

PROJECT ABSTRACT

Master of Divinity

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

Title: STRATEGY TO TACKLE COHABITATION AMONG MEMBERS OF
SOUTH-WEST LIBERIA CONFERENCE OF THE SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST CHURCH

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The institution of holy matrimony was divinely established by YHWH at the beginning between the first couple, Adam and Eve. “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, ‘Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it’” (Gen 1:28 KJV). However, this process of multiplication is intended to occur through a legal and formalized marriage. The church and society were meant to grow through the establishment of formalized families. The spirituality of the church reflects its positive growth in every sphere.

Cohabitation, or ‘living together’ without being married, is an increasingly common phenomenon in modern society. It has even become widespread in many Christian denominations—a practice that contravenes the growth and integrity of the church in every aspect.

This practice of cohabitation does not conform to the biblical model of marriage, yet it is present among members of the South-West Liberia Conference. Its

prevalence is raising serious concerns about the church's growth, both spiritually and numerically, in the region.

This research investigated the prevalence of cohabitation among church members of the South-West Liberia Conference. After assessing the extent of the practice and identifying contributing factors through questionnaires, targeted interventions—including training programs, workshops, and seminars—were implemented to address these factors. These strategies proved successful, resulting in the wedding of seven couples. The governing body of the Conference and the local churches witnessed and affirmed these positive outcomes.

Key words: Strategy, Tackle, Cohabitation

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ADVENTIST CHURCH

A project

presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Divinity

by

Paulo Hosna-Janeta

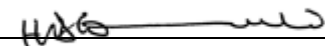
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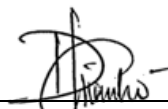
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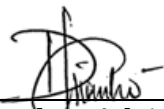
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I am utterly and deeply grateful to Almighty God for His Leading throughout my education, especially His leading hands in penning down this research work. This work is dedicated to my dear wife Martina Hosna-Janeta and my two children Graziella Mar-anita Hosna-Janeta, and Hosney Paulo Kweku Hosna-Janeta).

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

From the creation of man, God in His infinite wisdom saw that “it is not good for man to be alone” (Gen 2:18) therefore, God instituted Holy Matrimony in the Eden’s Garden between Adam and Eve. In the subsequent years, men began to take upon themselves multiple wives and concubines (1 Chr 3). This irrepressible practice was not only common in the New Testament Church but also gave rise to some other practices among the believers of the early Church (1 Tim 3:2), even though the New Testament Church tried to maintain God ideal for marriage, a man to one woman (1 Tim 3:2).

For the years the researcher served as a pastor of many local churches within the South-West Liberia Conference, and Director of Sabbath School/Personal Ministries, he has observed that the practice of cohabitation among the believers is prominent, and it is becoming the order of the day especially with the young adults. As a result, many young people, even among some local church leaders, are no longer interested in committing themselves to marriage. In some local churches within the Conference, some members who are known to have married are actually practicing cohabitation. This practice has resulted on children born out of wedlock, and raised mostly by single parents.

Unfortunately, the practice of cohabitation may hinder the growth of the church both spiritually and numerically. Church members who practice cohabitation either become sedentary in the church or leave their local church for another branch of

the Seventh-day Adventist church, or join a different denomination where they may not be well known. Still, while others become irregular in church attendance, some out of frustration decide to stay home, and indulge in illicit practices, thus denouncing their faith. This ultimately affects the spirituality and growth of the church.

Statement of the Problem

Over the years of the researcher's ministry in the South-West Liberia Conference, and having pastored many churches within the Conference, the researcher has observed a growing trend of cohabitation among church members in the South-West Liberia Conference. Additionally, the minutes of some churches record disciplinary actions taken against members involved in cohabitation. For instance, according to the minutes of a board meeting at New Jerusalem Church, three members were censured due to cohabitation.¹ Meanwhile, the Better Living Church, in a duly convened board meeting, voted to recommend to the church business meeting the censure of two church members for cohabitation.² It is clear that no study or research has been conducted in this regard to develop a plan or strategy to address or discourage cohabitation within this Conference, necessitating this study.

Purpose of the Study

This researcher developed relevant strategies which serve the purpose of tackling and discouraging cohabitation practices among church members within South-West Liberia Conference. These developed strategies similarly served the purpose of enhancing church growth, as they equip ministers in South-West Liberia

¹ Southwest Liberia Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, "Minutes of Southwest Liberia Conference, New Jerusalem Church" (Monrovia, Liberia: New Jerusalem Church, 11-12 November 2018), 7.

² Ibid., 12.

Conference with relevant requisites tools to enable them become more proficient and effective in dealing with members who are cohabiting, and those contemplating marriage.

Significance of the Study

The study proposed relevant strategies significant for addressing the cohabitation practices in South-West Liberia Conference. These proposed plans adopted by the South-West Liberia Conference, through the church leaders, as well as other Mission fields within the West Africa Union Mission, are important in discouraging or reducing cohabitation practice among church members.

Delimitation

This paper is delimited in proposing strategies that serve the purpose of dealing with the cohabitation rate in the South-West Liberia Conference. The researcher employed purposive Sampling Methods in the selection of churches and companies for the study. Only four 4 churches from each of the five 5 districts and 9 companies are used for this study. This research focuses solely in addressing the rise of cohabitation within the Conference and not beyond. The developed strategy is used in various churches within the Conference as it may be applicable for training, counseling, workshops, and seminars.

Definition of Terms

Cohabitation – is defined as “the situation of those who live together in a sexual relationship without being married.”³ More broadly speaking, cohabitation in a general sense can also mean group of people sharing the same quarters but not

³ D. J. Miller, "Cohabitation," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology (EDT)*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2001), 274.

necessarily as those pretending to be husbands and wives. “To cohabit, in a broad sense, means to coexist.”⁴ The word ‘cohabitation’ emerged in “the mid-16th century, from the Latin *cohabitare*, from co-‘together’ *habitare* ‘dwell.’”⁵

Concubine – is defined as a situation of a woman who shares emotional and physical affection with a married man, and live together in addition to his wife, whereas she is of a lesser rank than the wife. The concubine status is always secondary to the wife of the man whom she is in a loving relationship.⁶

Marriage – is also defined as consensual and legal commitment of love made by two individuals who share their emotions, physical affection, and some household tasks, as well as their finances.⁷ The Bible defines it as a representation of love of Christ for the Church (Eph 5:22, 23).

Matriarchal Marriage – is the situation where man cleave to his wife and leave together with the family of his wife and becomes part of the family of his wife.⁸ On the other hand, Melgosa and Melgosa defined matriarchal marriage “Where it is the woman who possesses and exercises authority in the couple and the family.”⁹

Tackle – in respect to this study, to tackle is “to make a determined effort to deal with a difficult problem or situation.”¹⁰

⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “Cohabitation,” last modified 2023, accessed July 16, 2023, <https://www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=Cohabitation>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, 6th ed. (2014), s.v. “Laity.”

⁷ David H. Olson and John DeFrain, *Marriage and the Family: Diversity and Strengths*, 3rd ed. (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 2000), 8.

⁸ H. W. Perkin, “Marriage, Marriage Customs in the Bible,” *EDT*, 740.

⁹ Julia Melgosa and Annette D. Melgosa, *Happy Couples: How to Have a Stable Relationship in All States of Life* (Madrid, Spain: Safeliz, 2012), 11.

¹⁰ *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, s.v. “Laity.”

Methodology

The sampling technique used in this research to select the study population is purposive sampling. This method, also known as judgment sampling, is limited to specific individuals or social groups who possess the required information—either because they are the only source of such information or because they are the only ones with the characteristics deemed suitable by the researcher.¹¹ Judgment sampling is primary kinds of Purposive sampling used in this research. This kind of design (Judgment Sampling) includes selection of the respondents appropriately in giving the needed information for the research.¹²

For this research, judgment sampling was the only viable method for obtaining the type of information needed to test the hypothesis.¹³ This sampling method aims to specifically focus on particular groups of individuals within a given setting who possess unique characteristics or knowledge relevant to the specific information and facts required for the research. For example, in an organizational setting—particularly in church-related research—clergy and other influential church leaders who are well-informed are included in the sample. Their enlightened views, opinions, and insights constitute a rich source of informative data.¹⁴ This Sampling is used when the researcher intends to target individuals containing certain characteristics of interest in the study.

Therefore, to further authenticate the theological findings, questionnaires are administered to the board and other church members. Opinion of the respondents in

¹¹ Uma Sekaran and Roger Bougie, *Research Methods for Business: A Skill-building Approach*, 6th ed. (Chichester, England: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 252.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

respect to cohabitation are surveyed and analyzed through SPSS, so as to help design a strategy. In this respect, the participants are consciously chosen based on their knowledge of the research Topic, as well as their understanding of the research question on hand.

The total membership of South-West Liberia Conference is 18,188.¹⁵ The target population of study is 377 members of the boards and other church members of the 29 organized churches and companies. The sample size for this study is 190 and the method used to calculate the size of the sample is Cochran's formula:

$$n = \frac{z^2 pq}{e^2}$$

Where, n_0 is the sample size, z is the selected critical value of desired confidence level, p is the estimated proportion of an attribute that is present in the population, $q = 1 - p$ and e is the desired level of precision

The maximum variability is equal to 50% ($p = 0.5$) and taking 95% confidence level with 5% precision, the calculation is as follows:

$$p = 0.5 \text{ and hence } q = 0.5; e = 0.05; z = 1.96$$

$$n_0 = \frac{1.96^2 (0.5 \times 0.5)}{0.05^2} = 384$$

Since the population is finite i.e. $N = 377$, Cochran pointed out that in order to calculate the sample size, the formula below is used:

$$n = \frac{n_0}{1 + (n_0 - 1)/N} = \frac{384}{1 + (384 - 1)/377} = 190$$

¹⁵ Southwest Liberia Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists Church, "Report of Southwest Liberia Conference Executive Secretary" (Monrovia, Liberia: Southwest Liberia Conference, 19-20 November 2021), 8-9.

The research is framed as follows: Chapter one is the introduction, comprised of problem statement, the purpose of the study, and stated the significance of the study; the chapter also highlighted the methodology used for the study. Chapter two is the presentation of the literature review as relates to different beliefs system and studies done on cohabitation, the Old and New Testaments perspective, the view of the major religions on cohabitation and others denominations.

Chapter three presents the profile of the local settings such as: historical background of the settings, and data gathered from the respondents through questionnaires. The four chapter of this study is description of the design of the research, it implemented the program designed for the research, and the strategies were hereby evaluated for tackling the issue of cohabitation in the Conference. In conclusion, chapter five summarized the whole study and gave the concluding statement in relation to the findings of the research while proposed recommendations with strategies to address the situation, and further studies.

1. What are the most important factors that influence cohabitation among church members in South-West Liberia Conference?
2. How does cohabitation affect church growth in South-West Liberia Conference?
3. To what extend can cohabitation be minimized among church members in South-West Liberia Conference?

Summary

The original condition of man as relates to the institution of marriage was initially perfect upon God's creation. It was not intended that man should be alone (Gen 2:18), in consequence God, at the culmination of creation, He instituted marriage. However, as man begins to explore other venue of relationship from the surrounding nations, marriage was tempered with, and given thus, rise to an uncontrollable practice such as: polygamy, cohabitation among others. These

practices were common among the different cultural practices of the ancient near-eastern, and throughout the Bible period (1 Tim 3:2).

It's been observed by the researcher's experience in ministry that the practice of cohabitation is becoming a common place among church members in Southwest Conference in Liberia. According to records of minutes of some churches, many church members have been censured, a situation which warrants this research, and with the purpose to develop a strategy that help to tackle or discourage the cohabitation practices among church members of the Conference. The developed strategies are significant in equipping pastors with relevant tools to address the growing practice of cohabitation among church members.

This research is delimited only in developing strategies to tackle cohabitation within the context of the South-West Liberia Conference. The population of study is 377 and the sample size is 190. The preferred methodology employed for this study is Purposive Sampling Method (Judgment Sampling Design). The use of these methods (Judgment Sampling Design) for data collection enhances accuracy and rich data source. This preferred method for this research does not only provides accurate information, but also necessitates relevant information that would have been insufficient in the use of different other methods.

CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF MARRIAGE

Cohabitation and Marriage

Cohabitation or ‘living together’ is becoming the order of the day in most western world and, it is even sadly to be observed among Christians across the globe. In the world today, the practice is becoming popular and acceptable in most cities and countries. This non-traditional form of marriage is “frequently practiced among the young university-age students, among divorcees and other segments of the population”¹

Therefore, pre-marital cohabitation is the consensus agreement reached between man and woman, with the expression of Love, desiring to live together though without any legal bound or parental approval. For many societies, cohabitation is an ideal testing ground for marriage. Cohabitation, though without any legal ties for the union of those pretending to be married partners, the practice is been adapted in many societies across the globe. For many, it is the easy and a rehearsal level for compatibility trial for marriage. Since many societies do conform to this form of marriage, the practice seems to be the preferred one, especially among the young people. For many cultures, unlike cohabitation, marriage is no longer a vehicle for living with someone whom one is in a loving relation or romantic partner.

¹ Kevin Howse, Hugh Dunton, and David Marshall, *Family Matters: A Guide to Family Life* (Grantham, England: Stanborough Press, 1989), 45.

However, from the very onset, the Bible clearly expresses God's ideal, and purposes of marriage. In marriage, God intends that both man and woman find joy and fulfilment that is both spiritual and physical in their marriage. In this respect, God united Adam and Eve in a holy matrimony, and He says: God intends that in the institution of holy matrimony, family should be formed only when man leaves his father and mother and cleave to his wife to establish their new home (Gen 2:24 NKJV). For God Himself instituted the law of marriage for human generations, until the end of time. For which the almighty had established, He made them good according to the divine Law of highest blessings for the growth of Man.² Unfortunately, this ideal God's intention for marriage was blemished by man choice to sin, in consequence, as man relationship with his Creator is marred by sin, so is his marriage (Gen 3:16-19 NKJV).

Cohabitation in the Old Testament Period

Cohabitation, as known as a situation whereas the male and female cleave together to establish unmarried union of false love and sexual expression without a legal bond.³ The practice, as common as is becoming today, it seems to have no connection with the Ancient religious Culture of the Jews. Thus, the Old Testament presents marriage practices that portray expression of moral and spiritual purity; a link from the biblical traditions, and followed by cultural expressions of love, sex and marriage.⁴ In the Old Testament period, some Ancient Near Eastern nations, as noted by James I. Packer, the groom usually cleaves to the live with the bride's family,

² Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1952), 56.

³ Miller, "Cohabitation," *EDT*, 274.

⁴ *Ibid.*

however, in Israel, it is the bride who cleave to the family of the groom, and becomes part of the his family.⁵ However, the Bible records seeming situations of matriarchal marriage occurrences where man went to marry his wife, and they both live in her parents' house, and he became part of his wife's family. Such examples of matriarchal marriage (and not cohabitation) is found with the following characters: Jacob did with Leah and Rachel, – and, either temporary or permanently. Samson went to marry a philistine woman while she continues to live with her family, Samson continued to visit her from time to time (Judg 14:8-20; 15:1-2).⁶ However, these only exemplified a customary matriarchal marriage system, and not cohabitation practice. This practice on marriage attests that history of Israel experienced some changes that affected their marriages, as they begin to accept degrading practices of inter-marriages with their neighboring countries.⁷

Cohabitation in the Community of Believers

Old Testament does not seem to have records on cohabiting practice among the believers, however, they adhered to chastity. It was unlawful, and serious offense for man and woman to get involve into sexual relationship when they are not married partners. They were not allowed cohabit together, in consequence, the couple were expected to practice chastity, highest sexual purity and remains virgin as long as she is unmarried. However, if anyone could prove that she was not a virgin when she married, then she is subjected to the capital punishment where the men of the city

⁵ J. I. Packer, Merrill C. Tenney, and William White Jr., *The Bible Almanac: A Comprehensive Reference Guide to the People of the Bible and How They Lived* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1980), 434.

⁶ Ibid., 740.

⁷ Ibid.

would carry her to her father's house then they stone her to death.⁸ Prohibition which rules out the cohabiting practice among the believers. From the Jews custom, sex was a gift to be enjoyed only and exclusively between the married couple. Sex is an ordained blessing for the institution of marriage. Practice, which was strongly sustained by the Jews to extend that a newly married man is exempted from official duties such as business or military, for a period of a whole year so that he could get to spend time together with his newly wedded wife according to the law⁹ (Deut 24:5 NKJV).

Old Testament narratives, portrayed the customs of the Jews on marriage rooted on straight command of God as relates to the selection of a damsel as a wife. Because of the sacred priestly duties; and that they are set apart unto God. The priests were commanded to choose for a wife a damsel. They were absolutely forbidden to marry women who are whore or profane, neither divorcee, instead they were required to marry to women who were virgins from their own people (Lev 21:1, 7, 14, NKJV).

