

PROJECT ABSTRACT

Master of Divinity

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

Title: **BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF INTERFAITH AND INTERDENOMINATIONAL MARRIAGES: PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS FOR ESMIRNA DISTRICT CHURCHES IN ANGOLA**

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Date completed: March 2025

Interdenominational and interfaith marriages have compromised the tenets and mission of the Adventist Church in the District of Esmirna Cuíto, Central Mission of Angola. With the coming of peace, increased movement of people and goods, the growth of various evangelical religious movements, charismatic Pentecostalism, the cautious introduction of Islam, as well as urban growth and globalization, a variety of viewpoints have emerged regarding the choice of spouses for marriage among some Adventist members.

Furthermore, the pressure Christians face today in striving to live a religious life in a postmodern context is challenging biblical doctrines such as “Be not yoked together with unbelievers” (2 Cor 6:14). This concept and its practice have caused major misunderstandings among believers regarding how to choose a marriage partner. While some believe such decisions should be guided strictly by the Word of God, others advocate for a different, more flexible approach. This new approach has

had a major negative impact on Adventist members who have entered into mixed marriages, leading the church to lose a significant portion of its membership—especially at a time when it is actively seeking to retain existing members.

The main objective of this study was to engage in a biblical and theological analysis of marriage principles and their pastoral implications, with a particular emphasis on the importance of correct doctrinal understanding for the advancement of the Adventist Church's mission. The study also examined diverse perspectives while employing various theological and biblical tools, such as a brief exegesis of Greek texts, grammar, lexicons, and commentaries. The writings of Ellen G. White were consulted, as well as religious views on the issue.

Religion, culture, and doctrine were found to form a crucial religious trinity that requires a high level of sobriety, comprehension, and clarity in order to contribute to the development of corporate/denominational spirituality and to enhance pastoral effectiveness in ministry. While contributing to the body of knowledge within the Adventist Church, this study aimed to be both doctrinally and theologically accurate, and to properly account for and integrate the cultural component in a way that harmonizes symmetrically with theology and the Bible.

The researcher is a frontline Adventist minister serving in the Central Mission of the Southwest Union of Angola of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

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A project

presented in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

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by

Samuel Mahamba Máquinas Domingos

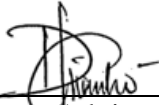
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Date: April 2025

This work is dedicated to my wife Maria da Conceição Epalanga Domingos for her unending support during my studies. I also want to dedicate it to the entire Central Mission of Angola, and in particular to Pastor *Emílio Cupua*, the Central Mission's Chief Financial Officer and his wife Alice Cupua, for their moral support throughout this journey, from which I received unwavering, unparalleled, and indescribable encouragement. Last but not least, to my Parents José Domingos and Bibiana Nené for everything in this life.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ATI	Antigo Testamento Interpretado
IB	Interpreter's Bible
IBC	International Bible Commentary
ISBE	International Standard Bible Encyclopedia
IThC	International Theological Commentary
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
SDA	Seventh-day Adventist
SDABC	Seventh-day Adventist Bible commentary
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

The last general census of population and eligibility in Angola, which took place from 16 to 31 May 2014, also known as the 2014 Census, was carried out by the National Institute of Statistics (INE) and it showed that the Angolan population is currently made up of 24,789,025.¹ The census revealed that the majority of the Angolan population is made up of women (13,289,313), while men were 2,499,000.² The Angolan population is also made up of majorly the youths under 25 years old representing 64.9% (21,475,348).³ The 2014 census also collected information on religion and found out that 41% of the population residing in the country are Catholics while 38% are Protestants. It was also revealed that 99.6% of the residents in the country live in households.⁴

The Bantus in Angola culturally practice monogamy, but there are also some who are polygamous, particularly in the city of Cuíto where relatives encourage such union if they involve partners of the same tribe and culture. Majority of the people contract mixed marriages because of the large presence of people from other tribes,

¹ Bernardino Manje, “O Recenseamento Da População de 2014,” *Jornal de Angola*, last modified 2023, accessed March 29, 2023, https://www.pressreader.com/angola/jornal-de-angola/20230212/281569474893996?srsId=AfmBOoq-dbi9XNRbkfsNop7M9VqLR_ebqCdDacwvZPQYc-9ocgklMQTUd.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

Muslims and nationalities in Cuíto which is at a railroad crossing. Marriage in the Umbundu culture, the largest Bantu tribe, is considered the meeting place for all members of a community, including the past, present, and future members. It implies that everyone—dead, alive, and yet to be born—is included.

