wives,

[190] Aylward Shorter, *Christian Family Power in Africa* (Eldoret, Kenya: Gaba Publications, 1977), 18.
[191] Xavier Leon DuFour, *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (New York: Seabury Publication, 1973), 336.
[192] Aylward Shorter, 1973, 18.
[193] David M. Thomas, *Christian Marriage: A Journey Together* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1983), 49.
[194] Judith Mbula, *Our Religious Heritage* (Lagos: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1982), 97.

respect and honor your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives deeply and do not be harsh with them." (Col. 3:18-19). "Thus, a man and a woman ... render mutual help and service to each other through the intimate union of their persons and of their actions. Through this union, they experience the meaning of their oneness and attain it with growing perfection day by day."[195] Not only commitment, which should be there in matrimony to thrive as a community, but also faithfulness of vows as reflected in God's faithful love for the Israelites.

Jesus' stress on the indissolubility of marriage against the laws of Moses, Paul Palmer said that, "…. before Christ could restore marriage covenant status, he had to restore to the woman's marital rights which had been denied to her."[196] The synoptic tradition of Mark states that marriage is an indissoluble bond. Marriage is ordered by its very nature to the good of the couple as well as the generation (procreation), education of their offspring, mutual help, sexual fulfilment, and conjugal love.[197] Unity and indissolubility are key components of marriage. Jesus argued with the Pharisee that Moses allowed divorce because of arrogance and the willful sinfulness of the people's refusal to accept God's authority (Mk 10:5). Jesus stresses the permanence and stability of marriage, where the vows exchanged act as security during joyful and sorrowful moments.

Christ the Lord elevated inter-baptized marriage to the status of a sacrament. The grace of the sacrament perfects the human love of the spouses, strengthens their indissoluble unity, and sanctifies them on the path to eternal life. Marriage, as a sacrament, symbolizes the union of Christ and the Church, and thus it gives the spouses the grace to love each other with the love with which Christ loved the Church. It is a call for couples to exercise love in their marriage by imitating Jesus Christ. Paul's stand on marriage in the Second Testament

[195] John Marshall, 1969, 25.
[196] Palmer, Paul F., S.J. "Christian Marriage: Contract or Covenant?" *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 33, no. 4 (December 1972): 617-636.
[197] John Marshall, ed. *The Future of Christian Marriage* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1969), 25.

continued the teaching of Jesus Christ. In Ephesians, "the subject is not conjugal rights but love."[198] He speaks of love as the foundation of the stability of marriage. When a husband and wife dedicate themselves to one another in mutual love, their wedded love becomes an invisible act of Christ.[199] The love that Christ showed for the sake of our salvation.

3.4 Catholic Tradition

The fundamental idea behind Catholic Tradition is that it is the actual faith, as taught by Christ to the Apostles and faithfully passed down to each succeeding generation.[200] According to Catholic doctrines, couples are expected to dedicate themselves entirely to one another until death. Raymond Bosler states that:

> Since the Roman Catholic Church has long held that Christ himself determined that marriage vows between Christians were to be permanent and indissoluble, she has considered this a law of God that could not dispense from.[201]

They pledge their allegiance to one another during the wedding ceremony till death separates them. The vows they make form a sacred covenant before God, thus spiritually binding and holy. According to the teachings of the Catholic Church, remarrying is allowed only when death separates them.

The foundation of marriage is a pledge of permanent sacrifice to love, commitment, care, and honor one another as husbands and wife for the rest of their lives.[202] Marriage is more than a covenant, unlike the ancient teachings of Jewish and Islamic culture. Contract is the lower view, while covenant is the higher view. *Consortium Totius vitae* stress the partnership of life, the personal relationship, and the union that exists between the spouses. [203] In other terms, it is

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[198]William G. Blum, *Forms of Marriage: Monogamy Reconsidered*, vol. 1, AMECEA (Kenya: Gaba Publications, 1989), 251.
[199]Grassi Joseph, "The Letter to the Ephesians," *In Jerome Biblical Commentary*. Retrieved from https://www.bloomsbury.com (accessed January 21st 2026).
[200] Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vatican, 2012), no.77-78.
[201] Raymond T. Bosler, *What They Ask About Marriage* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1975). 206.
[202]John Witter Jr. and Eliza Ellison, trans. *Covenant Marriage in a Comparative Perspective* (USA: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 3.
[203] Vatican II Council, *Gaudium et Spes*: *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, (December* 7, 1965) in *AAS* 58 (1966), 1025–115.

a "covenant by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life."[204] According to Vatican II, marriage is an intimate union of what God intended

3.4.1 Patristic Fathers

Patristic Fathers**,** also called Church Fathers, are early Christian theologians and writers whose teachings and writings shaped the church's doctrines, its theology, and the practices of the Christian church, especially from the first centuries to the 8th century. They are spiritual and doctrinal fathers. Among the Church fathers are: St. Cyril of Jerusalem, St. Ambrose of Milan, St. John Chrysostom, St. Augustine, St. Thomas, among others. They saw marriage as a holy, lifelong institution instituted by God.

3.4.2 St. Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 313-386 AD)

In Catechetical Lecturer 4, 25-26, St Cyril states that:

> Let none disparage marriage, for it is honourable; nor let any speak against the eating of meats, for they are good. For marriage is honourable and the bed undefiled. But fornicators and adulterers God will judge. Do not call marriage pollution, nor think the married state impure. For if marriage were evil, then He who made marriage would be evil. But God made them male and female, and blessed them.[205]

St. Cyril of Jerusalem makes it clear that marriage is a good and honorable institution established by God during creation, and thus must never be despised or regarded as impure. The creation of marriage is a result of vows that are the core foundation of the marriage covenant. He insists that the union of couples, including conjugal rites in marriage, is lawful and undefiled. He asserts that fidelity in marriage is a virtuous obligation emanating from Christianity. Marriage is noble; however, spouses should be faithful to each other and abstain from adultery to keep the bond of matrimony clean as they live a holy life for God. It is also a sacred obligation that entails spouses being bonded to each other through faithfulness, purity,

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[204] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Revised Edition (Nairobi: Pauline's Publications Africa, 2004), no.1601.
[205] Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd series, vol. 7, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 23–24.

and accountability to fulfil their sacred duty of living the Christian life. The spouses are called for absolute faithfulness to each other.[206]

According to him, Sin lies only in fornication, adultery, and lust, which happen outside marriage. He praises virginity as a noble calling freely chosen for the sake of God's kingdom; he carefully avoids setting it against marriage. He affirms that both states of life are acceptable and blessed in the church. Defend marriage by upholding the goodness of the body and of creation itself. For him, marriage is a legitimate path of Christian virtue marked by fidelity, holiness, and self-control. [207]

3.4.3 St. Ambrose of Milan (c.340-397AD)

According to Ambrose, marriage is good, honourable, and instituted by God for permanence. The consent expressed during marriage advocates for the permanence, commitment, and stability of marriage. Marriage provides companionship, moral order, and is a legitimate content of procreation. He highlights the properties and the ends of marriage that have to be met. The union between the bridegroom and the bride and its fruits result in marriage. In his Classicism and Catechism treatise, Colish, Marcia states that:

> The patriarchs provide models that are accessible and relevant in the present age. They were, after all, similar in many respects to the competence. Like them, the patriarchs were married men, rulers of households, concerned with providing for their families, raising and marrying off their children, training and governing their servants, administering property, getting along with their neighbours, and acting in the public sphere. Their stories contain lessons on the relations between husbands and wives and between blood relatives. They also offer instruction to unmarried girls, concubines, and slaves.[208]

In one of his sermons entitled Exhortatio *Virginitatis,* St. Ambrose explains that marriage is a remedy for desire and encourages chastity. He does not condemn marriage as the only way to control emotions, but it prevents one from indulging in it recklessly.

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[206]"Marriage," *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Encyclopedia Britannica, retrieved from https://www.britannica.com (accessed April 17, 2026).
[207] Cyril of Jerusalem, 1994, 23–24.
[208] Marcia L. Colish, *"Classicism and Catechesis in the Patriarch Treatises of Ambrose of Milan," Rivista di Storia della Filosofia* 61, no. 1 (2006): 9–42

The idea behind this is the promotion of chastity. He emphasizes mutual fidelity and moral equality between the spouses.[209] These virtues keep marriage on track, thus creating peace and happiness between the spouses.

3.4.4 St. Augustine (354-430AD)

On marriage, Augustine set forth his views in a treatise entitled "The Good of Marriage." he has a conviction that marriage is a divine institution. It is instituted by God for permanence, and the vows made are morally binding. It is a sacred commitment made before God for life and for the benefit of the couple. Since marriage is a divine institution, it is good. He insists that the marriage of believers is good and can be defended by right reason against all charges. In his tractates of the gospel of John 1-10, Jesus attending the wedding of Cana, is proof that marriage is good. Although marriage is good, the goodness of marriage is relative. Augustine contrasted two ideas when he wrote his marriage doctrine: marriage based on the social nature of man and marriage based on the biological difference of the sexes.

According to Him, marriage is an institution whose *raison d'être* is procreation, and the sexual act has only a biological function, whose exercise must be limited accordingly. In other terms, is that the main purpose of marriage is procreation. According to him, marriage is not only good because of procreation but also because of the union of the two sexes. The crown of marriage, according to him, is chastity of procreation and fidelity. Any other sexual relation not motivated by procreation is sinful. Husbands, as the head of the families should lead by example. Those who practice and live according to what God intended in marriage, husband and wife, will inevitably enjoy peace and unity in their marriage. He also holds that faithfulness and indissolubility will receive their high splendor if the spiritual communion is lived in total continence. Marriage bond is indissoluble; death can only dissolve marriage.

[209] Ambrose of Milan, *Exhortatio Virginitatis* 1–2, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 10, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 400–402.

In addition, marriage has some influential factors that help its stability. One among them is goodness and friendship. Augustine narrates that it is God who made the ties between man and woman so that they may live together. God joined them together so that they could journey together side by side.[210] The teachings of the Catholic Church stress that couples in marriage should be faithful to each other, the way Christ is faithful to the Church. According to Augustine, marriage as a sacrament entails faithfulness and procreation, which are inseparable.

3.5 Selected Popes

3.5.1 Pope Paul VI (1963-1978)

Pope Paul VI, in the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, presents marriage as a deep and committed union full of love and openness to one another. It originates from God, who is love, the father, "from whom every family is named in heaven and on earth."[211] Marriage was instituted by God and not by chance, whose aim was to effect in his loving design. The union of the husband and wife in giving oneself to one another must be specific and exclusive, and in perfecting one another. Their union of Commitment, openness, and exclusivity is paramount and is what God intended for the progress of the marriage. Their cooperation with God will enhance in procreation and rearing the children. Those who have been baptised are invested with the sacramental graces, as it symbolises the union of Christ and the Church. The bond between Christ and the Church has to be expressed and lived by the spouses in the exchange of consent. This forms the base and the beginning point of the marriage. On married love, Pope Paul VI highlights that:

> Married love is fully human, a compound of sense and spirit. It is an act of free will that neither of the two couples is forced to be in that union. They are called to embrace the joys and the sorrows of marriage with love as a means of growth in becoming one and achieving their human fulfilment.[212]

[210] James Aylward Mohler, *Love, Marriage and Family Yesterday and Today* (Delhi: Satya Press, 1982), 63.
[211] Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae* 9 in *AAS* 60 (1968), 481–503.
[212] Paul VI**,** *Humanae Vitae*: Encyclical on Human Life, (July 25th 1998) in *AAS* 60 (1968), 481–503.