This suggests that there might have been some sexual immoral practices among the people of the surrounding nations. The message here contained is for the priests; "They must keep from defilement of every kind. The people were permitted to do certain things that were forbidden to the priests."¹⁰ Yet, there was no biblical indication that cohabitation was a practice among the believers of the Old Testament, the Jews. Unfortunately, Leviticus 21 address rarely seems explicit to the degree of scale of conduct that was strict on the basis of the person's rank, which might have

⁸ Packer, Tenney, and White Jr., *The Bible Almanac*, 745.

⁹ Ibid., 425.

¹⁰ "Unto the Priest" [Lev 21:1], *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary (SDABC)*, ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1978), 4:795.

been applicable to the rest of the believers' adherence and responsibility (Deut 7:3,4 NKJV). The instruction, for the priest to marry a virgin woman from his people suggests that the Jews were intolerant to the practice of cohabiting or sexual immorality; though there might have been sliding members into the practice of interfaith marriages with unbelievers from the surrounding nations (Gen 4:19; Ezra 9:5-10; 10:4, 10-15) however, the priests alike other Jews leaders were not allowed to do the same.

Abraham, when looking for a wife for Isaac, he gave a strict order to his servant as relates to selection of the bride for Isaac, that the for Isaac should be taken from among the Canaanites women, and must also be willing to cleave with Isaac to live in the promise land, (Gen 24:12-32 NKJV). In no wise was Isaac expected to return to Haran to the persuasion of their former ways of life.

Prohibition on Cohabitation

God instituted marriage as a symbol of relationship between Him and the lost human race. Marriage was to restore God image in human race, and to be a representation of a relationship of a redemptive love for His people. The instituted of marriage is a holy institution that seeks to foster the biblical principles of a holy and monogamous relationship among the people of God, however, such an institution is soon became perverted by man's deviation from the ideal steps prescribed by God for human happiness (Gen 4:19).

There are different opinions as relate to cohabitation practice among the Jews of the ancient period. Some sources on matrimonial practices attest that during the 2nd. Century BC, that there were some cases of pre-marital cohabitation among the people of God. The discovery of Babatha from the Judean desert affirms that there had been a practice of couples living together for a period of time before the actual marriage

contract is drawn up.¹¹ This affirmation needs to be verified against the Jewish legal marriage practices. According to one study by Jacob Neusner, a distinguished professor and scholar of Judaic studies, refuted the discovery of Babatha affirming couple cohabiting before marriage; according to Neusner, it is imaginable to think that man and woman were admitted to live together without betrothal, or even a formalized marriage contract. According to Neusner, such affirmation does not conform to any rule on the account of marriage, instead, such practice would have been a clear violation of marriage if it has existed.¹²

Because of intermarriages between the Samaritan and the Assyrians; Jews resented them. In preservation of the commandments of their God, they despised Samaritan for their mixed-marriages with the Assyrians as unlawful marriage.¹³ This consideration typified the Jews ideal marriage. The discovery of Babatha on Jews cohabitation seems to be disjointed.

However, it is also well noting that because of Jews' inter- marriages with the pagan nations, there was a shift in the keeping of their old practice (The Torah) on marriage. Instead of cohabitation practices, which was common among the Pagan nations, the Jews adopted the Levirate marriage system, conveyed through family lines, to have an heir for the preservation of the properties inheritance;¹⁴ (Gen 16:2; Exod 15:17-18; Ps 127:128). Jews violation of marriage does not seem to warrant

¹¹ Tal Ilan, "Premarital Cohabitation in Ancient Judea: The Evidence of the Babatha Archive and the Mishnah (Ketubbot 1.4)," *The Harvard Theological Review* 86, no. 3 (1993): 247-264.

¹² Jacob Neusner, *A History of the Mishnaic Law of Women: Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1980), 5:266.

¹³ Packer, Tenney, and White Jr., *The Bible Almanac*, 509.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 435.

attest practice of cohabitation, rather polygamous life was admitted to gratify their traditions (Gen 29:21-30; 30:3-6).

In biblical times, marriage was primarily initiated by the groom's family, (Gen 21:21; 24; 29; Judg 14:2) and in some cases by the groom himself, and it follows the straight customary right for a holy matrimony. The Jews do not give any credence to any act of cohabitation before marriage. According to Ilan, even in a very casual relationship between man and woman, such relationship would require a clear definition of its purposes as relates to marriage contracts.¹⁵ On the basis of these strong cultural practices against pre-marital cohabitation, it's essentially important to note that there is no facts to substantiate the assumption of pre-marital cohabitation practice among the Jews of the ancient Period.

Factors and Effects of Cohabitation in the Old Testament Community

As the people of God begin to admire many heathen practices, they begin to copy even take upon themselves wives from the children of the world (daughters of man) (Gen 6:2). However, it is also not safe to assume that cohabitation practice was among those practices that have emanated from the very essence of the influences based on admirations of cultural practices of the heathen nations. In this respect, such practices chiefly include among others: childbearing, war bride, and intermarriages.

Childbearing. As child-bearing was an issue of utmost importance in the ancient tradition of the Jews, especially a male child for an Heir, "Every Jewish couple married with the mindset of having children. They were especially eager to have a male child."¹⁶ The Bible account noted that the Patriarch Abraham, subscribed

¹⁵ Ilan, "Premarital Cohabitation in Ancient Judea," 247.

¹⁶ Packer, Tenney, and White Jr., *The Bible Almanac*, 412.

to the practices of the heathen nations for childbearing as a successor by an Egyptian slave girl (Gen 16:2), Hanna (1 Sam 1:9-28); Rachel (Gen 30: 1-2) etc. Many men of the heathen nation begin to practice premarital cohabitation as a means of testing the fertility of the woman on child-bearing without having to run the risk of committing themselves to a legal marriage. In a Jewish culture, if a woman unable to give birth or children after a formalized marriage, she is subjected to the rebuke from her community,¹⁷ (Gen 30:1-2, 23; 1 Sam 1: 6-10). She and the family would then retreat into earnest prayer (Gen 25:21; 1 Sam 1:10-12, 26-28).

One radical approach asserts that the practice of pre-marital cohabitation was admitted among the Jews prospective husbands and wives to cohabit together before their decision to formalize or not their matrimonies.¹⁸ However, the Bible is silence about premarital cohabitation among the Jewish. It is still not safe to certainly say as to whether the Jews were actually exempted or not from such practice, since it could have emanated among many other practices from the heathen nations, adopted by the Jews.

War-brides. Another factor perhaps could have been inherent to cohabitation among others in the Near-Eastern nations is the war-bride. The war brides are the foreign women capture during war as captives. Those women were taken as wives without fulfilling the nuptial right of the brides (test of character of the groom, the fulfilment of the bride betrothal) before becoming legitimate wives. In respect to marital right, even the women who were taken as war slave, have some conditions to be fulfilled when they were taken as wives. Though they were slaves, however because of marriage contract, they were given right. For example, should the husband

¹⁷ Packer, Tenney, and White Jr., *The Bible Almanac*, 435.

¹⁸ Ilan, "Premarital Cohabitation in Ancient Judea" 262.

intend to discontinue the relationship with the war-bride, the war-bride wives were to be set free from slavery status.¹⁹ (Deut 21:10 NKJV). It is possible that adoption of war-bride as a wife, might have had its definition on the basis of the ancient cultural practices. Such a definition perhaps stands to repudiate all legal implication for the fulfilment of the requirement for marriage, making it void from its appearance as an act of cohabitation.

Intermarriages. The factors responsible for Cohabitation in the world preceding our world today has its origin from the Old Testament deviation from God's precepts on the ideal for marriage, and a general breakdown of morality among the professed followers of God.²⁰

Since the integration of the customs of the heathen nations into the Jewish culture through intermarriages, some men took upon themselves more than one wife (Gen 4:19). This issue of intermarriage with the foreign women, and polygamy contributed a great deal in the escalation of their problem.²¹ The Bible recorded intermarriages of some Israelites with pagan women, practice which was contrary to God's command. From David, and many and other Kings of Israel alike pampered the practice for their satisfaction; this alluring and extravagant practice of many wives and concubines, do not have biblical sanction, therefore this inference was unacceptable. This an unlawful practice was prohibited by God, and they were to refrain from such practices according to the commandment (Deut 17:17). Ezra and Nehemiah repeatedly reminded the post-exilic Jews of their unlawful relationship with the foreign women (Ezra 10; Neh 10:30; 13:23-28).

¹⁹ Packer, Tenney, and White Jr., *The Bible Almanac*, 421.

²⁰ Miller, "Cohabitation," *EDT*, 274.

²¹ Packer, Tenney, and White Jr., *The Bible Almanac*, 435.

In an Ancient Near Eastern culture, marriage was fitted on the basis of either title of dignity or dishonor and disgrace, because the element of marriage involves proper conduct.²² In the Ancient Syro-Palestine, marriage was not limited to the fulfilment of the requirement for a marriage between the two household, but also the desire of a pre-marital virginity, and preservation of their dignity as relates to their chastity after marriage.²³ On this notation, it seems that the factors that affect the Jews mindset toward cohabitation springs from their sense of godliness as relates to their religious belief system. The ancient Israelites centered all of their activities on the worship of Jehovah. The individual and the nation worship of God was held with high esteem.²⁴

Therefore, among the practices adopted from the surrounding nations, which directly or indirectly constituted serious effects in their ideal marriage system, the Bible does not seem to explicitly mention cohabitation practice among the factors (childbearing, war-bride, and intermarriages) that effected God precepts for the ideal marriage. In view of this effect, Nehemiah spoke against his generations saying: The kings of Israel, David and Solomon did sin by following the heathen women. Because those heathen women caused David and Solomon to sin against God of Israel (Neh 13:26; 1 Kgs 11:4-5). Ezra, in consequence, demanded that every man ends his relationship with those women of the heathen nations (Ezra 10:8).

The Bible clearly pointed out to the effects of these practices. The book of proverbs vehemently warned against the relationship with those loose and evil

²² V. H. Matthews, "Family Relationships," *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 294.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Packer, Tenney, and White Jr., *The Bible Almanac*, 386.

heathen women (Prov 2:16-19; 5:1-23). The disregard of God's law for the Canaanite cult prostitution was a serious abuse of God's law. The practice which was frequently exhibited among the people of Israel (1 Sam 2:22-23; 1 Kgs 15:12). On this note, it is not safe to avow that cohabitation was present among the Jews of the Old Testament, therefore, its effects cannot seemingly be discussed apart from been assured of its existence. Among others, factors mentioned above had their effects in the lives of the Jews community.

Nevertheless, God in His infinite wisdom gave the guideline by which man and woman should be united into a Holy Matrimony as husband and wife. The cohabitation practice would have been of serious offense with devastating consequence if it were present. The Old Testament adheres to sexual purity before and after marriage (Lev 21:13), that a damsel must be a virgin.

Marriage in the Old Testament

As observed, from the biblical times to present, different societies present different matrimonial practices. Views regarding cohabitation are influenced by socio-economic, cultural practices, and belief system. Likewise, the process of marriage and when a betrothal becomes a formative wife, has suffered significant changes through the ages. After the New Testament period, for example, the tradition feature marriage not as an act but rather as a process. According to the culture of the near eastern, it were the spouses that make the proposal for marriage through an engagement, and they formalized it through sexual intercourse.²⁵ The conclusion of the ancient culture

²⁵ Philip Lyndon Reynolds, *Marriage in the Western Church: The Christianization of Marriage during the Patristic and Early Medieval Periods* (Leiden, Netherlands: BRILL, 1994), 315.

as relate to sex is that sexual intercourse, plays a pivotal role for the consummation of holy matrimony; this is possible because it seems to function well as an oath.²⁶

However, if sexual intercourse is the determining means by which marriage is consummated; then it would be safe to say that those who are cohabitating are already married in God's eye by consummating their cohabitating union with sexual intercourse; this would also imply that the cohabiting couples are already 'one flesh' and need not to formalized their union by marriage, Instead, by making their relationship Christian. Still, some argued on the basis of (Gen 2:24), that cleaving together already formalizes the couple as one flesh. However, the main aspect in the solemnization of an enduring relationship between man and woman includes the spouses leaving their parents (father and mother) subsequent to the solemnization of their holy matrimony and joining together as formalized marriage couples (Gen 2:24; Exod 2:1; Deut 24:1). In view of the institution of marriage, it was not actually cleaving together first (an act of cohabitation [Eph 5:3]), or sexual intercourse before marriage (an act of fornication, [1 Cor 7:2]) that formalizes the couple and make them to become one flesh, rather it was a formalization of the betrothal into a holy matrimony that warrant the cleaving together to become one flesh.

The cleaving together is not essentially a matter of spatial change or movement rather, a sign of spiritual, physical, and socio-economical commitment. The translation of 'Cling' signifies a deeper relation between the couples, notwithstanding, 'clinging' is not limited to relationship only.²⁷ One central element

²⁶ Keith Warrington, "Cohabitation and the Church," *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 13 (1994): 132.

²⁷ 2 Samuel 20:2 (the people cling to their king); 23:10 (a soldier clings to his sword); Ruth 1:14 (Ruth clings to her mother-in-law); 2:8, 21 (Ruth clings to the servants); Lamentation 4:4 (a thirsty tongue clings to the roof the mouth).

in heterosexual union between the two opposite sex is that they become one flesh. The aspect of becoming one flesh is not limited to the act of sexual intercourse, has been understood by many. Nevertheless, the term ‘cling’ has much broader meaning from the biblical point of view. From the biblical account, the use of such term depict the meaning of corporality and the establishment of a close relationship.²⁸ Many cultures of the Ancient Near East, see Cohabitation as a primordial step to marriage, yet to some it is a foundational or even substitutionary to marriage. According to the culture of Ancient Rome, the union between husband and wife was therefore perceived to be in a broader sense as an aspect of purpose. For instance, if man and woman cohabit, and if they intend doing so as husband and wife, therefore, they should be seen as husband and wife in a formalized marriage. Cohabitation is not a synonymous of consummation, however, the former was seen as a vehicle that provide the validity for marriage.²⁹ Marriage was meant to be simple and descent, and not essentially with luxurious ceremonial extravagance. Instead, it meant to be without much essential ceremonial extravagance, Instead an enduring element based on cohabitation.³⁰

However, the Old Testament remains faithful and resolute on God’s intends and opinion on marriage among His chosen people; He (God) maintains a precept which does not sanction cohabitation practice. According to Old Testament, Jewish people were governed by collections of traditions.³¹ In view of the Talmud, a Jewish father had four (4) responsibilities toward his sons, and these responsibilities include,

²⁸ Genesis 37:27 (Judah notes that Joseph is ‘our brother, our own flesh’); also 29:14; 2 Samuel 5:1; 19:12.

²⁹ Greg Forster, *Cohabitation and Marriage: A Pastoral Response* (London, England: Marshall Pickering, 1994), 24.

³⁰ Beryl Rawson, ed., "The Roman Family," in *The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives* (London, England: Croom Helm, 1986), 1.

³¹ Packer, Tenney, and White Jr., *The Bible Almanac*, 413.

in addition to the teaching of the Law, the circumcision of the male son by his father (Gen 17:12-13); father's responsibilities to redeem his first born son from God (Num 18:15-16); finding of a wife for his son (Gen 24:4); and teach the son a trade.³²

Because of the value and sacredness attached to marriage as ordained by God, as noted in the *SDA Handbook of Theology*, according to Babylonian Talmud, a man should be careful to spend his income to provide food for his family, up to his income for clothes, and do everything beyond his income to honor his wife and children.³³ Meanwhile rabbinic Judaism viewed marriage as great blessing from God; therefore, they consider an unmarried person as an improper man.³⁴ According to the Babylonian Talmud Yebamoth, explains that such a person lives without joy, without blessings, and without goodness. Marriage was a mandatory among the religious Jews.³⁵ The Rabbinic Judaism reference on marriage as a great blessing, it seems to suggest marriage on the legal basis involving thus the parental support, and the fulfilment of all required traditional practices for marriage.

According to the ancient Jews tradition, Marriage arrangement was the responsibility of the parents on behalf of the groom, however, in some other cultures, the arrangement is made either by the brother of the groom or by the groom himself (Gen 4:19; 6:2; 12:19; 24:67; Exod 2:1). In the arrangement of marriage, the bride is expected to be a virgin, which is an indication of chastity and sign of purity and honor to the body of the bride as well as her parents. Contrary to the expectation on chastity

³² Packer, Tenney, and White Jr., *The Bible Almanac*, 413.