The love between them is total; that personal friendship of the husband and the wife in sharing everything, reasoning together, and helping one another is of great importance. "Whoever really loves his partner loves not only what he receives, but loves that partner for the partner's own sake, content to be able to enrich the other with the gift of himself." This love has been accompanied by the commitment for it to thrive.

"Married love is faithful and exclusive of all others, and this until death."[213] Marriage is fecund, in that the couple, by the fact of their union, are entitled to continue procreating. Marriage and conjugal love are naturally ordained towards procreation and the education of their children. In understanding the sacrament, the couple hopes for the best with all the uncertainties that may befall their marriage. Above all, marriage will be full of love if fidelity and exclusivity are practiced. This is what the church advocates and what is required of the spouses to keep the vows to the maximum. These are some of the values that need to be inculcated in the diocese of Wote for the marriage to thrive.

In addition, married love requires the husband and the wife to be responsible. Being aware of their responsibilities, taking care of, and educating their children. Respecting their duties and their proper functions is paramount in their life. They are called to be responsible parents in bringing up their children in moral order, following the teachings of the Catholic faith. The parents are not free to act in any way in procreating; they have to choose the right way to follow. "They are bound to ensure that what they choose corresponds to the will of God, the creator."[214] Unlawful birth control methods are not encouraged simply because they contradict human sexuality and the purpose of marriage. In conducting their affairs, and especially in procreation, the moral law of the Church must be followed according to its

[213]Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae* 9 in *AAS* 60 (1968), 481–503.
[214] Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae* 10 in *AAS* 60 (1968), 481–503.

teachings. In the generation of life, they should come into awareness that "human life is sacred; all men must recognize that fact."[215]

3.5.2 Pope John Paul II (1978-2005)

St. John Paul II, in his teaching on marriage, describes it as an institution rooted in both creation and redemption, affirming that it is not merely a human or social institution but a divine institution willed by God. St. John Paul II, based on the teaching of Sacred Scripture and the tradition of the Church, affirms that the institution of marriage finds its origin in the creative plan of God and its full meaning in Christ. The vows are practiced, where the deeper meaning of that Christ-like love becomes actualised. Reflecting on that Christ-like love and keeping the promise made is what shapes the lives of the couples. In the apostolic exhortation on the family, St. John Paul II affirms that the family, or rather the institution of marriage, is "the first and vital cell of society" and that it finds its purpose in participating in the loving plan of God for humanity.[216] Therefore, the institution of marriage has its own intrinsic dignity, which predates its recognition by the state.

One of the key elements of John Paul II's teachings is the concept of conjugal love as a total self-gift. The Pope emphasizes that true conjugal love is "totally human, faithful, exclusive, and open to life." [217] Conjugal love is characterized by the mutual self-giving of the spouses and cannot be limited to feelings and sexual attraction.[218] The total self-gift of conjugal love is the foundation of the Church's teaching on the indissolubility of marriage. According to John Paul II, the lifelong union of husband and wife symbolizes the unbreakable covenant between Christ and the Church.

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[215] Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae* 9 in *AAS* 60 (1968), 481–503.
[216] John Paul II *Familiaris Consortio* 17 in *AAS* 74 (1982), 81–191.
[217] John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* 11 in *AAS* 74 (1982), 81–191.
[218] John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* 13 in *AAS* 74 (1982), 81–191.

This idea is further elaborated in John Paul II's Wednesday catecheses, collected in Theology of the Body (1979-1984). In the Wednesday catecheses, John Paul II outlines a theological anthropology in which the human body has a "nuptial meaning" and can express the meaning of love in a sincere gift of self. Marriage is seen as the privileged space in which the bodily difference between man and woman is described as a gift of communion. Ontologically and existentially, man is ordered toward communion with one another. John Paul II states that:

> It is not just in their personal transcendence but in the interpersonal communion formed by their reciprocal, bodily expression of that transcendence that man and woman reflect God's image in the world, the image of three divine Persons united substantially in an ineffable communion of eternal Love.[219]

As a sacrament, Christian marriage is a symbol of Christ's redeeming love, and it is elevated by the grace of God. "The sacrament of marriage makes it possible for the spouses to live their vocation to holiness within the ordinary conditions of family life; the spouses participate vicariously in Christ's redemptive role, and especially, they are called to sanctify each other and their children through their conjugal life."[220] Therefore, Christian marriage is not only for the joy of the couple, but also for their spiritual growth and salvation.

One of the most important aspects of Christian marriage, as enunciated by John Paul II, is its openness to life. He constantly insisted that the procreation and education of children are part and parcel of the meaning of Christian marriage. Responsible parenthood, as enunciated by John Paul II, must be in harmony with the unitive and procreative meaning of the conjugal act. This teaching can be traced back to the earlier Church documents, especially "Humanae Vitae," which was constantly reaffirmed by John Paul II in the wider personalist context.

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[219] Jeffrey Tranzillo, "The Theology of the Body," in *John Paul II on the Vulnerable* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2013), 130–180.
[220] John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* 56 in *AAS* 74 (1982), 81–191.

John Paul II sets marriage within the wider context of a vocation to love that embraces all people. In reference to the Vatican Council, especially Gaudium et Spes, he emphasizes that the human person reaches fulfillment in the sincere gift of self. Marriage is one of the privileged ways of this vocation, in which the dignity of both spouses and their equal personal dignity are manifested. The same theme is treated in his apostolic letter Mulieris Dignitatem (1988), in which he emphasizes the mutual dignity and mutual submission of husband and wife in marriage.[221]

3.5.3 Pope Benedict XVI (2005-2013)

Pope Benedict XVI conceives of marriage as a fundamental reality of covenant, truth, and love, grounded in both natural law and divine revelation. Marriage, therefore, is not just a construct of culture, societal constructs, and individual preference, but rather a reality rooted in human nature, elevated to the level of sacrament through the action of Christ. Pope Benedict XVI declares that Human love, in all its forms, reaches its authentic fulfillment in the *unio mystica of eros* and agape.[222] This union is accomplished in marriage. The love of the spouse is the icon of the love of God, and the love of God is the icon of the love of the spouse. In this way, marriage is a school of love, where passion is transformed into faithful commitment, into the lifelong dedication of husband and wife to one another.

One of the major themes in the teachings of Benedict XVI is the integration of love and truth in marriage. Benedict XVI always argues that love and truth cannot be separated because, in such a case, love will lose its meaning. Benedict XVI argues that love has to be based on the objective truth of the human person, including the truth concerning human sexuality, complementarity, and fidelity.[223] Therefore, in marriage, real conjugal love will always be based on elements of permanence, exclusivity, and procreation. In this regard, marriage is not

[221] John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem* 24 in *AAS* 80 (1988), 1653–1729.
[222] Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est 3 in AAS* 96 (2006), 217–79.
[223]Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* 2 in *AAS* 101 (2009), 641–709.

an emotional experience but a moral and spiritual one based on the truth of the human person. Keeping the promises made will keep the marriage ongoing and for the betterment of the spouses.

He also strongly affirms the indissolubility of marriage as a sign of faithful love, like the faithful love of God. In several of his addresses to the Roman Rota, especially in his address in 2011, he emphasizes the fact that the indissolubility of marriage is not imposed on it from outside but is rooted in the very nature of love itself. The root of the crisis of marriage in modern times is a result of a misunderstanding of freedom, in which commitment is understood as a limitation rather than an expression of love. Real freedom is the capacity to give oneself definitively.[224]

In his sacramental theology, marriage is a sacrament, and it plays an important role in the sacramental life of Benedict XVI. He stated that Christian marriage is part of the covenant between Christ and the Church, which is sustained by grace. For him, Eucharist is the source of strength for the communion of marriage, as both are grounded in the self-giving love of Christ. The couples are called to be self-giving in their marriage. The self-giving is the foundation of the Christian marriage vows, reflecting the love of Jesus Christ, whose love is a self-gift. He offered himself freely for our salvation and sanctification. Thus, marriage is part of the sacramental life of the Church, aiming at holiness and the sanctification of the couple.

If marriage is separated from its natural and sacramental foundation, that is, the union of man and woman in life-giving communion, then marriage cannot function for the good of individuals and society. On family ethics and society, marriage is the foundation of family life, and thus of society. [225]Benedict XVI situates marriage within the broader context of the Christian vocation to love. Like his predecessor, he appeals to the Second Vatican Council,

[224] Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis* 27 in *AAS* 9 (2007), 105–180.
[225] Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* 44 in *AAS* in 101 (2009), 641–709.

specifically to the document *Gaudium et Spes*, to stress that the human person finds full realization in giving oneself. His original contribution, however, is to highlight the compatibility between faith and reason, such that marriage can be grasped both by faith and by reason. Marriage is both a natural institution and a sacrament of divine love.

3.5.4 Pope Francis (2013-2025)

The reflection of Pope Francis on marriage is mostly pastoral and ecclesial, but always in continuity with the magisterium of his predecessors. The concept of marriage of Pope Francis is that of a lifelong covenant between a man and a woman, grounded in the plan of God's creation and elevated by Christ to the level of a sacrament. For Pope Francis, marriage is not an idea but a reality lived in the concrete circumstances of everyday life, marked by joy, sacrifice, and growth. This concept of marriage is fully articulated in his apostolic exhortation.[226]

Marriage is one of the most important aspects of Pope Francis's teaching, which is the dynamic and gradual nature of married love. While reaffirming the fundamental characteristics of married love, Pope Francis emphasizes the gradual nature of the same, that married love gradually becomes one, indissoluble, and procreative. Marriage is not a static institution; it is a dynamic process wherein married love gradually develops through patience, forgiveness, and commitment.[227]

Pope Francis clearly affirms that married love is based on self-giving, not feelings. Pope Francis, based on the hymn on love found in 1 Corinthians 13, dedicates an entire chapter to the characteristics of conjugal love. According to Pope Francis, the characteristics of married love include values such as patience, kindness, humility, and perseverance. In this regard, Pope

[226] Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 122 in *AAS* 108 (2016), 311–446.
[227] Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 122 in *AAS* 108 (2016), 311–446.

Francis's teaching on married love resembles the personalist teaching of John Paul II, although in a more practical sense, presented as a path of love and holiness within the Church.[228]

Like his predecessors, Francis emphasizes the sacramental character of Christian marriage. Francis emphasizes that Christian marriage is a sign of Christ's faithful love for the Church and the source of grace that enables the couple to live out their vocation. Thus, the couples are called upon to keep the vows made during the celebration of marriage for the betterment of their life. Pope Francis writes that the sacrament of marriage is not a reward for those who are perfect but rather a gift that is given to help human weakness.[229] Christian marriage, therefore, has a very close relationship with the sacramental life of the Church and the mission of the Church, even if the couple is experiencing difficulties.

One of the most important aspects of the teaching of Pope Francis on Christian marriage is the emphasis he places on the pastoral care of wounded marriages that are the result of separation, divorce, and irregular marriages. Like his predecessors, Francis emphasizes the Church's teaching on the indissolubility of marriage. However, how the popes address the pastoral care of wounded marriages has been the subject of much theological reflection.[230]

Pope Francis places marriage within the mission of the Church and in society. As mentioned earlier, Pope Francis always stressed the fact that the family, built on marriage, is the first place where values, faith, and social commitment are transmitted. In *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope Francis spoke of the family as the "domestic church" and the mission of the family as evangelization.[231] Marriage is thus not only significant on the personal and sacramental level; it is also significant on the ecclesial and social levels.

[228] Francis. *Amoris Laetitia,*72 *in AAS* 108 (2016), 311-446.
[229] Francis. *Amoris Laetitia,*305 in *AAS* 108 (2016), 311-446.
[230] Francis. *Amoris Laetitia,*296-312 *in AAS* 108 (2016), 311-446.
[231] Francis. *Amoris Laetitia,* 200 *in AAS* 108 (2016), 311-446.

3.6 Selected Documents and Councils

3.6.1 Council of Florence (1431-1449)

The Council of Florence affirmed the sacramentality of marriage, declaring: "The seventh is the sacrament of matrimony, which is the sign of the union of Christ and the church as the saying of the apostle (Eph 5:32). The efficient cause of the matrimony is the mutual consent duly expressed in words relating to the present." The affirmative side of marriage was underlined by 'the Council of Florence, which emphasized the procreation and education of offspring, fidelity to each other, and indissolubility of marriage. The mutual consent of the couple is what brings marriage into being, and the indissoluble bond between Christ and the church has to be lived by the couples

3.6.2 Council of Trent (1545-1563)

The Council of Trent affirmed that marriage is truly a sacrament instituted by Christ and not just a civil contract. It is a covenant made for life by the couple. Trent reaffirmed that marriage indeed comes from the free consent of a man and a woman, thus making it valid. It also reaffirmed that this consent should be publicly manifested in the presence of a priest and witnesses to avoid secret marriages. The council emphatically reaffirmed the indissolubility of marriage, stating that a valid and consummated marriage cannot be dissolved by divorce. That remarriage while still living with the spouse is indeed adultery. Although the Church allows separation for grave conditions, the marital bond endures till the end.[232]

3.6.3 Casti Connubii (1930)

Pope Pius XI defined marriage as "a sacred Sacrament instituted by God for the mutual love and procreation of the spouses and the education of the children."[233] This encyclical emphasizes the necessity of marriage, both as a personal and social act, with the family being

[232] Council of Trent, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), session 24, canons 1, 7; decree *Tametsi.*
[233] Pope Pius XI, Casti Connubii, 2 *in* *AAS* 22 (1930), 545–548.

the basis of society. The document asserts that free consent during the celebration of the matrimony establishes a lifelong and faithful bond. The consent of self-giving love reflects the union of Christ and the church. This shapes the character of the spouse by giving oneself to the another. and This document also rejects divorce, artificial means of contraception, abortion, sterilization, and the duties and obligations of the spouses, with the former having the duty to be faithful, respectful, and morally correct towards the latter, thus addressing the concerns loyally and respectfully, while emphasizing the consequences of the attenuation of the sacred nature of the Divine Law for the family and society in general.

3.6.4 Vatican II, Gaudium et Spes (1965)

Gaudium et Spes defines marriage as the intimate partnership of life and love that has been established and endowed by him with its proper laws. God is the author of marriage. Marriage is irrevocable personal consent, and it is rooted in the covenant of the two partners as an institution, is confirmed by the divine law, and it gains its stability from the people's witness. The vows are an act of consent, personal and irrevocable, establishing a covenant of love. The consent creates a lasting partnership of life and love. Each of the spouses surrenders himself or herself to the other for the well-being of themselves, their children, and society.[234]

3.7 Marriage in the First Three Centuries

In the first centuries, marriage was not considered to be a romantic institution but rather a social and economic one. It was used to forge alliances, consolidate economic power, and produce legitimate offspring. In the Roman culture, the legal status of marriage was based on property and citizenship, but in the early Christian culture, marriage was considered to be a moral and spiritual union that was blessed by God. Women were expected to play roles that were centred in the home, and the decision to marry was usually one that was based on family arrangements, with love being secondary. Divorce was possible but was generally considered

[234] Cf. Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes* no. 48.

to be in poor taste, particularly under the influence of Christianity. In the Roman world, the law of the imperial age, marriage consisted of mutual consent (consensus). The consent makes marriage valid, and the couple was called upon to keep the promises they made during the matrimonial celebration.[235]

Legal exchange of consent requires the following: age, permission from parents, absence of impediments created by kinship, affinity, or civil law. The traditional ceremony of marriage was optional. Some customary practices during this period were betrothal done during a family meal. After the exchange of the vows, the fiancé gave the fiancée an iron ring, which was a sign of love and fidelity. Today, the Church uses the ring which symbolises fidelity and love. What followed was the marriage, which had three stages: dressing the bride, presentation of the bride, and reading the contract, which took place in the home of the girl, and then weeding feat, which occurred in the evening.[236]

From the 4th to the 7th centuries, marriage transformed from a somewhat flexible form of Roman law based on consent to a more formalized institution deeply influenced by Christian ethics of monogamy, fidelity, and moral obligation, and yet closely tied to family interests and social order. In the Middle Ages, nuptial blessings traditionally were given during Mass before the celebrants *pax domini* and the kiss of peace. This recalls the biblical story of the nuptial blessing of Tobias and Sarah (Tob 8:4-10). Which is also recalled in middles ages, a ritual for the blessing of husband and wife, which took place at the entrance of the church. The fiancée married the husband by the use of a ring in the name of the Trinity, which ended with blessings. After this, they entered the church and began mass. The Rites that precede the wedding mass include the exchange of consent, giving of the ring and coins, and transfer of the dowry.

[235] *Code of Canon Law*, c. 1070.
[236] *Epistle to Diognetus*, 5–6, in The Apostolic Fathers**,** trans. Michael W. Holmes, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2007), 687–695.

3.7.1 Christian Rite of Marriage in the West

3.7.1.1 The Rite of Matrimony

Concerning the Western world, the substance of the sacrament was the mutual giving of consent by the two spouses in front of witnesses. It was valid if the couple was capable of completing the act of sex (potestas coeundi). According to the first letter to Diognetus, Christians celebrate marriage just like everybody else.[237] The spouses are the main agents in the celebration of the sacrament and give fidelity to each other in front of witnesses. Christians indeed used special prayers for the celebration of the wedding even before the fourth century; however, there is no information on the celebration of the sacrament.

In the East, is different where the principal minister of the sacrament is Christ, represented by the priest, who not only blesses the marriage as in the West but also acts as minister of the grace of the sacrament. In the East, neither a deacon nor a layperson can replace the priest. Is complete when conferred by a priest. Canon 1061 of the Western code has no counterpart in the oriental code, which refers to non-consummated marriage only in passing in canon 862, when speaking about the possible dissolution of marriage.[238] The divisions in our treatment of marriage in the west are dictated by the three important stages in the development of the rite: Marriage in the family home until the eleventh century, with the first interventions of the priest being in the mass and the blessing the bride; marriage in in *facie ecclesiae* in the eleventh century, the first evidence of the rite of the sacrament itself, followed by the mass and nuptial blessing already used before; the rite introduced by Vatican II. The celebration of the sacrament after the liturgy of the world is a blessing which is now addressed to both spouses, and an epiclesis of more recent introduction.

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[237] Letter to Diognetus 5.6, in *Christian Letters of the First Two Centuries*, ed. H. I. Marrou, Sources Chrétiennes 33bis (Paris: Cerf, 1960), 62–65.
[238]Johannes Prader, *Marriage in the East and West* (Rome, 1992), reviewed by Metz, *Revue de droit canonique* 45 (1995): 170–72.

3.7.1.2 The Current Rite of Matrimony

The Rite of Matrimony is the second typical edition of the Catholic Church's *Ordo celebrandi matrimoniium*, which was published in 1969. This Rite of Matrimony is part of the Catholic Church's liturgy, which has undergone some reforms since the Second Vatican Council. In this Rite of Matrimony, marriage is described as a holy covenant, which is a sacrament representing Christ's regard for the Church and which affirms especially that the spouses themselves are ministers of the sacrament, especially through their own free and mutual consent.[239] Depending on the circumstances, the Rite of Matrimony may be celebrated either in Mass or out of Mass to include the social aspect of Christian marriage.[240] The *praenotanda* of Rite of Matrimony no. 8 states:

> By the sacrament of matrimony, Christian spouses signify and share in the mystery of the unity and fruitful love which exists between Christ and his church. They help each other to attain holiness in /their married life and in the rearing and education of the children.[241]

The origin of marriage lies in the covenant of marriage or irrevocable consent, wherein both parties freely consent to and from each other. The institution of matrimony and the love between spouses who are wedded are ordained to the procreation and education of the children.[242] The marriage bond is not referred to as a contract by the council in any of the traditional terms. Marriage, which is a covenant between spouses, is termed as a reflection of the covenant between God and humanity.

3.7.2 The Rite of Marriage During Mass

3.7.2.1 The Introductory Rites

At the appointed time, the priest dressed in alb, stole, and chasuble in accordance with the color of the liturgy being celebrated, leads the acolytes to the church entrance, where he

[239] Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium 11* in *AAS* 57 (1965), 15.
[240] Vatican Council, constitution on Sacred Liturgy, 52 in AAS 56 (1964), 890.
[241] Rite of Matrimony no. 8.
[242]Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* 48 in *AAS* 58 (1966), 1025–1120.

receives the wedding party and warmly welcomes them, thus indicating that the church is sharing their happiness. Then follows the procession to the altar according to the custom. On the other hand, the entrance rite begins with the priest going to the altar and paying reverence to the altar with a profound bow and kissing it.[243]

3.7.2.2 Liturgy of the Word and Homily

The liturgy of the word is conducted as prescribed by the rubrics. It can entail up to three readings, with the initial one from the Old Testament, but during Easter time from the Book of Revelation (nos. 197-222).[244] Following the Gospel readings, the priest delivers a homily based on the holy texts. It should be noted that, while giving the homily, among other requirements that a priest should observe, he is to remember faithfulness, teachings regarding marriage and family life, the graces and duties given by the sacrament, the mystery of marriage, and the dignity of conjugal love, among others.