³³ Calvin B. Rock, "Marriage and Family," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 2000), 742.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 743.

of the bride, as mentioned earlier, the groom then has the right to seek for further proof according to the prescribed law. If she is judged guilty, corporal punishment is applied, eventually leading to death (Deut 22:13-21, NKJV). On the contrary, if the man accusation against his wife is false, he “However, if the man had falsely accused his wife, he therefore would be punished, and subjected to pay a ransom twice than the usual bride price to the father of his wife.

According to Ellen G. White, marriage in the Old Testament tradition was regarded as one requiring that before the bridegroom betroths the bride, his presumed love and proposal to marry must be subjected to a test of integrity (character wise) and capability to provide support for his family. From the biblical account, Ellen White records that parents of the Near Eastern period, especially the Jews’ fathers, in order to provide a safe guard for their daughters, they were careful as to whom their daughters were to marry, as it was a matter of trust, and essentially important to consider whom they could trust the happiness of their daughters.³⁶

A practice which was required from Jacob (Gen 29:18-20 NKJV), and years of servitude for the betrothal, explained his inability to pay (on this case) to Laban upfront the required betrothal’s price, which is normally given to the bride as the costume demands. Jacob was subjected to the test of fitness of character for marriage (Gen 29:14 NKJV). The Old Testament traditions hereby mentioned, do not seem to suggest in any form the practice of cohabitation in the context of Israel chosen community of believers. According to the Jewish costume, “The family expected their daughter to remain a virgin until marriage,”³⁷ however, this wasn’t always the case,

³⁶ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 2018), 188.

³⁷ Packer, Tenney, and White Jr., *The Bible Almanac*, 415.

some young ladies were either seduced or raped before marriage (2 Sam 13:1-22 NKJV).

New Testament Tradition on Cohabitation

The New Testament has records of instances affirming God's ideal for marriage for all His creation, especially His chosen generation (Eph 5:1-33). It insists in making distinction between the Jews and the gentile in the context of their belief system, and the principles that inform their socio-economic, cultural/traditional, and spiritual life. It also recorded occurrences of abrogation of biblical marriage, diminishing thus the element of God's image in human relation (1 Cor 7:2). The act of cohabitation was rarely spoken in the account of New Testament church. Notwithstanding, the New Testament dwells more on purity and principles for maintain healthy marriage relationship as representation of God's love for the fallen race (1 Cor 5:11-13 NKJV).

In the New Testament, the Scripture recorded incident of possible cohabitations but not among the Jews: for instance, the Samaritan woman of John 4:16-26 was an indication that cohabitation was practiced among the surrounding nations. The discourse between Jesus and the Samaritan lady at the well suggest that the practice of cohabitation was present by the statement of the Samaritan woman as in verse 17, and Jesus sanctioned this statement in verse 18 saying: even the man you are currently cohabiting is not your husband, for you have had five other men that none of them was actually your husband. You're right! However, the Jews do not seem to sanction the practice in their community, even though the practice (cohabitation) might have had already its injunctions among others. Apostle Paul advise to the Corinthians is that since there is so much immorality, it is advisable that everyone gets married, and that whosoever desire to marriage should be so by

fulfilling the betrothal requirement and that of marriage formalization to be husband and wife.

The New Testament emphasizes on the legal terms of marriage, as the believers were counseled that any form of immorality or any adulteration as well as greed should in no wise be named or tolerated among the believers (Eph 5:3). The New Testament teaching is that since holy matrimony is the representation of Christ's relationship and love for His people, the church (Eph 5:22, 23), cohabitation does not have proper representation of that Symbol, therefore, it cannot be taken to represent "the marriage of the Lamb" which is the consummation of all things.³⁸ Therefore, Cohabitation does not seem to be an object of injunction in the Jewish community.

New Testament Perspective on Cohabitation

The main contribution of the New Testament (NT) to biblical view on marriage is the accentuation of the original principles of holy matrimony as established by the Creator. As oppose to cohabitation practice, the New Testament focuses on maintaining the role of man and woman in an indissolubility of marriage relationship, as it is made that man and woman shall be united to become one only through a holy wedlock (Mark 10: 8, 9).

Tracing back through the history, it is obvious that cohabitation is dated back from most of the ancient societies. For instance, in the Roman city of Corinth, it is noted that sexual immorality was a common practice, to extend that the practice grew up concern among the new convert to Christianity. The converts had written requesting for an address from the apostle about the growing immorality in the city of Corinth.

³⁸ Rock, "Marriage and Family," 726.

In this regard, Apostle Paul's response was: regarding the matters about which you have written: it is prudent for man not to have any physical attachment or emotional affection with a woman whom one is not in a formalized marriage relationship. This is because of the prevalent sexual immoral practices among the Corinthians; therefore. The apostle Paul advised that each man and woman should rather be united through a formalized holy matrimony as husbands and wives (1 Cor 7:1-3). Therefore, sexual immorality which might had not exempt cohabitation, were not accommodated among the believers in the New Testament. The growing concern of the new converts was a quest to live a moral life based on biblical mandate on sexual purity.

In the ancient Roman Culture, the city of Corinth is commonly known as a center of sexual immoral practice or sexual excess, so that the prostitutes were commonly known as 'Corinthian Girl' or 'Corinthian Companion.' The Greek word used to refer to the uprising prostitution was 'Corinthiazomai,' which means to 'Corinthianize,' which is in reference to the practice of sexual immorality.³⁹

In the New Testament, the picture of cohabitation does not seem to surface in the discussion in the settings of the Jewish community of believers, rather it portrays marriage as symbol of a legal bond between God and this fallen world (Eph 5:22, 23). Therefore, this passage (Eph 5:22, 23) is the deepest presentation of the Apostle Paul in reference to a formalized marriage among the believers. From the biblical point of view, he insisted that the qualities of love, respect and submission be the basis or nuclear of their relationship. It is these qualities that count. Therefore, what remained as central element in the Pauline presentation of the Holy matrimony between two heterosexual individuals is not the ceremonial practice, or a concept of the church as

³⁹ Spirit and Truth, "1 Corinthians 7: Abstinence, Celibacy, Cohabitation, and Marriage," last modified 2023, accessed June 17, 2023, <https://spiritandtruthonline.org/1-corinthians-7-abstinence-celibacy-cohabitation-and-marriage>.

an accepted divine union, rather, marriage is to be esteemed in respect to those qualities and its symbolism (Heb 13:4). The New Testament description of the relationship between God and humanity, is liken that of bride and the groom preparing for a lifelong relationship. Its exposition on marriage explained Jesus' reference in Genesis 2:24 as the basis for teaching the inseparable union between man and woman through sacred divine institution of holy matrimony.

The New Testament does not seem to accommodate, neither provides supporting opinion on cohabitation as an option for sacred matrimony between man and woman. According to the ancient Near Eastern culture, it is quite impossible to escape from the layers of moral implications that underlines the legal process that unite a man a woman through a holy matrimony.

This was the reason why Joseph was disturbed when he got to know about Mary's pregnancy (though by the Holy Spirit), he been a just man, and "Mary's betrothed husband, was utterly shocked of what appeared to be the fruit of a terrible sin on Mary's part"⁴⁰ (Matt 1:19 NKJV). The Greek word 'δίκαιος' (*dikaios*, righteous), is a description of personality of one who is righteous in deeds, and his/her judgement is correct, as straight adherence of instructions and costumes, and traditions as it is with that which is true.⁴¹ Joseph has been a stern adherent of the Torah according to Moses's instruction in keeping the rabbinical traditions of the Jews, afraid of the social and religious implication to be termed as cohabiter. He was left into dilemma to decide as to whether the rabbinical law warrants him right to marry a supposed adulteress, since they were not officially married; and bearing the fact that betrothal warrants no one right to cohabit, poses lot of questions as to

⁴⁰ Packer, Tenney, and White Jr., *The Bible Almanac*, 512.

⁴¹ "Just" [Matt 1:19], *SDABC*, 4:283.

whether Joseph was innocent about Mary's pregnancy. Though this wasn't a case of cohabitation, no adultery, but knowing that they were known to be only betrothed, in this respect, there was no ground for Mary to conceive before the actual marriage. In view of the Jewish tradition, betrothed couple are bound by a legal code of law for a commitment to a holy matrimony but until then, they are not to cohabit:

The costume and tradition of the Jews, warrants the betrothal no right to cohabit or have pre-marital sex prior to their formalized matrimony that made the two shall be become one, though by betrothal they are bound by the legal law (Deut 22: 23, 24). Act of betrothal is established by the legal code of law, which is a solemn covenant and therefore, it cannot be broken, except by an act of the law.⁴²

This is a clear evidence that biblical account does not excuse any condition as a reason for which man and woman should unite themselves as husband and wife, except by marriage. Moreover, it adhered to the principles which dismisses the illegal union of cohabitation by adhering to the way that is biblically lawful and, symbolizes commitment and bonding in holy matrimony, which “does not happen, however, in cohabitation.”⁴³

According to the Jews costume, man and woman cannot live together under the pretense of marriage, except they obtained marriage contract and have formalized their marriage. According to Tal Ilan, there was a sharp contrast among the Jews of the first century Judaism, as to how marriage contract should be drawn within the context of marital conventions. Ilan added that there was a noticeable disagreement on the alleged affirmation of possible cohabitation among the Jews of the 2nd Century

⁴² “Before They Came Together” [Lev 21:1], *SDABC*, 4:282.

⁴³ Miller, “Cohabitation,” *EDT*, 275.

Palestine, accordingly, man and woman were united, and live together in cohabitation.⁴⁴

His assertion was based on the account of the Palestinian Talmud which assumed that the pre-marital cohabitation was caused by war, leading the Judean to resort in pre-marital sexual intercourse or cohabitation. The circumstances resulting to pre-marital sex with their betrothal virginal women was because of war, so as to avoid that their virginal prospective wives do not have to be violated by their enemies' soldiers. In order to prevent such a disgraceful situation whereas the Jewish maiden may have to lose their virginity, raped or even conceive for the enemies' gentile. The prospective husbands were permitted to cohabit, and practice pre-marital sex even to the very houses of the maiden. One practical example of such pre-marital cohabitation, and sex before marriage was during the destruction of Jerusalem in the year AD 70 where such advice was evident.

Meanwhile, according to Jesus' teaching, it is God who instituted marriage between man and woman through a formalized wedlock to raise families that in consequence should be members of the family of God crown with honor. The account of the New Testament, only provides the information on marriage and family without a mention of the practice of cohabitation as an act among the believers. According to Papyrus Yadin 37-Marriage Contract, according to the Jews' tradition, it was the fathers' responsibilities to select the prospective wives for their sons. On this case, seldom the grooms and the brides had the chance to live together nor seeing their prospective wives and husbands except during the period of betrothal ceremony.

⁴⁴ Ilan, "Premarital Cohabitation in Ancient Judea: The Evidence of the Babatha Archive and the Mishnah (Ketubbot 1.4)," 262.

On this respect, one can simply understand the layers of moral implications that the practice of cohabitation bears on the perpetrators. In Jews many traditions, while some practices of the pagan nations were admitted into their culture, and allow to be practiced by all, others were not to be practiced among the people, to keep them from defilement of every kind. “The people were permitted to do certain things that were forbidden to the priests,”⁴⁵ and simply abrogated from their midst. This makes it quite impossible to affirm that because other practices were admitted into the Jewish culture therefore, the principles serve as a yeast to measure other practices as applicable.

In this regard, it is only safe to maintain that cohabitation was only a postulation among the Jews, and not a certainty. The New Testament therefore, focuses its teaching on the biblical bases of a monogamous marriage between man and woman; such relationship is centered on fidelity. The New Testament insists on biblical principles of a reciprocal care, support, and love as presented and originated by the creator. God expected husbands and wives to reciprocate such love, care in their relationship, as a response to the love of God for them as the creator and redeemer, and the only one God.⁴⁶

The Teachings of the Apostles on Cohabitation

While it is true that the Scripture does not give any prescribe model of marriage, however, several cultural practices that is a collection of different practices were used to form a basic guideline for marriage. Such guideline are biblically rooted, and presented in both Testaments of the Bible, standing as representation of God’s

⁴⁵ “Unto the Priest,” *SDABC*, 4:795.

⁴⁶ Ilan, “Premarital Cohabitation in Ancient Judea,” 247.

protective measure for the families on earth, and His love for the church. The apostolic teaching centered not on the aspect of cohabitation, perhaps since it was not prevalent practice. From my study of the Scripture, the Bible does not explicitly address a case of couples living together before marriage. This is why the Apostles teaching is much centered in the avoidance of other sexual immoral practices of the pagan nations, such as: adultery or fornication, polygamy, and prostitution among others.

The apostle framed their teaching on marriage as indicated in 1 Corinthians 7:2. The drift from God's ideal for marriage to cohabitation countermands the very essence for which God instituted marriage, and this practice combats against the institution of marriage, as ordained by God.⁴⁷ Consequently, cohabitation gain popular consensus and libertarian laws in the society today, as it was in the then societies of the pagan nations.⁴⁸ |On the basis of (2 Cor 6:14), the apostles insisted on the teaching that demarcates the relationship with unbelievers and their contractual practices of marriage against any form of sexual immorality including cohabitation if it were a practiced amongst the Jews. This strong emphasis tells us about the concern of the apostles for the preservation of the biblical precept on marriage as relates to dysfunctional practice and strong influence of sexual immoral practices that was affecting the religious practices. Such immoral practices, including cohabitation of the heathen nations, constitute starkly contrast with the biblical teaching on marriage.

Each man and woman are admonished to have their own husbands and wife as oppose to cohabitation practice. The caution on this chapter is to help believers avoid any form of union between man and woman that supposes that the couple are husband

⁴⁷ Ilan, "Premarital Cohabitation in Ancient Judea," 247.

⁴⁸ "Unto the Priest," *SDABC*, 4:729.

and wife without any legal bond; such union is considered as sexual immoral union. In verse 3, the apostle encourages every husband to give to his wife love and care as expected from him; wife is also to love her husband and render him all the affection due him and submit to him as the church to Christ. (1 Cor 7:3).

Apostle Paul here insists on teaching marital principles between man and woman, and not on principles of cohabitation. In 1 Timothy 5:14 he desired that the youths of his time should follow the biblical mandate of relationship as relates to the formation of families as instituted by God, that they should bear children, and learn the informal and formal education, as well as religious principles, so that the enemy would not label occasion against them. This passage attests to the fact that the teaching of the apostle exalts the partnership between man and woman without any allusion to cohabitation practices as an existing trend among the believers. Jesus, as well as apostle Paul, in all of their teachings, did not seem to address any case of cohabitation, nor gave information regarding an incident of cohabitation, on the contrary, both centered their teaching on the biblical mandate of partnership between man and woman; seeing marriage as an institution ordained by God. This ordained institution reflects God's relationship between Christ and the Church. Cohabitation, among other practices transcendent from the pagan's practices, which might had been seeing as an aspect of reproach that dishonor and defiles the relationship between husband and wife.

In consequence the apostles' teaching is that such union be held by all, in honor of the sacred institution of marriage, and should be kept unblemished and without undefiled; because at the end God will bring into judgement all those who dishonored this noble institution of marriage, such as fornicators and adulterers (Heb 13:4). The apostle's teaching alluded to the fact that marriage as ordained institution

of God should not be polluted by any form of union between man and woman, rather they are made husband and wife by the law (Rom 7:2). According to Jacob Neusner, the Jews' tradition does not permit man and woman to pre-maritally cohabit, except they are betrothed and obtained marriage contract, and had formalized their marriage.⁴⁹ Even so, in the Near Eastern world, there were different cultural practices in reference to marriage laws, laws which were applied to citizens .. freemen, freedmen, and slaves.⁵⁰

In consideration of God's ideal plan for marriage, the apostles based their teaching on the account of the Old Testament of the 7th commandment in the book of Exodus 20:14. This commandment addresses not only sin of sexual immoral practices but also other aspects of the believer's spiritual life. Therefore, pre-marital sexual relation, is considered as immoral practice, and it is contrary to God's ideal for marriage, as stated in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. Though, the culture of the present societies overlook morality to accepted and practiced sexual relation before marriage, cohabitation is becoming a common place in the world today, however, the adherence of society to this practice do not represent God's ideal for marriage thus, it contravene the biblical teaching of the apostle which reserves sexual relations for married partners. Based on the apostolic teaching on the biblical principles for marriage, the practice of cohabitation are distinctively exclusive. Hebrews 13:4, points out that "...those who intend to have sexual relation, should rather get marriage, so that their marital beds are kept undefiled" (Heb 13:4, ESV). Here the apostolic teaching laid emphasis on the sacredness of the institutions of marriage and its indissolubility.

⁴⁹ Neusner, *A History of the Mishnaic Law of Women*, 5:266.

⁵⁰ Forster, *Cohabitation and Marriage*, 19.