3.7.2.3 The Celebration of the Marriage

With all standing, including the couple and the witnesses, who are positioned near them, the priest addresses the couple. Before the consent, the priest questions them about their free choice of each other, their willingness to commit themselves for a lifetime in a faithful relationship, and their openness to fruitfulness by accepting children.[245] .

3.7.2.4. The Consent

The priest invites them to declare their consent

The bridegroom says:

[243]Cf. Rite of Matrimony no.45.
[244]Cf. Rite of Matrimony no. 55.
[245]Cf. Rite of Matrimony no. 59-60.

I **N**., take you **N**., to be my wife. I promise to be faithful to you, in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, to love you and to honour you all the days of my life.

The bride says:

I **N**., take you **N**., to be my husband. I promise to be faithful to you, in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, to love you and to honour you all the days of my life.[246]

3.7.2.5 Reception of the Consent

During the reception of the consent, the priest will pray for the couple as follows:
May the Lord, in his kindness, strengthen your consent pronounced here in his church and to fulfil his blessing in you. Let no man put asunder what God has joined together.[247]

3.7.2.6 Blessing and Giving of Rings

The priest blesses the rings, which you will give to each other as a sign of love and fidelity. The couple will then put the ring on each other's fingers and repeat, in unison, the line "**N**., take this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." The exchange of consent is the main act whereby the marriage exists, but the exchange of rings is the public act of the covenant that will last forever. What follows is a general intercession.[248]

3.7.2.7 Liturgy of the Eucharist

The order of the Mass follows, where during the offertory, the bride and bridegroom may bring bread and wine to the altar. A commemoration of the husband and wife in the Eucharist prayer is made[249]

[246] Cf. Rite of Matrimony no. 62.
[247] Cf. Rite of Matrimony no. 64.
[248] Cf. Rite of Matrimony no. 66-67.
[249] Rite of Matrimony no.70-71.

3.7.2.8 Nuptial Blessings

After the Lord's prayer, the prayer that delivers us is omitted. Then the priest faces the bride and the bridegroom, and then he gives the blessings.[250]

3.7.2.9 Blessing at the end of the Mass

At the end of the mass, the priest, with hands extended over the bride and bridegroom, gives the blessings. At the end of the solemn blessings, he blesses all the present.[251]

3.9 Exchange of vows in Marriage and its Commitment

"The fundamental theme of the marriage vows is the unconditional promise to love one another under all conceivable circumstances."[252] The goal is to create an intimate community of life and love. Marriage vows embody a covenantal relationship between the two individuals. This is greatly influenced by the Christian view of marriage as a sacred and lifelong commitment. In other words, during the marriage ceremony, the two individuals in question pledge their commitment to each other through the marriage vows they exchange. This is a clear indication to other church members and God that their union is spiritual in nature. Marriage vows are a clear representation of the handiwork of God in the couple's relationship.

However, one of the aspects to note is the mutual self-giving nature of the vows. When the couple in question pledges their commitment to each other "for better or for worse, in sickness or in health," they are essentially committing their lives to a lifelong partnership. This partnership is expected to cover the emotional, physical, and spiritual sides of the couple involved.[253]

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[250] Rite of Matrimony no.72.
[251] Rite of Matrimony no.77.
[252] David M. Thomas, *Christian Marriage: A Journey Together*, Message of the Sacraments (Wilmington, Michael Glazier, 1985), 100.
[253] David M. Thomas,1985, 101.

The importance of the sacramental perspective: The centrality of this perspective lies in the fact that Christian marriage is characterized as a sacramental act where God's presence becomes concrete. "The exchange of vows expresses a profound mutual commitment of faithful love in the present and for the future."[254] Even when the future is unknown, marital vows are made without fear. The pronouncement of vows with full knowledge brings a change in one's life, where priorities enter one's life. The vows act as not only a promise but also as a conduit where God's presence is felt. The vows are a means whereby both spouses will be able to experience God's love and live it out. Moreover, through the vows, both spouses are led to a spiritual path where love and fidelity are not just personal but are pronounced to be a symbol of God's love to mankind.

There is a communal and ecclesial component to Christian vows. Christian vows are exchanged before the Church. With a comparison noted between Christ's relation to the Church and the marriage relationships, we find that both unions involve a sharing of bodies. Therefore, Christian marriage is not just a personal but a communal act. The communal component brings into sharp focus the seriousness of Christian vows. It reminds each Christian spouse that Christian marriage contributes not just to individual spiritual lives but to a spiritual community. The marriage that is celebrated in the presence of the Church community can also become a special moment in the faith life of the couple. John Paul II explains that "the exchange of vows is the basic moment of the couple's faith."[255]

[254]David M. Thomas,1985, 101.
[255] John Paul II, *General Audience*, January 5, 1983, in *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006), 407–10.

Conclusion

Historically, marriage has experienced a deep evolution from the first understanding of it to the current theological and liturgical understanding. In the early centuries, marriage was viewed as a social and political union, a bond that linked families and communities. However, with the coming of Christianity, marriage was understood to be a spiritual bond, one that was blessed by God and based on God's love. This understanding is based on the teachings of Jesus Christ, who taught that the bond of marriage is indissoluble, and is found in the Old and New Testaments, which depict marriage as a covenant that reflects God's loyalty and concern for humanity.

The teachings of the Church have always upheld this understanding of marriage. Marriage is for the common good of the spouses and the procreation and education of children. The Church Fathers have underlined the natural and spiritual dimensions of marriage, seeing it as a means of grace and a symbol of Christ's love for the Church. There is a need for mutual self-giving, faithfulness, and openness to life as the essential elements of Christian marriage.

David M. Thomas, in exchange of vows, expresses theological and pastoral values in a concrete liturgical form that unites personal consent, ecclesial blessing, and communal witness. Despite the historical, cultural, and pastoral development, the Church still offers marriage as a covenantal, indissoluble, and grace-filled union. It is, at the same time, a natural institution and a divine vocation, which is the foundation of family, society, and the life of faith. Scripture, tradition, magisterial teaching, and liturgical practice together offer a vision of marriage not only as a human contract but as a sacred vocation, which is oriented towards holiness, communion, and the fullness of life in Christ. The following chapter will dwell on Kamba *Ntheo* in relation to the Rite of Christian marriage in the catholic diocese of Wote. It aims at the promotion of the inculturated rite of matrimony.

CHAPTER FOUR

KAMBA *NTHEO* IN RELATION TO CATHOLIC RITE OF MARRIAGE

Introduction

This chapter compares the Akamba *Ntheo* and the Rite of the Matrimony, highlighting their similarities and differences. The chapter will then dwell on the elements of the inculturation. What follows is the provision of recommendations for long-term marriage. The chapter will then discuss properties in marriage, like fidelity, and other key values like accompanying couples by following Christ's example, pastoral care to Christian families, inclusive liturgical, para-liturgical activities, and a Conclusion.

4.1 Comparison of the Akamba *Ntheo* and the Rite of Matrimony

4.1.1 Similarities

4.1.1.1 Formal Recognition

In the community of Akamba in *Ntheo,* the payment of bridewealth to the family of the woman is paid before the marriage especially the first three goats. It implies that the marriage has been officially recognized and accepted. The following morning after the payment of the bride wealth, the strap that ties the goats is returned to the family of the boy, symbolising that the boy has been officially accepted by the girl and the family.[256] The payment comprises the first two goats *(mbui sya ntheo*) and other goats for slaughtering. The sharing of the meal symbolises unity, joining of ancestors through the pouring of blood, and acceptance. This implies that the man has fulfilled all the requirements for marrying the woman and has been accepted. In the Christian community, during the Rite of Matrimony, the marriage is officially recognized in the Church when the couple makes their vows in front of the priest/minister and witnesses. This makes the marriage legitimate in society.

[256] Judith Mbula, *Our religious heritage* (Logos: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1982), 90.

4.1.1.2 Communal Ceremony

Marriage, as observed in the case of the Akamba community in *Ntheo,* is a close relationship between two extended families rather than between two people. Marriage is communally celebrated and establishes a relationship between the families. "In marriage, all the members of the community meet: the departed, the living, and those who are yet unborn."[257] Traditionally, marriage is an affair of more than one person.[258] In the marriage ritual in *Ntheo,* two families meet and agree on the bridewealth, which is a sign of appreciation and respect for one another's families. This allows each family to get to know each other and build trust to form a lasting relationship. The two families are bound by blood and are expected to stand with one another during difficult times, and encourage peace between one another.

Likewise, in the Christian Rite of Matrimony, the role that the family and friends have to play in the marriage ceremony implies the obvious fact that the marriage has the support of the community at large. Although nowadays this has been a great problem that has resulted in marriage breakdown in the diocese. In this case, the role that the family has to play in the marriage ceremony is unique, such as presenting the bride, counselling her, or giving her blessings. The families are present to witness the ceremony and give their support to the couple who have married. Therefore, in the case of *Ntheo*, as well as in the Christian Rite of Matrimony, it is obvious that the role of the family is implicated, and the marriage ceremony implies the obvious fact that the marriage forms a union that brings about relationships that bind the family with the community at large.[259]

[257] Judith Mbula, 1982, 88.
[258] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 108.
[259] Cf. Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis* no.27 in *AAS* 9 (2007), 105–180.

4.1.1.3 Celebration and Blessings

In the *Ntheo* tradition, the elders, together with the parents, blessed the couple by giving them their wishes for fertility, unity, health, and prosperity in their married life together. During this occasion, the two parents of the girl, that is, the girl's father and the boy's father, both spit each at their own stomachs and chests. "This is a sign of blessing for the young couples."[260] The blessings form part of the tradition of wishing the new family all the good wishes of the community. In the Rite of Matrimony, the priest or the minister says prayers and blessings, wishing the couple God's guidance and protection in their married life together. The blessings form an integral part of the tradition of wishing the couple a happy married life together. The *praenotanda* of Rite of Matrimony no. 17 states:

> Each conference of the bishops may draw up its own marriage rite suited to the usage of the place and people approved by the apostolic see. The rite must always conform to the law that the priest assisting at such marriages must seek and receive the consent of the contracting parties, and the nuptial blessings should always be given.