The Writings of Ellen Gould White on Cohabitation

Relationship that represents the holy union between man and woman, should be characterized by betrothed, formalized, and legally bond marriage, was commendable and supported by the apostles. The ideal for marriage as presented by Ellen G. White, the “donation of the Lord Jesus to the marriage’s supper was a representation of means of salvation.⁵¹ The act of Christ here sanctioned the practice of marriage ceremony employed to bring groom and the bride together as legal marriage couple. Therefore, this sacred union stands as a fitting type for the divine plan of salvation for the lost world and a representation of how God so loved the world that He sacrificed Himself for the reconciliation between Him and the sinners. Jesus’ view of the wedding celebration and the gladness in it contained “pointed towards to His coming, when He shall return in glory as a redeemer to redeem His people, just as the groom takes his bride to his marital home after the solemnization of a holy matrimony.⁵²

Therefore, the sacred union between man and woman through sacred matrimony, in no wise should be disjoined (Mark 10:9, NKJV). When a sacred legal vow of marriage is shared between husband in wife, in a sacred holy matrimony, God sees it as binding for as long as the couple shall live. As it (marriage) stands to represent God’s relation with the church, it must be constituted in a sacred covenant. The intimacy shared within the context of marriage couple’s relation, and the joy shared therein, must be done. When the sacred vows of marriage are considered as

⁵¹ Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist, 1877), 2:75.

⁵² Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898), 120.

sacred in principle and in practice, only then that marriage can be sanctioned by God; in consequence, the end result will be joy for the couple.⁵³

For Lord God instituted marriage as a legitimate union to be enjoyed within the protection of a marriage covenant, and not a union that is made of a partial fulfilment of the covenant. Such union simply means the couple do not belong together, they are partially and temporarily united without any binding lifelong covenant. They are not joined together by the creator God through sacred code of law (Mark 10:9, NKJV). Marriage as a symbol of God's relation with the church, the married couple merits the holiness of that intimacy that lasts as long as both shall live, and the commitment thereof, as the Lord God intended it to be enjoyed. Jesus, by sanctioning marriage, He made it that only through holy matrimony should the betrothed bride and groom (male and female) be united and cohabit as intimate couples. Families are honored, and accepted by God as units of His family above. This suggests that marriage should be that which is ordained by God. In this regard, whatever is ordained by God must be that which is done according to God's command.

Seventh-day Adventist Perspective on Cohabitation

Cohabitation, as rampant as it is in today's world, has led millions to abandon the biblical standard of holy matrimony among the children of God. The practice of cohabitation has penetrated nearly every society across the globe, including religious organizations. Despite its spiritual and social repercussions, many have already embraced the practice as a viable way to unite as husband and wife. In some cultures, the practice is coined as a 'trial marriage,' and it seems to have adherents among many church members.

⁵³ Ellen G. White, *Counsels for the Church* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1991), 133.

Like many others denominations, the Seventh-day Adventist church does not does not excuse the practice of cohabitation. On the contrary, it is seen as Satan's act of perversion of marriage, it's a deviation and attack against God's salvific plan as presented through marriage. The Adventist viewed the perversion of holy matrimony, which is the worst, and war against the institution of holy matrimony in relation to repopulate of the earth as ordained by God. In this regard, the practice of cohabitation is an act of perversion from the ideal association of male and female as blessings to the family.⁵⁴ The Church sees the widespread evilness of this practice becoming more receptive among church members, posing thus threat to the standard and the ideal Christian home.⁵⁵ Meanwhile, the Seventh-day Adventists recognized courtship as a period of acquaintance in which man and woman are attracted to each other. This preparatory period, between man and woman is envisioned to lead them into marriage. It is the period where evaluation of character should be weighed and taken into consideration as the couple contemplate marriage. The process leading to marriage should be characterized with every modesty and gentleness, commitment and honesty, striving as they seek God's counsel in every step leading to their marriage.⁵⁶

The Seventh-day Adventists Church follows the necessary steps for marriage based on God's ordinance. The biblical view on marriage is not determined by circumstances that they are husbands and wives by any means or situation. The process leading to marriage, and its formalization cannot be taken for granted. Members are encouraged that before marriage, the couple should go through

⁵⁴ White, *Counsels for the Church*, 151.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ellen G. White, *Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1905), 339.

“premarital counselling, this vital step in preparation for marriage should not be overlooked.”⁵⁷

This process for marriage does not seem to accommodate cohabitation practices. This is because, the church strongly believes that marriage was instituted by God, and not by man. Marriage is instituted to endure; the family is to stand in unity and fulfil the purpose of marriage if the relationship is built on the biblical foundation. In this respect, the union is bound together on common spiritual values as a foundation of their lifestyle.⁵⁸ This statement ruled out the idea of cohabitation which is a contradiction to the fulfilment of divine plan and the common spiritual values that bind them together as husband and wife.

Non-Seventh-day Adventist Perspective on Cohabitation

Though the Holy Scripture is very explicit in its condemnation of fornication (Matt 15:18, 19; Acts 15:20, 29, KJV). cohabitation or living together, is a growing phenomenon in many communities, denominations as well as some states across the globe and, it is only been recognized by few members as a violation of biblical principles for marriage. Different Christian denominations have different views on cohabitations based on their understanding and interpretations of what biblical marriage represents.

⁵⁷ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and Ministerial Association, *Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Manual* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2009), 174.

⁵⁸ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and Ministerial Association, *Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Manual*, 175.

Baptist Church

According to Baptist press, apart from the unmistakable spiritual declaration against fornication, cohabitation poses great threat and a serious breach of biblical ethics in respect to the process of matrimonial union between husband and wife. Sex, as established by God, serves the purpose of establishing the covenant relationship between man and woman in a sacred wedlock as it is in Genesis chapter 2.⁵⁹ The Baptist rendering on cohabitation is that it does not only disregards biblical sexual ethics but also stands as a direct violation of God's ideal for marriage. While many Christian churches (denominations) are still struggling as to whether to accept the practice of cohabitations against the biblical mandate, others have already adhered to the practice.

The Methodist Church

The British Methodist Church, on the release of their conference report among others, voted to accept cohabitation practice among their church members; the conference report confirmed resolution 10/3 of the 2019 Conference, making amendment on marriage statement to read as follow: that the Conference affirmed the summary understanding on cohabitation, on the basis that the love of God is present and manifest in the life of every human being, especially people who feel attracted to each other and are committed to either formal or informal relationship are recognized in the church.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Evan Lenow, "FIRST-PERSON: Cohabitation in the Church," Baptist Press, last modified 2013, accessed August 15, 2022, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/first-person-cohabitation-in-the-church/>.

⁶⁰ The Methodist Church, *GOD IN LOVE UNITES US: The Report of the Marriage and Relationships Task Group 2019*, PDF file, 2019, https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/3240-10-amended-marriage-and-relationships-report_whyBC64.pdf.

The conference resolution 10/3 of the 20219 in reference to cohabitation, is based on the perception that God created us essentially as relational beings with the faculties of mind which form part of our sexuality.⁶¹ The church insists on the fact that the reality of changes in the law of the state and society is a possibility that the church need to address to conform to reality. This explains their perception of the point that God created us as loving and relational beings, on that note the church accepts all of relationships whether formal or informal without discriminating any form of relationship. The Methodist sustains that as the called disciples of Jesus, we are to maintain such marks of God's love in every aspect of our relationships. The church insist that such a relationship live on the preservation of social value should be celebrated.⁶² The Methodist church maintained that the life reality may be different from the enriching character of marriage as originally presented by God in the Holy Scripture. In tracking the changes, the very teaching on marriage is basically about companionship between equal partners.

The Catholic Church

The Catholic Church disproved the acceptance of pre-marital cohabitation among the professed believers in Christ. According to their opinion, couple who wants to live together should consider first in foremost getting married. The Church contested not only against the practice of living together before marriage but also encouraged and required that chastity be practiced between the bride and the groom. The Catholic Church is particularly concern about cohabitation practice, though the

⁶¹ The Methodist Church, *GOD IN LOVE UNITES US*, PDF file.

⁶² Ibid., 23.

practice is gaining adherents in the modern society though it's devastating effects are visible among families of the professed believers as well as unbelievers.

The consequences of cohabitation are a clear indication that even though society might have condoned the practice, it cannot be compared with God's ideal plan for marriage. The Catholic Church accepts and recognized that sex is given to the wedded couple by God as a token for their marriage, and that it is a blessing instead. Therefore, the church urges its members against anyone who prone to dismiss the teaching of giftedness of sex, be it a priest or a layperson such would be absolutely wrong. The Catholic Church in this respect, acknowledged sex as a gift from God to marriage couples, therefore, be it a cohabitation, living together, or trial marriage is absolutely regarded sinful.

Factors and Effects of Cohabitation on the Mission of the New Testament Church

God instituted marriage between man and woman for their wellbeing (Gen 2:18-25), and to represent the sacred and a loving relation between Him (God) and the fallen world. However, various forms and customary practices of marriage have been introduced by man with the intention of representing the perfect institution of marriage, resulting in the procreation of children, multiplication of the community of believers, as it is for strengthening of the nation. Nevertheless, such unions only resulted in contravening the sacred institution of marriage.

There are numerous factors responsible for the perversion of marriage which was a symbol between God and His people. Such factors include but not limited to the followings: a) socio-economic; b) cultural; and c) religious practices. These factors have variants determinant effects either for the preservation or perversion of the sacred matrimonial union between man and woman.

Socio-Economic Effects

Though society have condoned sexual relation between the unmarried persons, and even accepted cohabitation or trial marriage as a form of marriage prior to a legal marriage. Study have shown that high percent of divorces are found among those who lived together, or none virgin before marriage.⁶³ This practice have left many women vulnerable with feelings of dissatisfaction, insecurity, and depression. According to a study, marriages that resulted from cohabitation, subsequently have as consequence broken homes, thus living many homes with single parents. This practice has negative effectives in the spiritual wellbeing of the church and the society at large.⁶⁴ Meanwhile, the biblical framework is that sex is a gift from God to the married couples.

Though many cultures have minimized the dignity and the role of woman as help meet to such extend that they are sexually abused, defile their dignity, and in this God is dishonored. In the New Testament period, women were accorded equal dignity with men (1 Cor 7:3, 4 NKJV), by elevating women to an equal right and restore them to what originally God intended them to be as equal help meet.

When God said the two shall be become one, He meant equality in marriage and as individual of the community of believers, though with different responsibility. In this regard, a wife was accorded with responsibilities to manage the affairs of her homes, such as fetching water, gathering sticks, provide clothing, welcoming guests, general education of the children until they are five years of age, reaping straw, preparing food etc. wife was not accorded with the responsibility of managing the financial affairs of the family, “even her own funds being administered by her

⁶³ Rock, "Marriage and Family," 736.

⁶⁴ Melgosa and Melgosa, *Happy Couples*, 8.

husband.”⁶⁵ Wife could only assume the managerial position of their finances when they became widows. Nonetheless, in God’s eyes, husband and wife have equal dignities but with different hierarchical responsibilities, useful primarily for the wellbeing of their union and the community of believers, and the society at large.

Cultural Effects

The society of the New Testament expected a married woman to be a good wife, fulfilling thus, all her responsibilities especially given birth to male child/children as her primary role within the context of a marital home. “The greatest honor a woman could have received would have been to give birth to the Messiah.”⁶⁶ According to the Jewish culture, it was necessary for a man to have an heir, especially to preserve the property inheritance received from God as a blessing (Exod 15:17-18). A woman who was unable to give birth to a male child or children, felt the rebuke of her neighbors⁶⁷ (Luke 1:25). Another cultural practice that affected the marriage of which Jesus, and apostle Paul addressed were the issues of polygamy and divorce. The biblical account observed that marriage was violated when man decided to be polygamous, and have concubines. The polygamous and cohabitation practices were foreign to God ideal plan for marriage, and it’s distractive to the growing body of Christ, the church. “According to Jesus, Moses permitted divorce because of the hardness of people’s hearts”⁶⁸ (Matt 5: 32; 19: 8, 9 NKJV).

Jesus addressing the difficulties of rabbis in dealing with the issues of divorce, which was already ongoing, He speaks on condition that seems to warrant divorce. He

⁶⁵ Perkin, “Matriarchal Marriage,” *EDT*, 742.

⁶⁶ Packer, Tenney, and White Jr., *The Bible Almanac*, 415.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 435.

⁶⁸ Rock, “Marriage and Family,” 737.

commented on the position that both the woman and her new husband will commit adultery if she is divorced on ground other than fornication (Matt 5:32). But to husband He said, it is not acceptable, as it is in God eyes that man should marry only to divorce, instead forgiveness should characterize the relationship and reflect the love of God. Therefore, divorce is only granted on ground of fornication after compassion is exhausted. Jesus' two statements on divorce (Matt 5:32, 19:9, NKJV) were only an address to demonstrate the cultural effects contrary to God original plan for marriage. The statements indicate that "Even though the Law of Moses allowed divorce, it was only a provisional and reluctant allowance."⁶⁹ In His conversation with the Pharisees in respect to their cultural believe system, (Mark 10:5-9; Luke 16:18). He clearly and affirmatively stated that divorce is contrary to God's plan for marriage.

Meanwhile, Paul address in 1 Corinthians 7:15, was on a different situation whereas believers were not allowed to marry unbelievers (1 Cor 7:39; 2 Cor 6:14-18), situation where unbelieving partner depart, as if is implying that the marriage to unbeliever was not admitted at the first place, and risky for the faith of the believer, warranting thus its dissolution (1 Cor 7:15 NKJV). While Jesus' address was to the teachers of the Law in Matthew 19, and Mark 10; Paul was urging believers to maintain peace in marriages that were formalized before conversion of the unbelieving partners. The New Testament focus was on teaching the biblical principles that promotes a loving union between man and his creator.

Religious Practices

Families are important, and key instrument for the development and the growth of the church; therefore, the religious community is constituent of families. In

⁶⁹ Packer, Tenney, and White Jr., *The Bible Almanac*, 438.

consequence, “..the practices of these units pervasively determine the strength of the confessing community.”⁷⁰ The book of Acts demonstrates such religious practices leading to the daily growth of the church in the New Testament (Acts 2:44-47).

From the Old to the New Testament, parents have utter responsibilities of instilling in the life of their children, the religious principles, moral values and virtue of Christ’s love (Prov 22:6). This explains reason why Israelites were instructed to eat the first Passover in their homes, within the family circle, and not in temples or synagogues (Exod 12:1-13). The New Testament church has its growth from the family circle, (Matt 4: 18-22; and Jesus and His brothers, Mark 6:3). The father, as a priest for the family, assumes the responsibility of all religious affairs of the family, the training of the children, especially the son(s), ensuring thus the family lives a devout religious life. The Jewish fathers were bound with responsibility to lead their families as relate to different religious practices, including the observance of Passover. The institution of marriage remains as a sacred union by which God’s church is built.

The Effect of Ideal Marriage on Mission and Growth of the Church

The institution of marriage was established, whereas God Himself performed the first wedding ceremony between Adan and Eve (Gen 2:23). As husband and wife, they became the first members and a model of marriage institution as well as the first parents of the human race. The couple was the constituent of the home religion, and resultant to the mission church. After they were blessed, they were given a great commission to be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it (Gen 1:28). This process was meant to be through cohabitation, rather through a formalized marriage.

⁷⁰ Rock, "Marriage and Family," 735.

Through the family of the Old Testament patriarch, (Abraham), the national church of the ancient Israel was blessed and multiplied, and the generations after (Gen 12:1-8). Abraham was commissioned to leave from his people group (Ur of the Chaldees). In obedience to the commission, the principles of multiplication were to be effectively fostered through formalized family institutions, and substitute the worship of the gods of his father with His God, the creator.⁷¹ Likewise, the family of Noah was given a great commission to preach the gospel to his generation (Gen 6). Again, through Jacob's home religion, a nation church was birthed in a foreign land of Egypt. In order to save the people of God from slavery from Egypt, God called Moses as a family and commissioned him to carry the good news of redemptions (Exod 4:20; 3:10-14).

It seems that both Old and New Testament, always shows records of God covenanting with families, or individual members of families of the community of believers for the mission and salvific plan for His church. According to the Lawrence B. Porter, "In ancient times, one of the most basic forms of association or community was the family."⁷² This is because the church has a form of community, therefore, it is a community of believers originated from families. The Bible does not seem to have incidents of cohabiting partners as symbol of God's sacred assembly, whereas husband is the priest. On the basis of sacred covenant of holy matrimony; the cohabiting partner cannot represent the sacred union between Christ and His Church., neither could they represent the authority of the head of the family as Christ is the Head of the Church (Eph 5:22-24).

⁷¹ White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 51.

⁷² Lawrence B. Porter, *A Guide to the Church: Its Origin and Nature, Its Mission and Ministries* (Bangalore, India: Alba House, 2007), 5.