4.1.1.4 Public Recognition and Commitment in Marriage

The ceremony is carried out in public in the presence of the family, relatives, and even the entire community. This ensures that the union is recognized in society. *Ntheo* takes place in the family of the girl during the day or at night.[261] The groom demonstrates his accountability and commitment to his bride and her family by fulfilling his obligation to provide bridewealth, thereby affirming his support for his wife.[262] In the Christian Rite of Matrimony tradition, the ceremony is carried out in a Church or in a gathering in the presence of witnesses.[263] The couple makes a lifelong commitment to each other through vows and promises to love and be faithful to each other. The consent is for life till death separates them.[264] "Marriage is seen as a life-

[260] Judith Mbula, *Our Religious Heritage* (Lagos: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1982), 91.
[261] John Kyule (65 years), interviewed by Daniel Katie: Nairobi, CUEA, March 5th, 2026.
[262] John S. Mbiti, 1969, 110-112.
[263] Rite of Matrimony Cf. nos.17 (1982), 558.
[264] Josef Heinzmann, *Love Is Your Calling: A Book on Marriage for the Faithful*, trans. Dame Mary Groves, O.S.B. (England: St. Paul Publications, 1993), 23.

long union where partners bear patiently with each other.[265]" The two traditions appreciate the importance of accountability and moral obligation in a support system.

4.1.1.5 Moral Order and Social Approval

In *Ntheo*, the couple receives approval from family members, elders, and the entire community, which confirms that they are married and that their marriage is socially accepted. This happened after serious consideration of roles concerning those to marry and not specifically based on moral traits and character.[266] The woman was to be of good character and a family free of curses or taboos.[267] This is important because, in the Akamba tradition, marriage is not just a union between two people, but it is a social covenant that affects the whole family, and without *Ntheo,* they may not get full acceptance in society.

A good and behavioural character made his clan respectful. In the Christian Rite of Matrimony, the couple gets approval because they are blessed by the church, led by a priest, and witnessed by the whole congregation, which confirms that they are married and that their marriage is a covenant before God and the whole world. The consent and the nuptial blessing approve the marriage.[268] In both cases, the couple gets the importance of having a relationship that has moral, social, and spiritual implications, as it connects them to the whole world, families, and society, and also to God in the Christian tradition.

4.1.2 Differences

4.1.2.1 Origin and Cultural Basis

Ntheo in the Kamba community has been practiced for generations as part of their culture and heritage. The practice is derived from the customs and beliefs of the Akamba tribe, who believe that the union is not only between the two individuals, a male and a female, but

[265] Judith Mbula, 1982, 97.
[266] John S. Mbiti, 1969, 107.
[267] Mbiti, John S. *African Religions and Philosophy*. Nairobi: Heinemann, (1987), 156-157.
[268] Rite of Matrimony Cf. nos.25-27 (1982), 562-563.

also between their families and clans.[269] The practice is derived from the customs of the Akamba tribe, who believe in the offering of goats from the families of the couple and the sharing of a meal between the couple, symbolizing the acceptance of the union between the families and the community, accepting the union as part of their culture and laws, derived from the Akamba laws. The Rite of Matrimony has been instituted by God and is acknowledged by the believers, who believe in the biblical principles of marriage as a holy covenant between two individuals, a man and a woman, in the presence of God. [270]The ceremony is performed inside the Church, reflecting the religious value of marriage for Christians

4.1.2.2 The Celebrant/s

In the Akamba *Ntheo*, the ceremony is led and monitored mainly by family elders and other respected clan members who have the authority and knowledge of the Akamba traditions. They act on behalf of the bride and the groom's families, ensuring that all the traditional conditions, including the dowry agreement, blessings, and other rituals, are observed and respected during the traditional ceremony.[271] This is an essential part of the traditional ceremony, as the elders will act as witnesses and ensure that the marriage is accepted by both families and the community at large. They will also offer the newlyweds advice and blessings to guide them in their new life together.

On the other hand, the Rite of Matrimony is conducted by an ordained church leader, such as a priest, pastor, or minister, among many others, who acts on behalf of the Christian Church.[272] During the wedding rite, it is the Church leaders who are supposed to offer prayers, read the Holy Bible, receive the marriage vows from the couple, and thereafter pronounce the blessings of the marriage as per the teachings of the Church. This is an indication that the

[269] John Kyule (65 years), interviewed by Daniel Katie: Nairobi CUEA March 4th, 2026.
[270] Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. no.1601 (1995), 358.
[271] John Kyule (65 years), interviewed by Daniel Katie: Nairobi CUEA, March 4th, 2026.
[272] Cf. Rite of Matrimony nos.25-29 (1982), 560-563.

marriage is not only recognized in society, but it is also a holy covenant in the presence of God and society as a whole.

4.1.2.3 Setting of the Ceremony

The place of the ceremony is also different in the Akamba *Ntheo* and the Rite of Matrimony, depending on the culture and religious beliefs. In the Akamba *Ntheo,* it takes place at the home of the bride or at the family homestead in the community.[273] This is important since it gathers all family members and elders, as the Akamba believe that marriage is between two families, not two people. The home is important since it is where dowries, blessings, and other ceremonies take place.

The location of the ceremony is also different in the Akamba *Ntheo* and the Rite of Matrimony, considering the cultural and religious differences. This is important in the sense that the entire family and the elderly are brought together, considering the culture of the Akamba, which says that marriage is between two families and not between two people only. According to the Liturgical Commission and the College of Bishops in Kenya, the Rite of Matrimony, it has been mostly practiced in the Church.

4.2 Elements of Inculturation

The inculturation approach is wide, as analysed through the writings of various authors, but finally, they all express the same idea. Inculturation is the central and dynamic principles that guide the Christian missionary approach to the people who have not yet been evangelized, or the areas where the church has yet to firmly establish itself. Commonly, we call this the principle of catholicity, or accommodation, adaptation, indigenization, contextualization, or, more radically, the incarnation principle.[274]

[273] John Kyule (65 years), interviewed by Daniel Katie: Nairobi CUEA March 5th, 2026.
[274] Joseph Komonchak, Dermot, eds., *The new dictionary of Theology,* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1988), 510.

Inculturation can also be defined as the honest and serious attempt to make Christ and his message of salvation evermore understood by people of every culture, locality, and time.[275] Inculturation, in its deepest sense, is the process by which the Church, in the power of the Holy Spirit, makes the Gospel incarnate in the cultures of the peoples.[276] It harmonizes universal liturgical elements with African customs, languages, and symbols. While supported by many, it presents challenges in balancing Theological integrity, cultural authenticity, and pastoral concerns

In Kamba *Ntheo,* inculturation is the incorporation of the culture of the Akamba, their beliefs, symbols, and values, in the formation of the Christian faith. Traditionally, *Ntheo* is a time for exchange of vows, initiation and moral instruction, preparation for marriage, where the elderly pass on the moral values of being an adult to the young, such as respect, commitment, discipline, and responsibility within the family and society at large. It was a communal event, and especially when choosing a partner, the family and clan participated. Girls were taught how to behave towards men, how to cook, and other responsibilities. Parents prepared their boys and girls for marriage.[277] These authentic values in Akamba traditional marriage are to be inculturated in the rite of matrimony to help in long-term marriage. They are culturally meaningful to the Akamba and at the same time conform to the Christian faith. The following values may help in seeking solutions to many problems facing contemporary marriages

4.2.1 Family and Community Participation

Marriage, in the Akamba culture, is not just the union between two people; it is the union between two families or clans. Given this understanding of marriage, it is therefore

[275] John Waliggo, John Mbinda, eds., *Inculturation: its meaning and urgency* (Nairobi: St. Paul Publications Africa, 1986), 12.
[276] Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1990), no. 52.
[277] Judith Mbula, *Our Religious Heritage* (Lagos: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1982), 88-89.

understandable why the family, particularly the parents, the elderly, and the clan, plays an important role in the marriage process, particularly in the guidance and facilitation of marriage, ensuring that customs are observed, and providing blessings and guidance to the young couple.[278] Given the religious framework of the traditional Akamba, the elderly are revered for their wisdom and moral values, and the role of the elderly in the marriage process is a positive contribution to the strengthening of family bonds and harmony within the community.

The blessing, praying, and giving moral instruction are key rituals that need to be inculcated in the Rite of Matrimony for the betterment of marriage. "The aim of these is to pray for the welfare of the new couples, bless them to bear children, and give them instructions and rules on how to conduct themselves as married people."[279] In the Christian marriage, the traditional Akamba marriage has blended with the celebration of the Christian Rite of Matrimony, and the elderly provide blessings and guidance to the young couple within the framework of the Christian faith, the role of the family within the Christian framework of marriage, and the support of marriage.

4.2.2 Marriage Negotiation

In the culture of the Akamba, the process of marriage negotiation, or traditional engagement, is the process in which negotiations between the two families of the intended bride and groom happen before they get married. According to the traditional religion of the Akamba, these negotiations must always be carried out by parents, relatives, and elderly people who get together and discuss different issues, including the intentions of the couples, their characters, and their responsibilities.[280] This process is aimed at ensuring that the marriage is based on mutual consent, respect, and commitment, as opposed to one that is based solely on the decision

[278] Mbiti, John S. *African Religions and Philosophy* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1987), 108-109.
[279] Mbiti, John S. 1987, 108-109.
[280] Adrian Hastings, *Christian Marriage in Africa* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1973), 45.

of the couple. This process also aims at strengthening the relationship between the two families involved.

According to Christian inculturation, it is very easy to harmonize this traditional process of marriage negotiation with the sacramental preparation of the Christian Rite of Matrimony by encouraging meetings between the two families, counselling, and publicizing their intention to get married before their Church marriage. This is aimed at maintaining traditional values, including those of the family, as well as Christian values, including marriage as a serious lifelong covenant supported by both the Church and society.[281]

4.2.3 Marriage Preparation

Marriage preparation, according to Akamba custom, includes educating youth about their roles as future husbands and wives. According to traditional religion, the youth are prepared for marriage by the elderly during their initiation before Ntheo.[282] Class boundaries have largely disappeared today; thus, professional and educational considerations should not be the focus.[283] They are given values to instil respect for one another, loyalty, teamwork, and care for their families. This prepares them for their role in life as married couples. This traditional custom in the process of inculturation can be used to prepare youth for the Christian Rite of Matrimony by counselling them in Church and mentoring them by married couples.

[281]Josef Heinzmann, *Love Is Your Calling: A Book on Marriage for the Faithful*, trans. Dame Mary Groves, O.S.B. (England: St. Paul Publications, 1993), 23.
[282] John Kyule (65 years), interviewed by Daniel Katie: Nairobi CUEA March 5th, 2026.
[283] Josef Heinzmann, *Love Is Your Calling: A Book on Marriage for the Faithful*, trans. Dame Mary Groves, O.S.B. (England: St. Paul Publications, 1993), 21.