According to the New Testament account, God called Joseph the father of Jesus to accept the challenge of bearing the message of hope to the perishing world. According to Ellen G. White, “When we have good home religion, we will have excellent meeting religion,”⁷³ in this respect, community where members are from home of idea marriage have positive effect on witness.

World Religions on Cohabitation

Details concerning cohabitation among the various religions of the world are both varied and limited. There is considerable ambivalence regarding cohabitation within these religions. A systematic presentation of views on cohabitation among the major religions—Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism—is rarely found.

Various studies on cohabitation have attempted to highlight its negative impact on society, including the rise in single-parent households and the associated challenges in raising children who may struggle with instability or behavioral issues. Nevertheless, cohabitation is rapidly gaining acceptance in today’s society. This section of my study aims to present, though not exhaustively, the core beliefs of each of these major world religions concerning cohabitation.

Jewish Views on Cohabitation

Judaism (Hebrew: יהודה *Yahādūt*) is a religion that has its root from the calling of Abraham, and is monotheistic orientated.⁷⁴ Its religion comprises of ethnic

⁷³ White, *The Adventist Home*, 319.

⁷⁴ Kaufmann Kohler, "Judaism," *The Jewish Encyclopedia: A Descriptive Record of the History, Religion, Literature, and Customs of the Jewish People from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, ed. Isidore Singer (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, 1924), 7:359-368.

collective religious, cultural, and legal tradition⁷⁵ in adding to their civilization, characteristics from the nations around them.⁷⁶ This religion originated during the ancient period, and is resultant of the God covenant with the people of Israel through their ancestors to the subsequent generation. The beliefs of the Jews incorporate an extensive range of texts, costumes (marriage among others), religious belief system, and organization structure. It is worth noting that there are numerous sets of traditions and beliefs system that revolving around the Jews' religion. The aspect of cohabitation is discussed on this section with resources to help understand the background of the Jews as relates to their view on cohabitation.

From the Jewish standpoint, the pre-marital Cohabitation only maintains the relationship on the casual level, without divine endorsement.⁷⁷ Unlike cohabitation, Jewish beliefs on marriage uplifts marriage as divine endorsement and sacred in its constituent. This divine institution of marriage cannot in any form be substituted for pre-marital cohabitation, neither does its sacredness is found in anyway on pre-marital cohabitation. In this regard, the sacred is a formalized marriage, and the casual is cohabitation; both are said to be contradictory, and cannot co-exist.

Judaism also disapproved cohabitation. Jewish disregards any form of union between man and woman that does not follow the betrothal and formalized marriage procedure, and to ensure to extend in which they condemn cohabitation, they disregard even intermarriage that does not follow the acceptable biblical and

⁷⁵ Louis Jacobs, "Judaism," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Fred Skolnik (Detroit, MI: Macmillan, 2007), 11: 511-520.

⁷⁶ Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Understanding Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism*, ed. Jon Bloomberg and Samuel Kapustin (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav, 2003), 34.

⁷⁷ Rebbetzin Feige Twerski, "Living Together vs. Marriage," Aish.Com, 2009, accessed July 3, 2023, <https://aish.com/48933117/>.

traditional Jewish's marriage custom. In this respect, as the interfaith marriage couples were not utterly welcome in the Jewish community, cohabitation was not an acceptable practice as it was considered an abomination.⁷⁸ It seems groundless to think about the practice of cohabitation among the Jews, since the costume emphasizes on chastity and virginity before marriage: "If a man believed his wife was not a virgin when he married her, he could take her to the elders of the city. If they judged her guilty, her punishment was death..."⁷⁹ (Deut 22:13-21). This signify that cohabitation would have been a contradiction of the Jewish beliefs on marriage, if it was a practiced by the Jews.

According to Judaism, the only acceptable means that warrant the union of men and women who are in a loving relationship was through a formalized holy matrimony, Nisu 'in - the marriage proper'.⁸⁰ To fulfil the right of living together as husband and wife, according to the Jewish Talmudic period, the ceremony of betrothal must be fulfilled, and then followed by the 'Nisu' in (the marriage proper),⁸¹ that without this the practice is merely a cohabitation union.

Christian Views on Cohabitation

The Holy Bible, the principal book of the Christian rule of faith and practices, is utterly consistent in its command in the dynamics of marriage and family. On the contrary, cohabitation and pre-marital sex are seen as sin (Exod 20:14). From the Old to the New Testament, the Bible negates the practice of cohabitation among the

⁷⁸ Landy Landsey, "Religious Beliefs on Cohabitation," Classroom Synonym, last modified 2023, accessed July 4, 2023, <https://www.classroom.synonym.com/religious-beliefs-on-Cohabitation/12087>.

⁷⁹ Packer, Tenney, and White Jr., *The Bible Almanac*, 437-438.

⁸⁰ Warrington, "Cohabitation and the Church," 131.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 128.

believers. According to Genesis account, the basic elements to formalize the union of two heterosexual individuals includes both man and woman leaving their fathers and mothers and joining together to become husband and wife (1 Cor 7:2). The Christian faith based on the biblical mandate, considers living together in a sexually intimate relationship apart from marriage, as sinful and displeasing to God. Frequently, the Bible speaks against sexual immorality. “Flee from sexual immorality,” says the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:18, NKJV.

According to biblical mandate, sex is reserved exclusive for the betrothed formalized partners (Exod 20:14), it is only through this process that man and woman shall be united and become one flesh (Gen 2:24). Even though most Christian denominations stand firmly against the practice of cohabitation, however, they are more than slightly alarmed by its increasing frequency, and social acceptance across the globe.⁸² Christian viewed cohabitation as an element that diminishes the expression of love in the couple’s relationship.⁸³ Miller added that cohabitation is a form of social interaction which may communicate that the couple might be important to each other, but not so much to lead into a relationship of a formalized marriage.⁸⁴ According to the Bible, upon the creation of man, God instituted marriage for the good of mankind (Gen 2:18-25), cohabitation is man established institution and not God. The prohibition of sex outside marriage, according to the Christians’ Bible suggests also no tolerance to cohabitation practice (Heb 13: 4). According to Genesis 2:24, Christian Religion beliefs that the permanent heterosexual relationship encompasses a man leaving his parent, clinging to his wife, to become one flesh, and

⁸² Miller, “Cohabitation,” *EDT*, 275.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

it is the central element in marriage. From the biblical point of view, cohabitation is not an accepted practice of marriage.

Islamic Views on Cohabitation

Among many religions, members of the Islamic religion present a deeply adherence to the Islamic faith and practice, and their beliefs on marriage is deeply rooted in their orthodox Islamic tradition. According to Islamic tradition, the prospective bride and groom are forbidden to date or court. In consonant with the beliefs system of the Islamic religion, the selection of a bride for the groom remains as the responsibility of the father or relative of the groom. Though polygamy is allowed, however, it does not warrant anyone the right to cohabit.

Muslims believed that for couple to live in a sexual relationship, they must first above all be married. According to the Islamic religion, allowance to cohabitation is not only sinful but also leads the couple to be tempted to brake their marital vows by having extramarital affairs (adultery) which is also a sin.⁸⁵ According to Surah 4:24, dowry should be paid to regularize a marry relationship between a man and woman.

However, no mentioned ever made of cohabitation in the Quran. Surah disregard any sexual intercourse out of marriage, and consider such affair as sinful (Surah 4:24). According to one prominent Islamic scholar, and a senior lecturer, Sheikh Ahmad Kutty, noted that it is not acceptable that man and woman who are in a loving relationship live together as if there are marriage.⁸⁶ He added even though in Islam, marital relationship which binds the couples are merely social contract between

⁸⁵ IslamOnline, "Living as Husband and Wife without Marriage," last modified 2022, accessed July 7, 2023, <https://fiqh.islamonline.net/en/living-as-husband-and-wife-without-marriage/>.

⁸⁶ IslamOnline, "Living as Husband and Wife without Marriage."

man and woman, it's still requires that the consent of the both partners. And that marriage cannot be formed by secret affair liaison and call it marriage.⁸⁷

Another form of marriage practiced in the Islamic tradition is called *Nikah-al-misyar* or most often known as traveler marriage.⁸⁸ This form of marriage does not require serious commitment between the two partners. This marriage warrants the partners the right to terminate the relationship at any given time. Because this type of marriage is formed based on contractual temporal relationship, therefore, it does not carry a legal bound, in consequence, it admits sexual practices that can be termed as adulterous.⁸⁹ It is well noting that though this form of marriage is called 'temporary, contractual marriage,' yet it fulfils the marriage right and all requirement steps that makes it legal.

Hindus View on Cohabitation

Unlike other religions, Hinduism is marked with complex and variant religious belief system. These practices have been in existence over a long period of time. The religious practices of Hindus as relate to marriage are symbols of their faith that progressed over many centuries. The Hindus religion has segments of complex and at time unclear rules that are meant to guide the individual conduct in relationship to marriage.⁹⁰ In some consideration, these sects of rules are applicable to individual rank or social status, gender and family background.⁹¹ As it is observed, according to

⁸⁷ IslamOnline, "Living as Husband and Wife without Marriage."

⁸⁸ Yusuf al-Qaradawi, "Misyar Marriage from an Islamic Perspective," Islam Awareness, accessed July 7, 2023, https://www.islamawareness.net/Marriage/Misyar/fatwa_01.html.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ V. Jayaram, "Hinduism and Premarital Relationships," last modified 2023, accessed July 1, 2023, https://www.hinduwebsite.com/hinduism/h_premarital.asp.

⁹¹ Ibid.

Hindus, in respect to religious practices, what could be permissible for one group of people, may not be necessarily acceptable practice for another set of people groups.⁹²

The costumes of the ancient India as relates to sexual practices is determined mostly on the basis of social structure of the people groups.⁹³ In spite of the inconsistency in the application of the law books to enforce morality for every people groups, as relates to sexual conduct, the Manusmriti (the Law book of marriage) code of law states that cohabitation practices or sexual misconduct always result on children borne with evil infection, therefore, the practice should be avoided.⁹⁴ The Hindu have different traditional types of marriages, among many, the major are eight which include: Brahma, Daiva, Arsha, as well as Prajapatya, Asura, Gandharva, Rakshasa, and Paisachika.⁹⁵

Among the types of marriages mentioned above, there is one marriage that has characteristic similar to that of cohabitation; such marriage is known as Gandharva marriage (Sanskrit: गान्धर्व विवाह, gāndharva vivāha, [gəndərvə viva:hə]) which is a love marriage.⁹⁶ This Hindus traditional form of marriage, it's an arrange marriage based in an agreement between the two partners. This type of marriage does not require witness, or ritual, nor the opinions of the both parents of the partners neither their presence. It's a kind of marriage similar to cohabitation, though is termed as

⁹² Jayaram, "Hinduism and Premarital Relationships."

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Catherine Benton, *God of Desire: Tales of Kāmadeva in Sanskrit Story Literature* (New York, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006).

marriage.⁹⁷ Accordingly, this type of union, though it does not bear the term of cohabitation however, it is of no difference from cohabitation, since it is based only in love between the two partners without any legal requirement necessary for marriage. Apastamba Grhyasutra also confirmed that, in the antiquity writing of the Hindu fiction, woman usually select whom she wants to marriage but on the basis of mutual consent between the woman and her proposed husband. According to Gandharva, this type of marriage only seeks the consent of the man and the woman, the social or religious consent do not matter on this marriage. After the partners conceded to live together, the relationship is hereby consummated on the ground of passion. This form of marriage is known to be the ancient form of marriage, similar to pre-marital cohabitation,⁹⁸ however it was accepted and practice and considered as a form of marriage.

However, the types of marriages recognized by the Law books of marriage are namely ‘Manusmriti’ a marriage by which men could be recognized as married and become householders.⁹⁹ Though polygamy and prostitution, rapes and forceful marriages were practiced, but unlawful union of marriage, was termed evil.¹⁰⁰ With all the complexity of traditional practices, and different types of marriages, whereas some are termed as evil, yet Hindu did not subscribed to cohabitation as a type of marriage.

⁹⁷ Johann Jakob Meyer, *Sexual Life in Ancient India: A Study in the Comparative History of Indian Culture* (New Delhi, India: Motilal Banarsidass, 1989), 2014.

⁹⁸ Rajbali Pandey, *Hindu Samskaras: Socio-Religious Study of the Hindu Sacraments* (New Delhi, India: Motilal Banarsidass, 2006).

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Pandey, *Hindu Samskaras*.

Though Hindus have different types of marriages, however, not all of them are lawful, the marriage law defined the demarcation between the lawful marriages and the unlawful marriages. The lawful marriage requires the consent of the father who is the chief contributor for her education, molding of her character, and provider for her needs. In this regard, the marriage become unlawful and the woman unqualified to be call a wife should the consent of the father is ignored.¹⁰¹ Unlike others religious system, Hinduism does not see sex as a ministry or a phenomenon that cannot be spoken about, or a taboo. They do not view sexual desire as evil, according to Hindus beliefs; sex desire plays a pivotal role in the spiritual life of the worshiper because it is the foundation and the continuation of their life's existence.¹⁰²

In addition to Hinduism beliefs, the intention of the individual to satisfy sexual desire stands as the determiner of the practice as lawful (dharma) that is if the intention is for procreation, or unlawful (adharma) if the intention is for mere pleasure.¹⁰³ This also poses serious question on the basis of intention - if cohabiting couple do so with the intention of procreation, could the practice be considered lawful (dharma)?

Nevertheless, Hindu religion with its different types of law books of marriage, and traditions as well as costumes applicable to individual people group, yet, it does not exhibit, nor encourages act of cohabitation among the believers. Hindus viewed sex as one of the most stunning and legitimate pleasures on earth, but to be used only within the context of marriage. Sex before marriage is regarded as unlawful and, it's discouraged and stigmatized, and extramarital sex is prohibited.

¹⁰¹ Pandey, *Hindu Samskaras*.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

Buddhist View on Cohabitation

There are different traditions and beliefs system as relates to the relationship between Buddhism and sex orientation. These beliefs varied from one tradition to another according to different orientations of the teachers. Some scholars argued that patriarch of the Buddhism accepted cohabitation as a way of life without any stigmatization, since marriage is a social matter, and it's not religious concern, and their religion did not specifically address the issue of marriage, neither does it prevent cohabitation. Buddhism has little to say about this subject.¹⁰⁴

Buddhism condemned acts of extramarital affairs especially among the priesthood. Extramarital affair is seen as transgression and evil.¹⁰⁵ The teachings of the Buddha consider extramarital affairs as sexual malpractice, and it is not tolerated especially among the clergy. pre-marital sex or fornication among the laity was permitted it was not an Issue of much concern for restriction, cohabitation or sex before marriage are left to the will of the laity as long as the practice is not within the context of sexual misconduct such as adultery.¹⁰⁶ As oppose to Abrahamic religion (Christianity, Judaism, Islam), the Buddhism tolerates cohabitation on the ground that it is sufficient for two heterosexual individuals to live together once they are in a loving relationship with one another. The Buddhism accepts cohabitation as a form of marriage. Among the major religions mentioned on this research, Buddhism is the

¹⁰⁴ James William Coleman, *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2002), 146.

¹⁰⁵ Warren Matthews, *World Religions* (Boston, MA: Cengage Learning, 2012), 142.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

only religion reported to have high rate of cohabitation, and pre-marital sex among its members, and that there are no specific guiding principles for sexual comportment.¹⁰⁷

For the sake of religiosity, the Buddhist religion requires that its members desiring to follow the path of enlightenment must refrain from sex during this period. This religion insists that the members desist from everything that brings pain in life. Buddhism does not have specific rule about marriage, this is why cohabitation is left to the discretion of the individual choice just as the marriage is also. According to Buddhism, when people are in a loving relation, and decide to unite themselves either by marriage or cohabitation, the most important thing is to love each other unconditionally.¹⁰⁸ Buddhism laid emphasis on the fact that it is not possible to find such a perfect partner in this imperfect world; instead accept a partner unconditionally.¹⁰⁹ One important aspect in a romantic relationship according to Buddhism is the unconditional acceptance of partner; it is believed to be an important step in achieving personal fulfilment in family life. The Buddhist Religion viewed marriage as none religious affair. Marriage is seen as secular affairs, and a matter of individual choice.¹¹⁰ Since marriage is government affairs, and not religious, In consequence, Buddhism does not have a strict bonding law for or against cohabitation. Even though the requirement and the practice of marriage ceremony is civil, the Buddhists couple often seek for blessings from their gods at the temple, for the consummation of their union.

¹⁰⁷ Jong Hyun Jung, "A Cross-national Analysis of Religion and Attitudes toward Premarital Sex: Do Economic Contexts Matter?" *Sociological Perspectives* 59, no. 4 (2016): 798-817.

¹⁰⁸ Susan Piver, *The Four Noble Truths of Love: Buddhist Wisdom for Modern Relationships* (New York, NY: Lionheart Press, 2010).

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Damien Keown, *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Pali Canon, a major Theravada text, also did not provide any guidelines for marriage, no any prohibition on cohabitation, but rather vehemently condemns homosexuality and lesbianism among its members. Buddhism considered any attachment of the same sex as offense of sexual misconduct. Though Buddhism has little to say about marriage, without any strict rule on the subject, it does not condemn or encourage its members to get marriage; nor assumes the position of responsibility as a religion, to provide guidelines for marriage as relates to cohabitation.¹¹¹ However, to those who choose to cohabit, the book of Buddha, provides guidelines for mutual respect for the partners as they coexist.¹¹²

Summary

Many studies confirmed that opposition to cohabitation as an aspect of marriage is always from the religious perspective. Religious communities would always cite the Bible or foundation of their faith as the basis for their opposition to cohabitation. With the exception of few religions and denominations, almost all the religions and protestant denominations across the globe reject the position for cohabitation as a form of marriage. To the Christians, cohabitation contradict the biblical principles for the solemnization of holy matrimony between man and woman; it violates the 7th of the 10th Commandment of the Christian Bible, therefore, it is considered as sin of fornication.¹¹³

¹¹¹ London Buddhist Vihara, "Questions and Answers on Buddhist Practices: Teachings," last modified 2012, accessed July 17, 2023, <https://www.londonbuddhistvihara.org/teachings/buddhist-practices/>.

¹¹² Narada Thera, trans., "Sigalovada Sutta: The Discourse to Sigala—The Layperson's Code of Discipline," Access to Insight, last modified 1996, accessed July 17, 2023, <https://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.31.0.nara.html>.

¹¹³ J. Halstead, "Muslims and Sex Education," *Journal of Moral Education* 26 (1997): 317-331.

Among many, only few, such as the Anglican accepted and admitted the practice of cohabitation among the members. The Anglican receives the cohabiting couples in the Church as if legitimate partners, and encourage her members to esteem cohabitation as an introduction to Christian marriage.¹¹⁴ The Jews community of believers resented against the practice of cohabitation.¹¹⁵ Even though the practice was prevalent among other nations; the Bible does not seem to have an explicit record of at least a case of cohabitation practice among the believers. It was unlawful and unacceptable practice of marriage. According to the teaching of the apostles, cohabitation among other sexual immoral practices should not be found among the believers (Eph 5:3).

Furthermore, Ellen G. White explained that only holy matrimony should be consummated by a legal bond, and not cohabitation.¹¹⁶ Among many denominations, the Seventh-day Adventist church viewed cohabitation practice as unlawful, and an act of perversion from the best to worst, and it contravenes the biblical mandate on marriage.¹¹⁷ Meanwhile, the factors responsible for cohabitation include but not limited to: socio-economic; cultural; and religious practices. These factors marred the institution of marriage as ordained by God.

The Bible is replete of records on the effects of families on the mission of both Old and New Testaments church. From the onset, God established the institution of marriage in the Garden, and He then commanded not cohabiters but families to

¹¹⁴ Ina Taylor, *Religion and Life with Christianity* (London, England: Heinemann, 2005).

¹¹⁵ Packer, Tenney, and White Jr., *The Bible Almanac*, 425.

¹¹⁶ White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, 2:75.

¹¹⁷ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2015), 151.

multiply, repopulate the earth and subdue it (Gen 2:28), through Adam's family, all nations of the earth were birthed. Through the family of the Patriarch Abraham, and his descendants, the nation church of the ancient Israel was blessed, (Gen 12:1-8). Through the family of Joseph, the Messiah was born, Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. Therefore, among the major religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism) cohabitation is viewed as pervasive. However, Buddhism, since marriage is secular affairs cohabitation is accepted.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Keown, *Buddhism*.

CHAPTER 3

DESCRIPTION OF THE LOCAL SETTING

Overview of the South-West Liberia Seventh-day Adventist Conference

The event marking the year 1926 to 1931 made the experience of the Adventist church a remarkable historical event in the missionary development of the church in Liberia. During those formative years of struggles, through the efforts of the missionaries from the United States of America (USA), Europe, and the local missionaries,¹ (Liberian), the Advent unique message was taken to the people group in the hinterland. Mission fields were established, schools as well as Bible training center were instituted to train Bible workers and teachers, so as to support the promulgation of the gospel to the uttermost parts of the country.²

The Adventist church in Liberia, was organized as a Mission field in Konola, during those successive years from 1937, the headquarters of the said Mission was then been relocated from Konola to Monrovia in 1940s,³ and it was only then the Mission was included among other countries (Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, and West, and East Nigerian Missions) as part of West Africa Union Mission (WAUM). According to one publication, the "Seventh-day Adventist Church in Liberia

¹ James M. Golay, "The First Mission Field in Liberia, Grand Bassa County," in *History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Liberia*, ed. Emmanuel G. M. Kollie (Accra, Ghana: Advent Press, 2022), 28.

² John Oswald Baysah, "The Third Mission Field: Konola Mission," in Kollie, 38.

³ Ibid., 39.

transitioned from Mission to Conference status,”⁴ and was named ‘South-West Liberia Conference.’ The conference is comprised of 50 worship centers, 29 organized churches and 21 Companies. At least the total membership of the Conference is 18,188, and 32 Pastors.⁵ As an evangelistic arm of the church, the conference established six (6) High schools, and nine (9) Elementary schools across the territory.⁶

The administration and leadership of the local churches and companies, and related institutions are guided by the Church Manual and policy formulated by the higher body of the church organization (General Conference - GC), the General Conference (GC) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the West Central Africa Division (WAD), and South-West Liberia Conference. The higher authority in the local church according to Church manual is the local church at business.

History of Cohabitation in the South-West Liberia Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Church

Genesis account recorded that man was made in God’s own image and likeness (Gen 1:27). God intends for creation of man is that he may be social being, in consequence He said, it is not good for man to be alone so He made him a companion comparable to him (Gen 2:18), and they become one flesh (Gen 2:24) socially, emotionally, morally, spiritually and in all other dimension of their lives. Man was to live in harmony with the Lord’s command so that they may enjoy their companionship and meet as well their emotional needs. Man was made with a social

⁴ James M. Golay, “South-West Liberia Conference,” in Kollie, 99.

⁵ Southwest Liberia Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists Church, *Report of Southwest Liberia Conference Executive Secretary*, 8-9.

⁶ Golay, “South-West Liberia Conference,” 99.

nature for the benefit of his own pleasure. As social beings, men establish friendships and develop love relationships that grow and result in a higher level of unity of heart, leading to commitment in married life.⁷ It is expected that man endeavors to keep the proper association with the opposite sex, should be conducted in a safe environment, with regard for religious and socially acceptable practices that have been prescribed for our coexistence.

The modern world has tempered with foundation that makes the home a pleasant and happy environment for living. The extensive breakdown of marriage is due to uncontrolled human passions to satisfy the carnal desires.⁸ Disobedience brought about sin, and sin resulted in the corruption of all that God had made perfect for the well-being of humanity. As a consequence, humanity became immoral and insensitive to the Law of God (Jer 17:9). Cohabitation and other forms of sexual misconduct began to be preferred over the sacred union of holy matrimony.

In the context of the South-West Liberia Conference in Monrovia, Liberia, it is evident that church members are not exempt from this vice. Although there is no written document or official minutes that serve as a historical reference for the prevalence of cohabitation, there are witnesses who can attest to its occurrence. According to the first and second Liberian presidents of the then ‘Liberia Mission,’ cases of cohabitation were not as widespread in the past as they seem to be today. The more common issue among members—particularly in the hinterland churches—was the practice of polygamy.

Pastor Josiah Kanga (late), one of the ministers who served alongside the missionaries during the early years of the church in Liberia, affirmed in his testimony

⁷ *Church Manual* (2015), 151.

⁸ *Ibid.*

that cohabitation was initially foreign to the church, while polygamy was a well-known and widespread phenomenon. The practice of cohabitation only began to emerge in later years as the church grew in urban areas.

From my personal observation as a pastor in the South-West Liberia Conference, and through interactions with fellow pastors, it appears that nearly every congregation has instances of premarital cohabitation among members in some local churches. Furthermore, it is noticeable that a significant number of church members are either living together without being married or renting apartments for their partners, whom they visit on a regular basis.

While some cohabiting members have been placed under censure in accordance with the Church Manual, many cases remain unaddressed. For instance, according to the minutes of board meeting of the 'New Jerusalem church,' three of her church members have been censured because of cohabitation.⁹ Meanwhile, the minutes of the board of the Better Living church, from the years 2017-2021, shows votes taken to censure some church members found on cohabitation practices.¹⁰ Still, the Pastor of Paynesville central church attests that a number of church members were censured on the basis that they were found on the act of cohabitation.¹¹

A Pre-programme Survey and Data Presentation

The researcher designed questionnaires as survey instrument to collect data from pastors, elders, family life directors, personal ministries leaders, Sabbath school

⁹ Southwest Liberia Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Minutes of Southwest Liberia Conference, New Jerusalem Church*, 7.

¹⁰ Ibid., 12.

¹¹ Josiah Kangar, interview by Author, Buchanan, March 17, 2023.

Superintendents, and other church members of the selected local churches in South-West Liberia Conference, about their experience and knowledge in dealing with cohabiting among church members as they lead in their various departments. The data collected from the respondents above mentioned, served as an instrument to ascertain the cohabitation practice among the local church members in South-West Liberia Conference. Hundred ninety (190) survey questions were distributed to the church board and other members of the church within the conference, and hundred ninety (190) which is 100%, were returned. After the analysis, the following results were discovered. Table 1 is the description of socio-demoFigure characteristics of the board and other members of the church. Majority of the respondents 102 (55.4%) were 39 years and above with most of them 44(23.3%) occupying elder position. Less than half of the respondents 56(29.6%) have served for over five years.

Table 1. Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age(years)	≤ 22	12	6.5
	23-27	22	12.0
	28-32	18	9.8
	33-38	30	16.3
	≥39	102	55.4
Sex	Male	117	68.4
	Female	54	31.6
Position served in the church	Pastor	23	12.1
	Elder	44	23.2
	Head deacon/deaconess	18	9.5
	Family life director	16	8.4
	Church clerk	26	13.7
	Sab.sch.per. Ministry Leader	32	16.8
	Others	31	16.3
Years served in the position	≤5 years	133	70.4
	>5 years	56	29.6
Number of church members	≤ 25	18	9.5
	26-50	28	14.7
	51-75	12	6.3
	76-100	26	13.7
	≥100	106	55.8

Majority of the respondents were male representing 117 (68.4%), and the remaining respondents were female representing 54 (31.6%). On the other hand, 44 or (23.2%) of the responders served as elders; while 32 (16.8%) respondents represents Sabbath School/Personal Ministry leaders; 32 (16.3%) of the respondents represents other church members. Additionally, 133 (70.4%) of the respondents served not more than 5 years in the current positions, and 56 (9.5%) served not less than 5 years in the current positions mentioned above. The frequency of membership of the churches and companies were 106, representing 55.8%, which means the membership of most of the churches are ≥ 100 .

The Use of Biblical Principles on Marriage

The Figure charts below show how frequent each question on the biblical principles of marriage has been taught by the leaders of the local churches to their church members. All other options (never, rarely and occasionally) are all referred to as else in this result. Figure 1 shows the results for marriage as a symbol of the union between Christ and His Church.

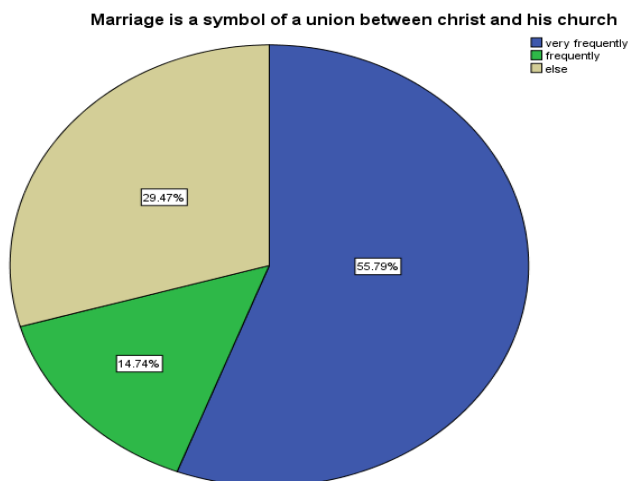


Figure 1. Marriage Was a Symbol of the Union between Christ and His Church

This implies that 55.79% of the respondents taught their membership that marriage stands as representation of a relationship between Christ and the Church is very frequent, 14.74% did that frequently while 29.47% church leaders/Pastors rarely, occasionally and never did that.

Figure 2 shows that 51.58% of the respondents indicates that very frequently Pastor taught their members that fornication and adultery are acts of disobedient to God; while 18.95% of the respondents indicate that pastors taught their church members frequently that fornication and adultery are acts of disobedient to God; In contrast others respondents representing 29.47% said pastors did teach church members rarely, occasionally and or never that fornication and adultery are acts of disobedient to God.

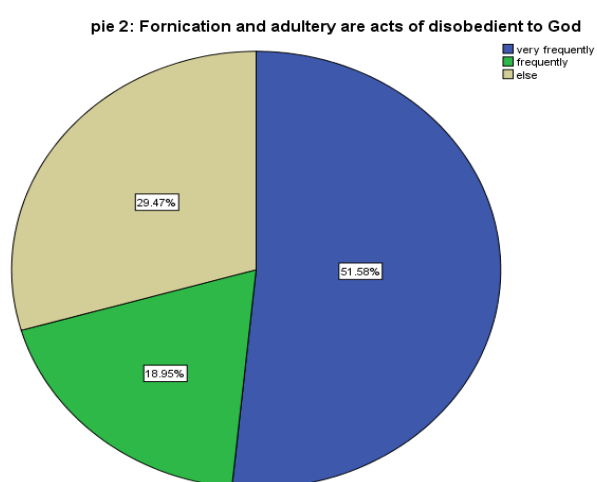


Figure 2. Fornication and Adultery Are Acts of Disobedience to God

Figure 3 implies that less than average percentage (43.16%) of Pastors taught their members very frequently that marriage is when a man leaves his parental household and join with his wife in a Holy matrimony and they both become one flesh; This simply means that church members are aware that cohabitation is wrong, is

against the Bible, and is considered a sin—therefore, it is not recognized as marriage. Meanwhile, 17.89% of the respondents indicated that their pastor frequently teaches that marriage is the union of a man and a woman in holy matrimony.

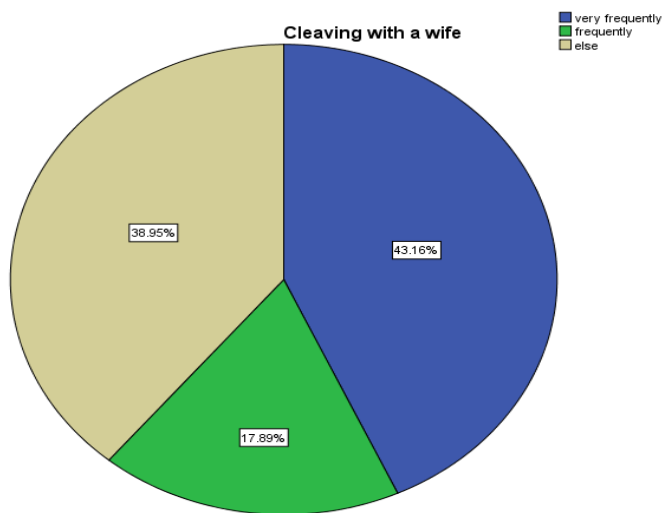


Figure 3. Marriage Is When a Man Cleaves to His Wife in Holy Matrimony, and Both Become One Flesh

This means that church members are aware that cohabitation is not a substitute for marriage; therefore, there might be different reasons for which church members are cohabiting, not because they are not aware that cohabitation is wrong; the remaining 38.95% of the respondents indicated that the teaching was done occasionally, rarely and never. Whether the teaching of marriage was done occasionally, the reality is that it was done, and the church members are aware of the biblical mandate for marriage.