Similarities	
Akamba	**Christianity**
1. Ministers (elders) **2. Communal** **3. Formal recognition** **4. A Celebration with blessings** **5. Order and approved by the elders**	**Minister (priest)** **Communal** **Recognised by the church** **A celebration with nuptial blessings** **Order and approval by the priest**

Differences	
Akamba	**Christianity**
1.Origin and Cultural basis **2. Monitored by the elders** **3. Setting differs**	**Instituted by God** **Monitored by an ordained minister** **Setting the church building as preferred**

4.3 Proposed Recommendations

4.3.1 Proper Preparation for Marriage

"The most important factor in preparation for marriage is that the man and woman each have a sense of their own personal dignity and worth, a sense of at least the initial fullness and completeness of themselves as persons."[284] In preparation for marriage or when helping others to prepare for marriage, one may learn to regard it as axiomatic that emotional "inadequacies" or dangers are elements to be accepted positively as opportunities for growth.[285] Proper preparation for marriage entails the following stages: remote, proximate, immediate, and ongoing preparation. Application of these stages in the Diocese of Wote will help a lot in imparting knowledge to the couples, thus strengthening their marriage bonds and reducing family breakdown.

These stages of marriage aid Christians in understanding how to reconcile the personalist approach with the communitarian African lifestyle in the context of African Christian marriage. Christians are encouraged to adopt these ideals because the marital issue in Africa is partially caused by ignorance of and rejection of both conventional and Christian marriage standards. However, stability in a marriage can be achieved with the aid of God's grace and appropriate planning. God's plan of marriage was unity of the two spouses since the nature of marriage is communion, which is achieved through the cooperation of the spouses and the Church.[286]

4.3.2 Remote Stage

Imparting knowledge together with ethical values in marriage is of crucial importance in this stage. The remote stage focuses on the marriage of Christ to the church and how the couples should live in following Christ's example. It also focuses on the role and the duties of

[284] Stephen J. Kelleher, *Divorce and Remarriage for Catholics?* (Garden City, Doubleday, 1976), 79.
[285] Walter Kasper, *Theology of Christian Marriage*, trans. David Smith (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 87.
[286] Stephen J. Kelleher, 1976, 79.

couples in marriage. The Church has to ensure that the couples are catechized about these key issues. The aim of it is to encourage and strengthen couples. "Covenant marriage requires minimal premarital counselling, a legally binding declaration of intent in which the parties agree to the binding laws established by their choice of marriage regime."[287] It entails the obligation to take all "reasonable steps" to preserve their marriage, such as marriage counseling, to resolve marital difficulties, and submission to more limited grounds for divorce.

4.3.3 Proximate Stage

In this stage, through pre-marital counselling, couples are prepared to understand their responsibilities, foster their communication, and build a stable and faithful marriage rooted in Christian values. It is also a moment to grow in holiness in marital status. Along with spiritual and psychological preparation, this time comprises renewing the sacramental catechism so that the youth can celebrate and live their long-term commitment with appropriate moral and spiritual depositions.[288] The natural requirements of the interpersonal relationship between the parties, such as awareness of the freedom of consent as the cause of their union, unity, indissolubility, education of children, a correct view of responsible parenthood, and so forth, should be thoroughly taught to young people at this stage. Deepening of the Christian faith in this stage is required for the couple to be strong. The couples are also catechized to extend their love to their siblings. The catechesis is incorporated with the gospel teaching and values about marriage for the benefit of the couples.

4.3.4 Immediate Stage

This kind of preparation, according to *Familiaris Consortio,* should take place a few months before the celebration of marriage.[289] It is the stage that involves the fruitful celebration of the sacrament of marriage. A greater understanding of the mystery of Christ and the Church,

[287] Steven L. Nock, Laura Ann Sanchez, and James D. Wright, *Covenant Marriage: The Movement to Reclaim Tradition in America* (USA: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 27.
[288] Cf. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio,* no. 66.
[289] Cf. John Paul II*, Familiaris Consortio,* (1981), no. 76.

the meaning of grace, Christian responsibility, and preparation for taking an active and aware part in marital rites. Both candidates and instructors must understand that marriage is not only a social reality, but also a spiritual and saving reality.

At this level, spiritual preparation in the field of retreats, spiritual exercises, and correct liturgical preparation, with special and careful attention to the sacrament of reconciliation, should be emphasized. Canonical standards are also emphasized at this point to avoid contracting marriage. This is the last stage of catechizing the couples about the faith, Christian life, and the sacrament itself. Marriage, according to the Kamba community, is not only a social event but also a spiritual and saving reality.

4.3.5 Ongoing Formation

Often, attention is not given to ongoing formation by pastors on marriage, which has contributed negatively to the formation of couples. Couples much need ongoing formation and entail pastoral support, like having seminars and retreats on marriage. This ensures that the vocation of marriage is deepened and promoted. Pastors have a duty to play by encouraging the couple to stay in unity and love. They should ensure that the couples have a deeper knowledge of the sacrament of marriage as holy and permanent. Sponsors of the candidates to marriage have a duty to encourage the couple in their lives. Emphasis on personal development in education to maturity should be met. "The basic psychological and emotional factors in personality development and fulfilment are more important here than the intellectual and physical development, which has been the traditional task of education and training."[290] This is done with the aim of making sure that the couples mature in their marriage.

4.3.6 Provision of Employment

Provision of employment by the County and the government is one of the solutions to the problems affecting families. Citizens and especially couples will be in a position to sustain

[290] Stephen J. Kelleher, 1976, 79.

and meet all their responsibilities through their daily earnings. This will protect them from engaging in unwanted behavior like infidelity. Apart from the provision of employment, well-balanced education is paramount for citizens to be equipped with skills for available jobs and be competent in their work. "An equal standard of education is now essentially more important for a good marriage than a common background."[291]This will help couples grow in many fields. Initiations of programs of education for the people by institutions and the government will help them to acquire skills that will lead to self-employment.

4. 3.7 Ongoing Catechesis for the Families

The Church has a responsibility to play by imparting the required catechesis to families in order to strengthen them throughout their lives. Attention to marriage as a continuous entity, even after the growth of children, is paramount since marriage continues to grow over time. "Such a re-orientation of marriage in terms of ongoing and continuous relationships requiring characteristics in the partners to meet and match changing needs in the marriage cycle, will have wider repercussions for the Catholic theology in the future." The church has to come in and provide catechesis on marriage as a relationship that grows and changes with time.

Catechizing the families about the growth and changes that may come in marriage is of great importance since it will help a lot in the acquisition of knowledge. The Church may conduct seminars for families yearly. Riding on this helps the Christian in receiving strong Christian formation that will help them understand that marriage is a sacred covenant. Family members should be taught the Catechism, which gives meaning to their families. The Church has to impart knowledge on love, fidelity, perseverance, and so forth in families. This is because the basis of Christian marriage and family emanates from God's own family; his love, revelation, and the plan of humanity to be with him forever."[292]

[291] Josef Heinzmann, *Love Is Your Calling: A Book on Marriage for the Faithful*, trans. Dame Mary Groves, O.S.B. (England: St. Paul Publications, 1993), 2.
[292] Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1997), 91.

John Paul II, speaking on the Church in Africa, stressed that it is crucial to help young people overcome obstacles to their development, whether drugs, idleness, or hunger, to name a few.[293] He looks at the children within the family in two ways. One of the ways is that the youth within the family should become evangelizers of their parents; this will be accomplished through the efforts of the parents to teach their children about the Catholic faith. He emphasizes that parents are the first to instill faith in their children by their words and actions, which is paramount to the family unit. According to the teachings of the Catholic Church, it is the responsibility of the parents to teach the Gospel to their families.[294] Catechizing the Christians of the diocese of Wote is to impart knowledge and be in a position to meet the challenges they face in life, thus fostering and strengthening their relationship. Walter Kasper notes that challenges in marriage should be accepted positively as opportunities for growth. Openness in marriage also helps in solving these problems when they face one another.

4.3.8 Promoting Catechesis for the Couples

According to John Paul, "evangelization depends in the future to a large extent on the domestic church."[295] Parents living their religion are apostles of faith to their children. They are the first evangelizers to their children through words, teachings, and admonitions. Catechizing couples before, during, and after marriage is of great importance. The matrimonial covenant, which forms a lifelong partnership between a man and a woman, is by its very nature oriented toward the welfare of the couple as well as the bearing of children and their upbringing; Christ the Lord has elevated this covenant between baptized individuals to the status of a sacrament. The matrimonial union of man and woman is irreversible: what therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder.[296] Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved

[293]Cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, (1995) no. 93.
[294]Cf. Paul VI, *Lumen Gentium* (1964), no. 11.
[295] Josef Heinzmann, *Love Is Your Calling: A Book on Marriage for the Faithful*, trans. Dame Mary Groves, O.S.B. (England: St. Paul Publications, 1993), 16.
[296]Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (2001), nos.1614-1615.

the Church and gave himself up for her, to sanctify her, the apostle Paul states emphatically, and he immediately follows up with. “For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one.” This is a profound mystery with regard to Christ and the Church.

God himself seals the accord by which the spouses give and receive one another. Their bond gives birth to an institution, affirmed by the law of God. “God’s covenant with humans is intertwined with the covenant between spouses: “authentic married love is caught up into divine love.” Therefore, God himself instituted the marriage tie in such a way that a marriage between two people who have been baptized cannot end.[297] Relationship, which comes about as a result of the spouses’ free human act and their marital consummation, is a reality that cannot be undone going forward and gives rise to a seal that is faithfully assured by God. This inclination of divine wisdom cannot be violated by the church.

The equal human dignity that both husband and wife must receive in reciprocal, unconditional love serves as a clear indication of the unity of marriage, which is clearly acknowledged by our Lord.[298] Polygamy is not allowed by the Catholic Church since it is against conjugal love. Marital love by definition necessitates the spouses’ unwavering loyalty to one another. This is the result of their giving each other a gift of themselves. Love can't be an agreement that lasts until further notice; love is final. The good of the children and the intimate union of marriage, as a mutual giving of two persons, require an unbreakable union between the spouses and total fidelity from them. The oneness and indissolubility of the spouse’s union of persons, which spans their whole life, is a requirement for love between spouses by definition; so, they are no longer two, but one flesh.

[297] Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), December 7, 1965, no. 48, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 58 (1966), 1070.
[298] Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (2001), no.1645.

The chaste individual upholds the integrity of the life-giving and loving forces bestowed upon him. This integrity protects the person's oneness and opposes any actions that could damage it. It does not accept living two lives or speaking falsely. Adopting the following strategies will help anybody stay true to their baptismal commitments and withstand temptations: self-awareness, practicing an ascesis appropriate for the circumstances, abiding by God's commands, practicing moral virtues, and prayer fidelity. In fact, chastity is what brings us together and restores us to the unity that was before we were split apart into multiplicity.

While some persons exercise chastity in continence, married people are exhorted to live conjugal chastity. The virtue of chastity comes in three forms: it applies to spouses first, widows second, and virgins thirdly.[299] Spouses are called to practice chastity in continence. They are called to be faithful, respectful, and to receive each other as God's gift. They should express the feelings of marriage, like love, which generates life, and help each other to grow in chastity.[300]

The married pair establishes "the intimate partnership of life and love established by the Creator and governed by his laws; it is rooted in the conjugal covenant, that is, in their irrevocable personal consent." They are one flesh now; they are no longer two. The couples are required by the covenant they voluntarily entered into to maintain it as distinct and irrevocable. Therefore, let man not separate what God has united.

Being faithful is being consistent in honoring one's commitments. Through the Sacrament of Matrimony, both sexes can share in Christ's faithfulness to his Church. They testify before the world about this enigma through conjugal chastity. Young husbands should utter to their spouses, imitating St. John Chrysostom's words, "I have taken you in my arms,

[299] Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (2001), no. 2337–2359.
[300] David M. Thomas, *Christian Marriage: A Journey Together* (Mumbai: St. Paul's, 2005), 65.

and I love you, and I prefer you to my life itself." Because this life is nothing, and I have the greatest desire to spend it with you in a way that ensures we will be together forever in the life that is meant to be ours. I would rather die than lose your love, and nothing would make me feel worse or more resentful.

4.4 Fidelity in Marriage

Marital fidelity is a quality of marital love that persists throughout the lifetime of the couple.[301] The shared responsibilities in bringing up children are one of the convincing remedies of the indissolubility of marriage fidelity.[302] Couples should be aware that marriage entails the commitment of the two spouses to be faithful and loyal to one another in love and trust. The couple commits themselves to each other to an existence, the end of which cannot be seen, and is something unconditional and unquestionable. "The definitive bond of faithfulness in marriage has, in other words, an essential religious dimension."[303]Marriage is not only about social or legal, but it also has a spiritual connection with God.

Couples find their definitive status in faithfulness, becoming one flesh (Gen.2:24; Mk 108; Eph 5:13). They commit themselves to something they do not possess or may not possess, but live in hope and faith. Marital faithfulness is a symbol that points to a reality beyond itself and a participation in the faithfulness of God. "At the altar, the couple exchange their consent forever, till death separates them. [304] They express their feeling that they will be faithful to each other till death parts them. Therefore, Christians should put into practice these teachings for their marriage to bear fruit. Fidelity in marriage strengthens the bond of union between the two spouses, hence promoting unity in a family. The marriage bond is the essence of marriage. John Marshall states that:

[301] David M. Thomas, *Christian Marriage: A Journey Together* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1983), 172.
[302] Walter Kasper, *Theology of Christian Marriage*, trans. David Smith (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 21.
[303]Walter Kasper, *Theology of Christian Marriage*, trans. David Smith (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 22-23.
[304] Josef Heinzmann, *Love Is Your Calling: A Book on Marriage for the Faithful*, trans. Dame Mary Groves, O.S.B. (England: St. Paul Publications, 1993), 23.

> It is rooted in the conjugal covenant of irrevocable personal consent. Hence, by that human act whereby spouses mutually bestow and accept each other, a relationship arises which, by divine will and in the eyes of society, too, is a lasting one.[305]

Fidelity in marriage plays the following roles: respect for one another as a way of keeping promises made during the marriage, the development of confidence between the spouses, and protects a family from conflicts such as jealousy. Thus, faithfulness is significant in the development of a stable and loving relationship.

> A promise of faithfulness made in freedom is permanently inscribed in the history of the two persons. It is an intersubjective ontological intention and determination made in freedom through which a man and a woman reach their definitive status in and through their bond of unity.[306]

4.5 Accompanying Couples by Following Christ's Example

The union of Christ and the Church is symbolized by the sacrament of Matrimony. The grace of the sacrament thus perfects the human love of the couple, deepens their indissoluble unity, and sanctifies them on the path to everlasting life. It offers spouses the grace to love each other with the love that Christ has given his Church. But then Jesus goes back and reiterates that the two, "They are no longer two but one." That's the fundamental reality. John Marshall states that:

> Thus, a man and a woman … render mutual help and service to each other through an intimate union of their persons and their actions. Through this union, they experience the meaning of their oneness and attain it with growing perfection day by day.[307]

Divorce in marriage is discouraged because it does away with the indissolubility of marriage, that is, the Creator's original intent, which called for marriage to be irreversible, and this was what the Lord Jesus insisted upon. He revokes the exceptions that had crept into the previous legislation. According to the Catholic Church, a recognized and consummated marriage in any way cannot be dissolved by human agency or for any circumstance other than death. Divorce is a serious transgression of natural law. Another reason why divorce is not

[305] John Marshall, ed. *The Future of Christian Marriage* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1969), 24.
[306] Walter Kasper, 1983, 22-23.
[307] John. Marshall, ed. *The Future of Christian Marriage* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1969), 25.

accepted is that it is immoral, and it causes chaos in both the family and the community. Indissolubility of marriage is something that the church cannot change, though there is room for discussion on why the church makes marriage indissoluble.[308]

4.6 Pastoral Care to the Christian Families

For families, especially married couples, to persevere and bear fruit in marriage, ongoing formation is of crucial importance in their lives. It aims to strengthen them and encourage them in their vocation. For divorced families, pastoral care is needed to strengthen and bring them together. Pastoral care will be one of the measures to prevent further divorces. A lot of effort in pastoral care is required of the pastors in the Wote diocese to avoid family breakdown. Accompanying and offering spiritual guidance to divorced families is thus recommended. They should not be judged or discouraged. They should be encouraged since they belong to the Christian community.[309]

4.7 Inclusive Liturgical and Para-Liturgical Activities

4.7.1 Active Participation

Is unquestionably the act of every community member engaging in a worship service, song, or gesture actively. "Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy."[310]The use of these gestures and local language helps the Christian to reflect more on faith and culture. This promotes understanding of sacraments in clear and meaningful ways.

However, active engagement does not negate the need for active passivity in quiet, stillness, and listening; in fact, it encourages it. When it comes to hearing the readings, the homily, the celebrant's prayers, or the chants and music of the liturgy, worshippers are not

[308] Raymond T. Bosler, *The Making of the Christian Marriage* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1975), 203.
[309]Cf. Francis, *Amoris Laetitia: On Love in the Family* (2016), no. 241–246.
[310]Sacrosanctum Concilium, nos. 14, 30, in *AAS,* 56 (1964), 104–105.

silent.[311] Although there are moments of quiet and calm, they are incredibly dynamic in their own unique ways. In a society that does not encourage or support silent reflection, developing the skill of inner listening can be challenging. This illustrates how the liturgy is, while it should always be enculturated but also counter-cultural.

To ensure conscious involvement, everyone in the community must receive adequate instruction in the mysteries of the liturgy. Otherwise, worship could become merely ritualistic. However, this does not imply that attempts to make the implicit apparent within the liturgy itself must always be made, as this sometimes results in verbosity and informality that are foreign to the Roman Rite and ultimately trivialize the act of worship. Furthermore, it does not imply the eradication of all subconscious experience, which is essential in a liturgy that depends on symbols that communicate with the subconscious in the same way that they do with the conscious mind. While using the vernacular has undoubtedly helped participants discover the richness of the liturgy. [312]

The fathers of the synod during Vatican II demonstrated how important the family is to liturgical and sacramental life. In this way, the family is the first Christian life, as the father, mother, children, and all other family members practice their priesthood through reception of the Sacrament of baptism, prayer, and giving thanks, as well as by bearing witness to the holy life and engaging in self-sacrifice and the practice of charity.[313]

The family is a unique setting where the gospel of family is lived. It serves as a source of both divine and human nourishment in addition to serving as a testimony. This has also been somewhat concretized in the Wote diocese, where the mothers participate in the Catholic Women's Association and other Catholic associations. Men, women, and youth participate in liturgical activities like choir, and a lot is yet to be done to enroll the Christians in liturgical

[311] Sacrosanctum Concilium, nos. 14, 30, in *AAS* 56 (1964), 104–105.
[312] Sacrosanctum Concilium, nos. 36, 54, in *AAS,*56 (1964), 108–109.
[313] John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa: The Church in Africa*, in *AAS,* 87 (1995), 92.

activities. This engagement will help a lot in strengthening the faith and understanding of the sacrament more clearly.

Conclusion

The value and essence of traditional marriage practices can greatly enrich the Christian Rite of Matrimony if these elements are incorporated into the Christian practice of marriage through the process of inculturation. Many traditional marriage practices, such as the participation of families and communities in the wedding ceremony, the negotiations leading up to the union, the celebrations that follow the union, and the recognition of the union, all point to the importance of traditional marriage practices in instilling moral values that promote the sustainability of matrimony. At the same time, they are given the correct catechesis on what they need to understand about the fundamental teachings of Christian marriage, especially faithfulness to each other among the spouses and indissolubility, as marriage is for a lifetime. The stages of marriage preparation are, therefore, fundamental for the development of maturity among couples. The church, by adding valuable traditional practices to the Christian Rite of Matrimony, provides a form of marriage that is true to its culture and faithful to its teachings.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The researcher, in this work, is addressing the importance of *Ntheo* (the exchange of vows) in Akamba traditional marriage: Inculturated Rite of Matrimony in the Catholic Diocese of Wote, Kenya. The researcher focuses on the importance of *Ntheo* in Akamba traditional marriage to promote an inculturated Rite of Matrimony in the Catholic Diocese of Wote. This is developed across the four chapters.

In chapter one, the analysis of the background of the Catholic Diocese of Wote has been discussed. The chapter situated the geographical location of Wote Diocese as one of the recent Roman Catholic dioceses in Kenya. It was officially opened by Pope Francis on 22 July 2023. It was carved from the diocese of Machakos. The nature and the climatic rainfall of the place have been tackled. Kamba land experiences two distinct rainy seasons: long rain and short rain, known as *Uua* and *Nthwa* respectively. The focus has been the Kamba people, a Bantu-speaking community believed to have originated from the Congo Basin region of central Africa, sharing strong linguistic and cultural ties with other Eastern Bantu groups such as Meru, Kikuyu, Mbeere, and Chuka. Eventually, they settled in Mbooni Hills, within today's Machakos county, during the latter half of the 17th century. From Mbooni, they migrated into the large regions now comprising Machakos, Makueni, and Kitui. From the recent statistics, the population of the Kamba speakers is about 3,960000.

Kamba have been politically based under the homestead. They had a decentralised political system under the clans, led by a council of elders whose primary role was to solve disputes, among other roles. The family among the Kamba was important since it formed the social basic unity. They are divided into three ethnic groups: Masaku, Kitui, and Mumoni. They are notoriously religious, and each ethnic group has its own religious system with a set of beliefs and practices. Some of the practices included the age-set system, like circumcision. The Kamba religion was *Kilumi* and believed in one supreme God, Ngai.

Culture is a way of life, and according to Kamba, culture has been expressed through language, Art, food, dance, customs, traditions, religion, among other ways. They believed in the existence of spirits known as *Aimu* who served as intermediaries among the Kamba. They also practiced some rituals during worship, like giving a sacrifice or offering. Farming is part of their life on a small and large scale.