The Figure 4 shows that 44.21% of the respondents indicated that very frequently church members were taught that man and woman living together before marriage is against God's command; only 12.11% of the respondents said church members were frequently taught; in contrast to 43.68% of the respondents indicated

that church members were rarely, occasionally and never taught that man and woman living together before marriage is against God's command on marriage

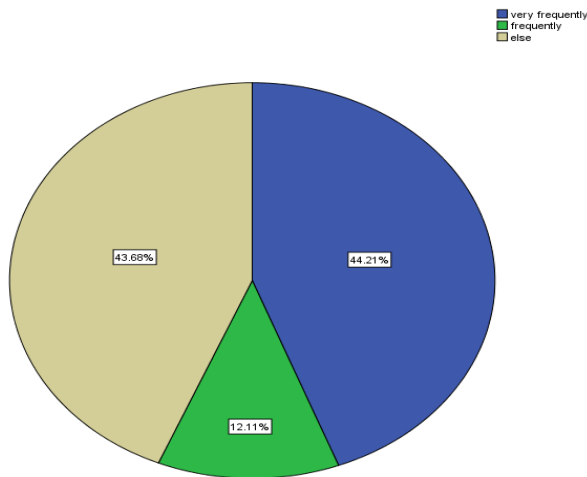


Figure 4. Man and Woman Living Together Before Marriage Is Against God's Marriage Command

Figure 5 shows that 41.58% and 17.37% of the respondents said that the church members were very frequently and frequently taught that marriage is the means God gave for men to multiply and fill the earth; while 41.05% of the respondents said church members were rarely, occasionally and never taught that marriage is the means God gave to man to multiply and fill the earth.

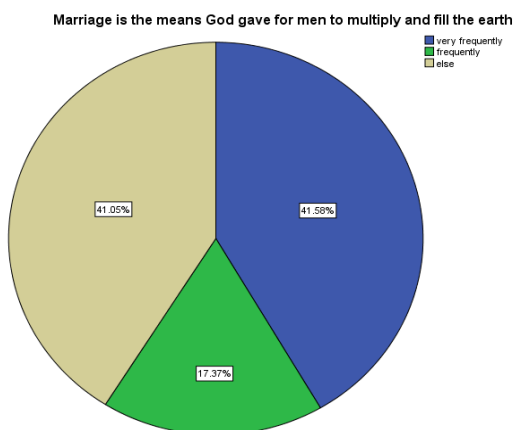


Figure 5. Marriage Is the Means God Gave for Men to Multiply and Fill the Earth

Table 2 shows that all the reasons above indicate that church members cohabitate because they don't want to be committed to their partners through legal bond of marriage relationship because of fear of not been sure of the character of their partner; the fertility of their partner for child bearing. Another constituent reason for cohabitation as shown on Table 2, is that the cohabitants engaged in the practice, so as to be sure if there are truly in love; as it is also to avoid the cost of living in separate homes.

Table 2. The Reasons for Cohabitation Among Church Members

Reason	YES	NO
	Frequency %	Frequency %
To avoid commitment in marriage relationship	183 96.3	07 3.7
To know each other character	185 97.4	05 2.6
To understand each other roles in marriage	182 95.8	08 4.2
To ascertain if the partner can bear children	185 97.4	05 2.6
To be sure if the partner is romantic	183 96.3	07 3.7
To know whether they are compatible in marriage	182 95.8	08 4.2
To know how to handle crisis in marriage	183 96.3	07 3.7
To know if both partners are truly in love	185 97.4	05 2.6
To avoid the cost of living in separate homes	183 96.3	07 3.7

Table 3 shows that the three major reasons why church members cohabitate is to know each other character, which represents 185 (97.4%) of the respondents. To ascertain if the partner can bear children is represented by 185 (97.4%); and to know if both partners are truly in love 185 (97.4%).

Table 3. The Top Three Reasons for Cohabitation Among Church Members

To know each other character	185 97.4%	05 2.6
To ascertain if the partner can bear children	185 97.4%	05 2.6
To know if both partners are truly in love	185 97.4%	05 2.6

Table 4 indicates that the above were the 4-second-high reasons why church members cohabitate. Each of the four (4) reasons below represents 183 (96.3%).

Table 4. The Second Most Popular Reasons for Cohabitation Among Church Members

To avoid commitment in marriage relationship	183 96.3%	07 3.7%
To be sure if the partner is romantic	183 96.3%	07 3.7%
To know how to handle crisis in marriage	183 96.3%	07 3.7%
To avoid the cost of living in separate homes	183 96.3%	07 3.7%

Table 5 shows that another factors constituent of cohabitation is underlined above. According to the respondents, the 3rd high reasons as to why church members cohabit were based on the fact that the cohabiting partners do so in seeking to understand each other roles in marriage, which represents 182 (95.8%); and to know whether they are compatible in marriage represents 182 (95.8%).

Table 5. Other Reasons for Cohabitation Among Church Members

To understand each other roles in marriage	182 95.8	08 4.2
To know whether they are compatible in marriage	182 95.8	08 4.2

Table 6 presents the respondents' perceptions of cohabitation practices within their local church. An overwhelming majority (98.2%) acknowledged that cohabitation is practiced by some members, with only 1.58% indicating otherwise. Similarly, 98.9% reported that there are church members living together without being married, while just 1.05% disagreed.

When asked about the awareness of church leadership regarding cohabiting members, 72.1% of respondents affirmed that leaders are aware, whereas 27.89% believed they are not. In terms of disciplinary action, 77.36% stated that the church

has censured members who cohabit, while 22.63% indicated no such action has been taken. Finally, regarding the prevalence of cohabitation, 94.2% of respondents agreed that only a few church members are living together without marriage, with 5.79% disagreeing. These findings highlight the widespread acknowledgment of cohabitation among church members and the church leadership's awareness and disciplinary response to the practice.

Table 6. Respondents' Knowledge on Cohabitation in the Church

Factors	YES	NO
	Frequency %	Frequency %
Cohabitation is practiced by some members in my local church	187 98.2%	3 1.58%
There are church members living together without being married	188 98.9%	2 1.05%
Church leaders are aware of cohabiting church members	137 72.1%	53 27.89%
The church has censured some church members who are cohabiting	147 77.36%	43 22.63%
Only few church members are living together without marriage	179 94.2%	11 5.79%

This is also shown in Figure 6.

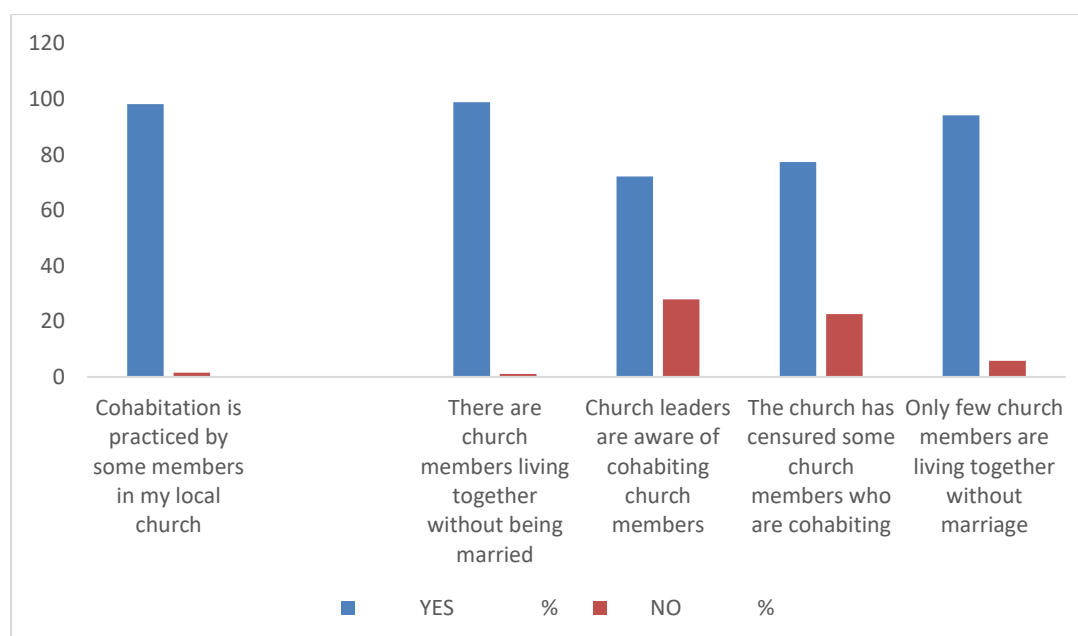


Figure 6. Respondents' Knowledge of Cohabitation in the Church

Figure 7 indicates that a (98.2%) of the respondents agreed that Cohabitation is practiced by some members of their local churches, only (1.58%) of the respondents said no, that Cohabitation is practiced in their local churches but very little.

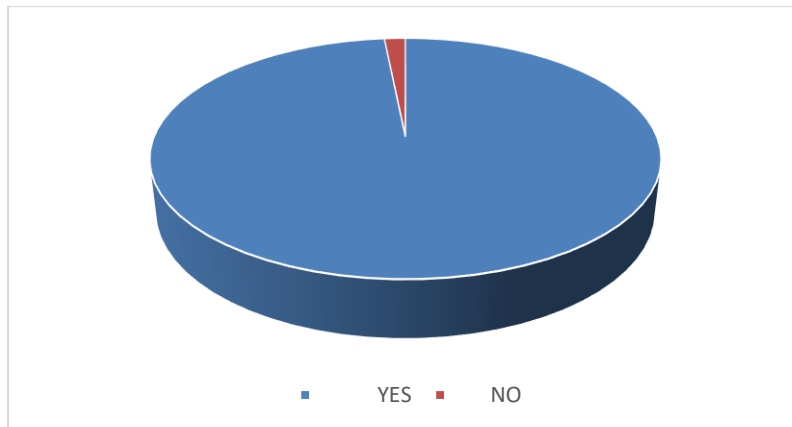


Figure 7. Cohabitation is Practiced by Some Members in the Local Church

Figure 8 implies that (98.9%) of the total sampled population agreed that there are church members living together without being married; only (1.05%), of the sampled said that very little church members living together without married.

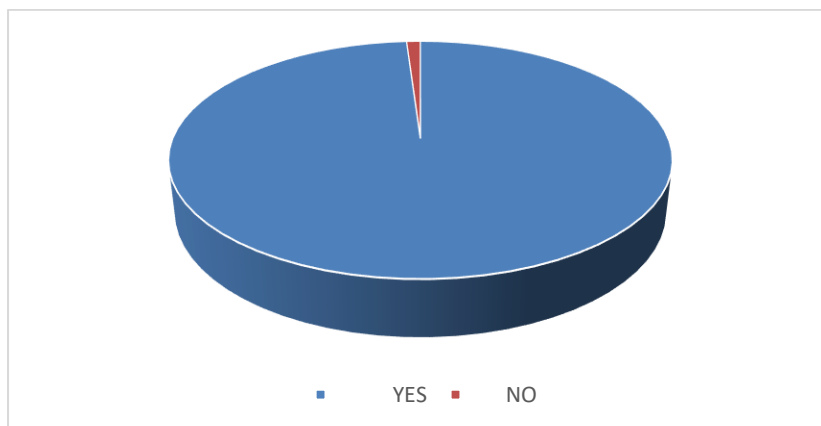


Figure 8. There Are Church Members Living Together without Being Married

Figure 9 shows that 72.1% of the respondents agreed that church leaders are aware of cohabiting church members, while (27.89%) of the respondents said no, that church leaders are aware of cohabiting church members.

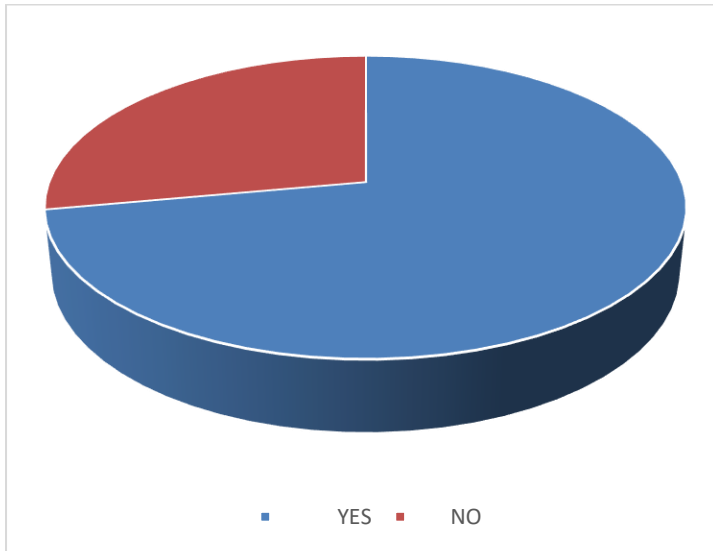


Figure 9. Church Leaders Are Aware of Cohabiting Church Members

Figure 10 shows that 77.36% of the respondents agreed that the church has censured some church members who are cohabiting, while (22.63%) of the respondents said no, there are very little cases of censure of some church members who are cohabiting.

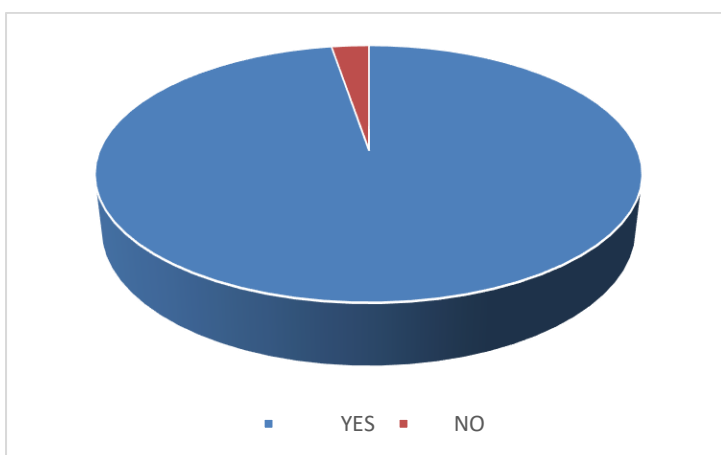


Figure 10. The Church Has Censured Some Church Members Who Are Cohabiting

The Figure 11 implies that (94.2%) of the respondents agreed that only few church members are living together without marriage, only few respondents representing (5.79%) agreed that the number of church number living together without being married are very little. This also attests that there are church members cohabitating without married.

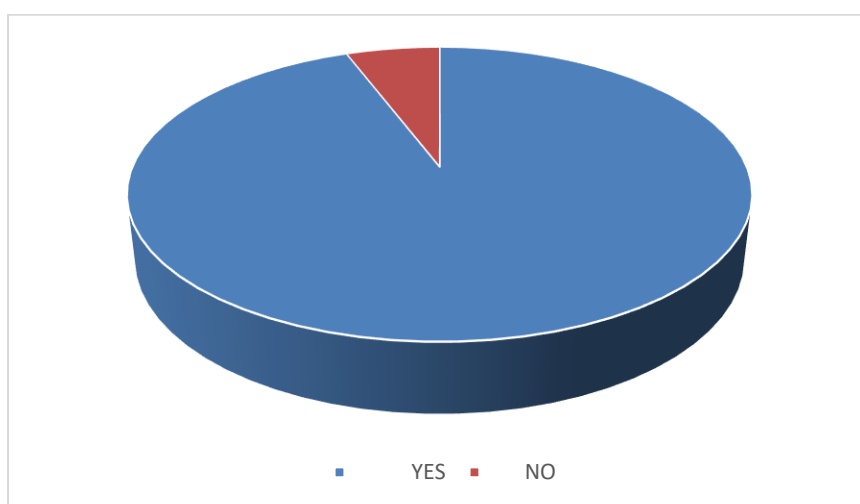


Figure 11. Only Few Church Members Are Living Together Without Marriage

Summary

Chapter Three presents a brief description of the church in Liberia. The chapter highlights the history of cohabitation as opposed to the biblical foundation for marriage. It also makes inferences to the program survey and data presentation. From the arrival of the missionaries in Liberia between the years 1926 and 1931, great efforts were made to take the Advent message to the remotest areas of the country. During these formative years of mission, churches and schools were established, and a training center was instituted for the training of gospel workers and teachers. The foreign missionaries worked as a team with local gospel workers and made a tremendous impact in spreading the Advent message—first to the people groups in the

hinterland, and then to rural areas of the country—leading to the organization of the Liberia Mission Fields.

As noted above, according to the testimonials of some local ministers who served in those remote areas of the mission field, one of the major issues the church had to deal with during its early years in Liberia was not cohabitation, but rather the prevalence of polygamy, particularly in churches located in hinterland communities. The practice of cohabitation only began to gain followers in subsequent years as the church started to grow, and some church members have attested that their churches have censured cohabiting members.

To verify this observation, the researcher designed questionnaires as a survey instrument to collect data from church board members and other members within the churches of the South-West Liberia Conference. A total of 190 questionnaires (100%) were distributed and returned, and all were analysed. The findings from the respondents confirm that the practice of cohabitation is an ongoing phenomenon in the church.

CHAPTER 4

PROGRAM DESIGN, DEVELOPMENT, IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

Program Design

This chapter is the description of the program design, implementation and the evaluation. The program includes teaching, seminars and workshop on premarital counseling, seminar on cohabitation and marriage, the effect of cohabitation, and courtship. The researcher prepared a program outline with the topics and relevant materials to educate church members in South-West Liberia Conference. After the implementation of this program, the researcher realized many factors responsible for the practice of cohabitation among the church members

Program Development

This section underlined the process of program development to teach the church members about the steps for biblical marriage and the underlining consequences of cohabitation. The program is designed to educate church Leaders and entire membership, especially youth, young adults and those contemplating marriage. The education on the importance of biblical marriage was done during the divine service hour of the church, and Sabbath afternoon programs. The presenters were Pastors, and experts church members in pre-marital counseling. The workshops and the seminars were conducted every week from February 2024, to June 2024, on Sabbath afternoons and one Sunday. Each section was allotted to two hours. Table 7 shows the description of activities undertaken for the program implementation.

Table 7. Program Implementation Schedule from February 5th – June 8th, 2024

Date	Activity	Lesson/topic	Facilitator	Participant	Evaluation
5 th Feb. 2024	Education	The Importance of Counselling	Pr. Paulo Hosna-Janeta	The entire Districts	The attendance was good
10 th Feb. 2024	Workshop	Principles of Courtship	Pr. Dr. Adventor M, Trye Jr.	The entire Districts	The attendance was good
2 nd March 2024	Education	Seminar on Cohabitation and Marriage	Pr. Paulo Hosna	The entire districts	The attendance was good
16 th March. 2024	Workshop	Seminar on singleness and the effect of Cohabitation	Pr. Herrol Seton	The entire Church	The attendance was good
13 th April. 2024	Seminar	The Effects of Cohabitation	Pr. Paulo Hosna-Janeta	The church members	The elder's attendance was great
11 th May. 2024	Teaching	God's ideal for marriage	Pr. Paulo Hosna-Janeta	The entire church	It was great
25 th May 2024	Teaching	Theology of Marriage	Ps. Paulo and Ps. Frank O. Bannor	The Conference & the two Missions Fields in Liberia	It was well attended
8 th June 2024	Teaching	Marriage as a sign of God's Love for His People	Ps. Paulo Hosna-Janeta & Districts' Pastors	Two local churches in the Districts	Well attended

The researcher obtained authorization from the Conference to undertake this program in all the churches and districts within the Conference. The underlined topics, the presenters, as well as the participants were described on Table 7 following the evaluation.

Now in relation to the topics, 'the importance of counselling,' serves the purpose of underlining the benefits of pre-marital counselling, and exposes and tackles the root causes of cohabitation. Principles of Courtship focuses on setting boundaries, underlined acceptable biblical principles for healthy relationship. The topic contrasted the Christian courtship from secular courtship as a vehicle for cohabitation. As shown on above Table 7, Seminar on Cohabitation and Marriage

underlined the legal and illegal perspective of the both. The security and protection granted for a formalize marriage couple as oppose to a union based on cohabitation, a contract without any legal or biblical foundation. There were groups discussion on the effects of cohabitation in the church, and society.

On March 16, 2024 seminar on singleness and the effect of Cohabitation was conducted. The program was guided toward educating the single young adult as to how to live a life of chastity with contentment even while single. During the program, presentation was also made with focus on the effects of cohabitation, and such effects include: socio-economic, psychological, moral, and spiritual. This was a day retreat with the single young adults at the Conference ‘Youth Camp.’

On the 11th of May, a seminar was conducted on the topic: “God’s ideal for marriage.” The emphasis was laid on the intend of God for marriage, which is characterized by an unconditional love and indissolubility of the union. The presentation features a comparative analysis between God’s unconditional love for the church, just as husband ought to love his wife, and submissive role of the church to Christ, just as the wife does to her husband. Some sub-topics out of this topic were discussed in groups. Such topics include: God’s unconditional love for the church; husband unconditional love for his wife; the submissive role of wife; and what marriage should be. Following this presentation, on May 25, 2024 the Theology of Marriage was discussed in a forum comprising all the districts of the Conference, with some representations from the two Mission fields in Liberia. The emphasis of the presentation was on building block of marriage and its sacred covenant. Marriage was to restore God image in human race.

The topics for the groups discussion were: 1) the place of marriage in the redemptive plan of God for the human race; 2) How can cohabitation be an acceptable

means in the restoration process? The program ended on June 8, 2024 with a presentation on marriage as a sign of God’s unconditional Love for the fallen world. Again, this program was done in collaboration with the Conference, whereas the districts’ pastors conducted the program during afternoon program comprising at least two main churches of the districts.

Strategies to Reduce the Rate of Cohabitation among Church Members

According to the results obtained from the respondents, as presented on Table 7, and the evaluation of the program, it is clear that there is an ongoing cohabitation practices among church members almost across all local churches of the Conference. See the frequency and percentage on Table 8.

Table 8. Respondents’ Knowledge of Cohabitation in the Church

Factors	YES	NO
	Frequency %	Frequency %
Cohabitation is practiced by some members in my local church	187 98.2%	3 1.58%
There are church members living together without being married	188 98.9%	2 1.05%
Church leaders are aware of cohabiting church members	137 72.1%	53 27.89%
The church has censured some church members who are cohabiting	147 77.36%	43 22.63%
Only few church members are living together without marriage	179 94.2%	11 5.79%

This implied that there is an urgent need to stopped or reduce this practice since it contravened the biblical principles for marriage. Cohabitation affects the numerical, socio-economical, psychological and Spiritual growth of the church. The following are the recommended strategies to tackle the increasing practice of cohabitation among church members. These strategies were developed from the respondents’ higher reasons for cohabitation among church members

Strategies to Address Cohabitation among Church Members

1. For the Conference through their local church pastors to intensify their teaching on principles of biblical marriage and its benefits.
2. Conference to engage in counselling process for the youth and young adults on the spiritual impact of cohabitation.
3. That the Conference develop programs and seminars to engage the youth and singles on Christian Courtship.
4. Regular teaching on how to maintain commitment in marriage.
5. Regular teaching that cohabitation is not a commitment
6. Counselling session on Compatibility test for marriage
7. Conflict resolution in marriage
8. Regular teaching, workshops and seminar on financial responsibility.

Program Evaluation

There were a considerable number of church members who were cohabiting. As a result, they were not regular in attending church activities—especially those who were already pregnant, had been impregnated, or had children out of wedlock. However, during and after the training program, many pastors and church members attested to significant improvement in church attendance and active participation by cohabiting members in church services and related programs. It was realized that the training was a crucial component in helping church members formalize their unions, maintain a right relationship with God, and remain in good standing with the church. Some church members admitted that entering into cohabitation was a serious mistake.

The program led to three couples who were cohabiting in my local church formalizing their marriages—similar to what happened in other churches. One cohabiting couple separated, even as they continued to contemplate formalizing their marriage. Meanwhile, some pastors in the Conference have pledged to continue the

program in their respective local churches. Many church members testified that the program has changed their perspective on marriage.

There was also an increase in reports of counselling and marriage preparation, as well as more cohabiting members returning to take active roles in church services through regular attendance. Most importantly, some cohabitants have come to recognize the missteps in their relationships that led to cohabitation. In some districts, church members have taken the bold step to correct their mistakes and have gotten married. These experiences attest to the success of the program and its potential as an effective tool to address cohabitation among church members in the South-West Liberia Conference.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

According to Genesis account, from the creation of man, God evaluated His creation, and saw His creation was not complete because the man Adam was without a companion (Gen 2:18) therefore, He made for Adam a companion comparable to him, there the institution of marriage was established, and the first wedding conducted in the garden of Eden. However, as the world is affected by sin, men began to take upon themselves manifold wives and concubines (1 Chr 3). This irrepressible practice stretched from the entire Bible, became common in the New Testament Church as it also gave rise to some other practices among the believers of the early Church (1 Tim 3:2), even though the New Testament Church tried to maintain God ideal for marriage, a man to a woman (1 Tim 3:2).

Cohabitation or ‘living together’ is becoming a common practice in the world. In relation to marriage, cohabitation is becoming the preferred practice, and acceptable in most western world. It is sad to know that the practice of cohabitation is becoming a common place even among the professed Christians across the globe. This non-traditional form of marriage is “frequently practiced among the young university-age students, among divorcees and other segments of the population.”¹ Therefore cohabitation is defined by David H. Olson, John DeFrain, and Linda

¹ Southwest Liberia Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Minutes of Southwest Liberia Conference, New Jerusalem Church*, 12.

Skogrand as “two unrelated adults of the opposite sex sharing the same living quarters.”² For many societies, cohabitation is an ideal testing ground for marriage. Cohabitation, though without any legal ties for the union of those pretending to be married partners, the practice is being adapted in many societies across the globe. For many, it is the easy and a rehearsal level for compatibility trial in marriage. Since many societies do conform to this form of marriage, the practice seems to be the preferred one, especially among the young adults. For many cultures, unlike cohabitation, marriage is no longer a vehicle for living with someone whom one is in a loving relation or romantic partner.

Through many years, and experience in ministry the researcher has observed that the practice of cohabitation is eroding biblical principles for marriage among the church members in the Conference. According to records of some churches, many church members have been censured.

Details concerning the cohabitation among the various religions of the world are varied and limited. There is a considerable ambivalence relating to cohabitation among these religions. It is rarely found a systematic presentation of cohabitation among the religions here mentioned (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism).

Based on the prevailing cohabitation practice, as indicated by the respondents through the findings resulted from the questionnaires, this research proposed relevant strategy to help in addressing the problem of cohabitation practices among church members of the Conference. These proposed strategies adopted within the Conference by the church leaders, as well as others fields of the West Africa Union Mission, are

² David Olson, John DeFrain, and Linda Skogrand, *Marriages and Families: Intimacy, Diversity, and Strengths*, 8th ed. (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2013), 184.

relevant to discourage or reduce the practice of cohabitation among the church members of the South-West Liberia Conference.

Conclusion

This research has brought us to a clear conclusion that the phenomenon of cohabitation is an outgrowing trend that is occurring not only in our neighbouring communities as an acceptable traditional form of marriage, or an outgrowing version of marriage in the society, however, it is a practice that threatened the Christian religious principle of biblical foundation for marriage. The Practice is exponentially gaining its affiliation in many Christian denominations, either as an acceptable union between two romantic partners, or as an ideal testing ground for marriage. For many it is the informal and a trial form of marriage for compatibility for a future marriage. Since many societies do conform to this form of marriage, the practice seems to be the preferred one, especially among the young people. As it is in many cultures, unlike cohabitation, marriage is no longer a vehicle for living with romantic partner.

This research has revealed that the practice of cohabitation is currently present, and it's an ongoing phenomenon among church members of South-West Liberia Conference. The study exposed that church leaders are aware that some church members are living together as if they are husbands and wives though without been married. The finding from this study exposed factors responsible for cohabitation among church members of South West Conference, such factors include: see the Table 9 as indicated on the frequencies and percentages.

Table 9. Factors Responsible for Cohabitation

Factors	YES	NO
	Frequency %	Frequency %
To know each other character	185 97.4%	05 2.6
To ascertain if the partner can bear children	185 97.4%	05 2.6
To know if both partners are truly in love	185 97.4%	05 2.6
To avoid commitment in marriage relationship	183 96.3%	07 3.7%
To be sure if the partner is romantic	183 96.3%	07 3.7%
To know how to handle crisis in marriage	183 96.3%	07 3.7%
To avoid the cost of living in separately homes	183 96.3%	07 3.7%

Based on these factors, strategies were designed and were recommended to the conference and the local church Pastors as relevant instruments to help tackle cohabitation practices among church members of the Conference. The effects of cohabitation in the lives of the individuals may be socio-economical, numerical, financial, psychological, as well as Spiritual growth of the church; therefore, the practice cannot be taken for granted. Therefore, the practice of cohabitation among church members requires an urgent address.

Recommendations

1. There is need for South-West Liberia Conference, through the pastors, to intense their teaching, preaching, seminars and workshop on principles of biblical marriage and its benefits. Also, adhere to censure or measures prescribed in the Church Manual to them that may disregard God's ideal for marriage according to the Bible.
2. The leadership of the local church should engage the youth and young adult counseling on socio-economic and spiritual impact of cohabitation.
3. The Conference, and local church leadership should engage the single youths and young adults with Workshop on Courtship
4. A further study is needed to be carried out among the cohabitants' church members to estimate the prevalence of cohabitation, assess and determine the factors influencing cohabitation among the cohabitants so that intervention can be targeted to address the factors.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

LETTERS

Ps. Paulo Hosna-Janeta,
CoD Adventist University of West Africa
PAdvent Hill, Robert Field Highway, Schieffelin Town
Margibi County, Liberia
May 19, 2024

The Executive Committee of
South-West Liberia Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church,
Old Road, Sinkor, Monrovia, Liberia, P.O. Box 52

Dear Sir

LETTER OF REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN SOUTH-WEST LIBERIA
CONFERENCE OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST

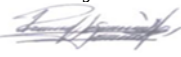
Calvary Greetings,

I, the under signed, write to seek your consent to undertake this research project in your conference. I am a student of the Adventist University of Africa (AUA) in Kenya pursuing Master of Divinity (M.Div.). I am currently writing my thesis on the topic: ***Strategy to Tackle Cohabitation among Members of South-West Liberia Conference of The Seventh-day Adventist.***

Your permission in this respect will enable me collect useful data for this study, which will serve the purpose of stopping or reducing cohabitation as the finding reveals. The study is expected to commence on February 2024 respectively. This study is intended to last for a period of 12 weeks to complete this exercise.

I pray that this letter meets your approval, as we continue to work in achieving your Conference goal for the Kingdom.

Thank you for your usual support.

Signed: 

Paulo Hosna-Janeta (Pastor)

CoD – Theology Department

Cc: Ps. Arve Sivili – Executive Secretary of
South-West Liberia Conference

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE

SOUTH-WEST LIBERIA CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

Strategies to Tackle Cohabitation Among Members

of South-West Liberia Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Church

Dear respondent, for the purpose of this research, I am soliciting your kind voluntary participation, and consent in filling in this questionnaire as an anonymous. Please be also assured that all information provided will be treated with high confidentiality.

SECTION I: Demography

What is your position in the Church? Pastor []; Elder []; Head Deacon/Head Deaconess []; Family Life Director []; Church Clerk []; Sab. Sch. & Per. Ministry Director [], others

How long have you served in the position mentioned above? 1 – 2yrs []; 3 – 4yrs []; 5 – 6yrs []; 7yrs and above [].

What is the status of your congregation? Sab. Sch. Branch []; Company []; Organized Church [].

How many years since your church is established? 1 – 5yrs []; 6 – 10yrs []; 11 – 15yrs []; 16 – 20yrs []; 21yrs and above [].

What is the membership of the congregation you serve? 1 – 25 []; 26 – 50 []; 51 – 75 []; 76 – 100 []; 100 & above []

How many times does your local church board meet? None [], Once a month [], once a quarter []; twice a quarter []; Once a year []; others (please specify)

Sex? Male []; Female [].

Which range does your age fall within? 18 – 22yrs []; 23 – 27yrs []; 28 - 32yrs []; 33 – 38yrs []; 39 and above []

SECTION II:

Please indicate by ticking how often you use the following Biblical Principles on marriage for the instruction of church members?

Never = 1 Rarely = 2 Occasionally = 3 Frequently = 4 Very Frequently = 5

#		1	2	3	4	5
1	Marriage is when man leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife in holy matrimony (marriage)					
2	Man and woman living together before marriage is against God's marriage command					
3	Marriage is the means God gave for men to multiply and fill the earth					
4	Fornication and adultery are acts of disobedient to God.					

5	Marriage is a symbol of a union between Christ and His Church.					
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Please indicate by ticking the corresponding option of how each of these statements on cohabitation serves as the basis for marriage

Not a basis = 1; Not Often the Basis = 2; is the Basis = 3; Most Often the Basis = 4; the Strong Basis = 5

#		1	2	3	4	5
1	To avoid commitment in marriage relationship.					
2	To know the real character of each other.					
3	To better understand each other roles in marriage.					
4	To know if the partner can bear children.					
5	A testing means of how to live with a romantic partner.					
6	To know whether they are compatible for marriage.					
7	To get to know how to handle unexpected crisis in marriage.					
8	To know whether both partners are truly in love.					
9	To avoid the high cost of living in separate homes.					
10	To avoid parents disapproval of the marriage proposal					

Please indicate by ticking the degree of your knowledge about the interpretation of the following statements:

Very Little = 1; Little = 2; Some = 3; Much = 4; Very Much = 5

#		1	2	3	4	5
1	Cohabitation is practiced by some members in my local church.					
2	There are church members living together without being married.					
3	Church leaders are aware of cohabiting church members					
4	The church has censured some church members who are cohabiting.					
5	Only few church members are living together without marriage.					

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