Chapter two has investigated the rite of *Ntheo* in the Akamba traditional marriage. Among the Kamba community, the concept of traditional exchange of vows was a ritual conducted not through spoken words, as in the Rite of Matrimony, but through symbolic acts and cultural rituals, with questions of intent led by elders that expressed commitment. These symbolic acts and rituals happened during the climax of one of the family's visits before the wedding ceremony. The ritual of exchanging vows during the occasion solidified the commitment.

Before marriage, there were rites of passage that were communally performed as a person passed from one stage to another: at birth, adolescence, adulthood, and death. This echoes what is done in the rite of marriage. Bride wealth or price was paid before the exchange of consent to the girl's parents, beginning with the first goats *(Mbui sya Ntheo*). This custom allowed the fiancé to own the bride. Other customs included bride price negotiations, ritual and ceremonies, courtship and engagement, among others, as outlined. In comparison with traditional marriage, many problems affect current marriage, like early marriage, alcoholism, and unemployment, among others. The following chapter dwelt on Church teachings, on the exchange of vows.

Chapter three analyzes the church's teachings on the exchange of marriage vows. Historically, marriage experienced a deep evolution from the first understanding of it to the current theological and liturgical understanding. In the early centuries, marriage was viewed as a social and political union, a bond that linked families and communities. However, with the

coming of Christianity, marriage was understood to be a spiritual bond, one that was blessed by God and based on God's love. The understanding is based on the teachings of Jesus Christ that marriage is indissoluble, which depicts marriage as a covenant that reflects God's loyalty and concern for humanity, as found in the Old and New Testaments. Marriage is for the common good of the spouses and the procreation and education of children. The Church Fathers have underlined the natural and spiritual dimensions of marriage as means of grace and a symbol of Christ's love for the Church. There is a need for mutual self-giving, faithfulness, and openness to life as the essential elements of Christian marriage.

Concerning the exchange of vows, David M. Thomas expressed theological and pastoral values in a concrete liturgical form that unites personal consent, ecclesial blessing, and communal witness. Despite the historical, cultural, and pastoral development, the Church still offers marriage as a covenantal, indissoluble, and grace-filled union. It is, at the same time, a natural institution and a divine vocation, which is the foundation of family, society, and the life of faith. Scripture, tradition, magisterial teaching, and liturgical practice together offer a vision of marriage not only as a human contract but as a sacred vocation, which is oriented towards holiness, communion, and the fullness of life in Christ.

Finally, chapter four gives recommendations for the inculturated rite of matrimony for the diocese of Wote, responding to theological, pastoral, liturgical, and cultural practices. Some values and the essence of traditional marriage practices greatly enriched the church by incorporating them into the Christian Rite of Matrimony. Traditional marriage practices, such as the participation of families and communities in the wedding ceremony, the negotiations leading up to the union, the celebrations that follow the union, and the recognition of the union, all point to the importance of traditional marriage practices in instilling moral values that promote the sustainability of matrimony. At the same time, couples are given the correct catechesis on what they need to understand about the fundamental teachings of Christian

marriage, especially faithfulness to each other among the spouses and indissolubility, as marriage is for a lifetime. The stages of marriage preparation are, therefore, fundamental for the development of maturity among couples. The church, by adding valuable traditional practices to the Christian Rite of Matrimony, provides a form of marriage that is true to its culture and faithful to its teachings.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: Questionnaire

I am Rev. Deacon Daniel Katie, a licentiate student at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa in the Faculty of Theology, Department of Sacred Liturgy. I am conducting an address on the importance of the (exchange of vows) in Akamba traditional marriage: Inculturated rite of Matrimony in the Catholic diocese of Wote, Kenya.

The research aims to highlight the significance of the exchange of vows in the Akamba traditional marriage within the institution of matrimony. It demonstrates how useful the Kamba traditional marriage is, how it is done, and its usefulness for the rite of matrimony. This will enhance active engagement in marriage, thus promoting long-lasting marriages. It is in this regard that I request your valuable input for my successful completion of this work by answering the provided questionnaire.

Your participation is voluntary, and your input will be treated with the confidentiality it deserves and only for academic purposes. Thanking you in advance for your voluntary participation, and I remain available for any queries regarding this research in the below contacts.

Your sincerely

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INSTRUCTIONS

Kindly answer by ticking against or by giving a brief explanation in the spaces provided

SECTION A: RESPONDENT PARTICULAR

Gender Male [ ] Female [ ]

Age 40-49 Years [ ]

50-59 Years [ ]

60-69 Years [ ]

70-79 Years [ ]

80-89 Years [ ]

Marital Status Single [ ] Married [ ]

Educational level Standard 1-8 [ ] Secondary [ ]

Certificate [ ] Diploma [ ]

Bachelor [ ] Master [ ]

Other (Specify)

SECTION B: THE KAMBA HISTORY AND RELIGION

Could you briefly answer the following questions?

1. Do you know the origin of Kamba? Yes [ ] No [ ]

2. If yes, explain the origin

……
……

……
……

3. Which types of cash crops did Kamba grow? Explain

……
……
……..

4. Have you heard about the Kamba traditional dance? yes [ ] no [ ]

5. If yes, what is it called?.....

6. When did Kamba do prayers and offerings …….

7. The basic unit in Kamba society is called?.....

8. How many Kamba clans do you know?.....

9. Outline Kamba clans

……
……
…….

6. Explain about Kamba family ties and kinship …….

SECTION C.THE RITE OF NTHEO IN THE AKAMBA TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE

Provide answers for the following questions

If 'Yes', specify

	Questions	**Yes**	**No**	**I don't know**
a	Is traditional marriage communal in Kamba?			
b	Is there a specific age when a girl or a boy gets married?			
c	Do parents participate in choosing and negotiating marriages for their children?			
d	Are there specific requirements for marriage?			
e	Did elders lead the traditional marriage celebration?			
f	Is traditional brew required for marriage, and how much			
g	Is there a specific number of goats required?			
h	Elders forbid many young people from marrying within clans of the same kinship and from communities considered to be associated with curses and immoral behaviour			

i	Is there a specific time when *Ntheo* is performed?			
j	Were there other gifts given to the mother of the bride apart from the goats?			

1. Under what circumstances should a girl and a boy get married according to traditional marriage practices?

……
……
……
…….

2. What are the differences between the rite of the *Ntheo* and the rite of matrimony in its celebration?

……
……
……

3. What might be the cause of marriage breakdown in the Diocese of Wote?

……
……..

4. How was *Ntheo* prepared and celebrated?

……
……
……

5. Explain how traditional marriage was celebrated

……
……..

SECTION D: ELEMENTS OF INCULTURATION AND ADAPTATION

1. In your opinion, which elements of Kamba tradition can be incorporated into marriage through inculturation

A. ……

b. ……

c. …….

d. …….

e. …….

List of Informants

Dr. John Kyule

Stephene Mutuku

Andrew Katolo

Geofry Muendo

James Malika

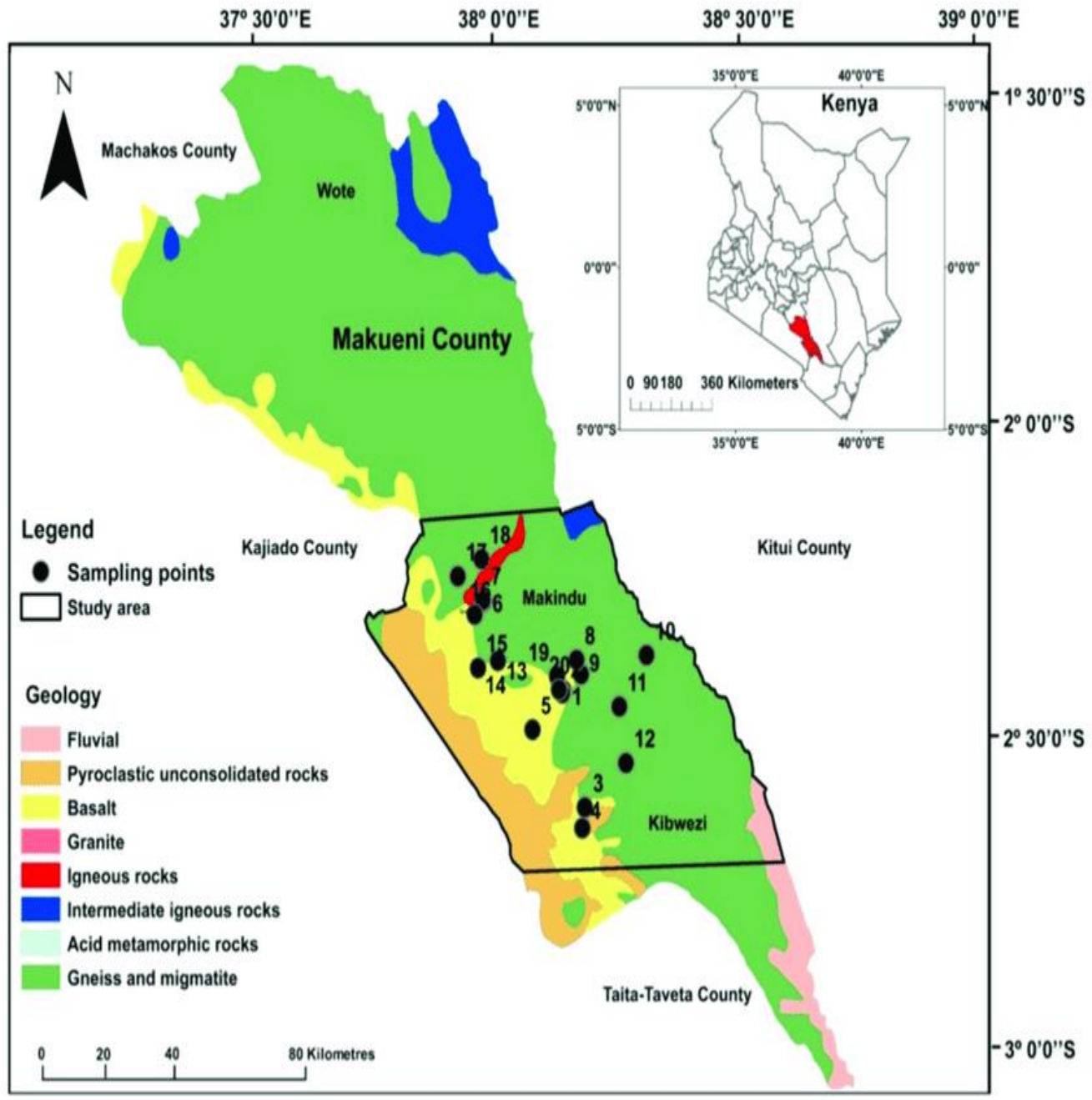
Stephen Wambua

Stephene Muthoka

Christopher Wambua

Magdalene Ndoti

Appendix II: Map of Makueni County



Appendix III: Pictorial

Picture of a Pre-Wedding Ceremony



Picture of a Wedding



A Picture of Traditional Marriage