In Umbundu culture, traditional marriage is done with support from family and even friends. Traditional marriage, for a long time, is a process in which economic, social, and religious aspects are often mixed, making it difficult to eliminate the dividing line between them. In general, when someone does not marry, in Umbundu culture, it means that they are rejected by society and the community, as marriage systematizes, controls social life, and organizes relations between relatives in the affixation of affiliation.

The path of traditional marriage is standardized in the Ovimbundu groups as well as the matrimonial uses and customs and the value of virginity constituting the essence of cultural unity. Marriage is also seen as an alliance. For the woman and the man form a new aggregate, they reinforce the friendship and the alliance between families, tribes, kingdoms, and friends. This alliance formed between the two-family groups constitutes the heart of the families' deep relationships.

The Ovimbundu marriage is a legitimate alliance between the two families, which unites the lineages without the intervention of the authorities. Both are based on union a sign of a contract. The marriage act does not concern just one person, it commits the two families to which the two belong, so the young people get married, unite into a single family resulting from the two clans and then a new culture and society is born.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church entered into the Angolan religious scene in 1924 in the Mission of Bongo, through a Mexican missionary called William Harry

Anderson, nicknamed in Angola as “*Kakongo*.” However, the first exploration contacts for the establishment of the Seventh-day Adventist Movement took place before the official date of the establishment of the Church at the request of the Annual Committee of the Division (1922). At that time, Angola was still under the colonial rule of Portugal.

Since the church was new in the country, it was necessary to confront Adventist doctrines and practices with so many other existing⁵ confessions spread across the country. Authors such as Lawrence W. Henderson even claimed that Adventists, compared to other denominations, had the most aggressive evangelism programs.⁶ Through an observation until then, marriage relations between non-Seventh-day Adventists and some members of the SDA faith always represented a serious problem for the faith and practices of church members in Angola, and in the Esmirna District of the city of Cuíto in Angola, this problem still persists up to date.

However, in Esmirna District, 203 Adventist members have so far married non-Seventh-day Adventists, a constant practice that is causing many negative results.⁷ Due to doctrinal disagreements between spouses, families are always torn apart especially on the issue of day of worship, and children as a result are left wondering whether to follow their mother or father. Adventist principles of modesty

⁵ “At the time that Adventism appeared in Angola, Catholicism had existed for at least 440 years and had a large volume of missions and churches in all the districts (current provinces of Angola). which the Calvinists made it appear against the background of the country’s Christendom.” Ralph Delgado, *História de Angola* (Porto, Portugal: Aframento, 1948), 1:55; Eduardo dos Santos, *Religiões de Angola* (Lisboa, Portugal: Junta de Investigações do Ultramar, 1969), 201.

⁶ Lawrence W. Henderson, *A Igreja Em Angola* (Lisboa, Portugal: Editorial Além-Mar, 2013), 124.

⁷ Esmirna Ecclesiastical District of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Home and Family Department, “Statistical Report of the Fourth Quarter” (Cuíto, Angola: Esmirna Ecclesiastical District of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Home and Family Department, 2021).

and Christian living are also being affected because of these marriages.⁸ Dressing and eating habits in some denominations clash with Adventist ideals. Numerous Sabbath programs, including those held in the morning and in the afternoon especially (Sabbath School as well as Bible Study), and some church board meetings (scheduled on regular weekdays) are not regularly frequented by individuals married outside the church since the Adventist partner is pressured to spend time with their family on both Saturdays and Sundays.

The detrimental impact on Adventist members who have chosen to marry outside of Church circles within Angola's Esmirna district is great and the church is losing many members, especially young people, to such marriages at a time when membership retention is called for. Faced with these challenges, some authors claim that in a postmodern context, contemporary Christians interact people with different points of view more frequently. The Christian ideals and ethics of their followers have been questioned and challenged by a 21st-century world that is consistently opposed to Jesus Christ and those who follow him.⁹ Christians are confronted with the biblical teachings in the passage of 2 Corinthians 6:14 in addition to the pressure they experience today to practice their religion in the post-modern environment. "Be not yoked together with unbelievers" – The text conveys the idea that believers should avoid contact with non-believers since Paul cautions them against doing so through a metaphor.

⁸ Robert C. Kistler, *Marriage, Divorce And...* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1987), 103.

⁹ S. Bakker, "Ethical and Doctrinal Foundations for an Integrated Approach to Faith and Conduct in 1 Peter," *The South African Baptist Journal of Theology* 13 (2004): 117-123; Marc Kolden, "Are You Serious? First Peter on Christian Life in a Complicated World," *Word & World* 24, no. 4 (2004): 421-429.

Marriage, as an institution created by God, should be a rewarding experience for both husband and wife. The Bible presents guidelines according to the divine plan, revealed in the Bible: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Eph 5:25). This means that the experience of marriage should be rewarding for both husband and wife. Ellen White says, “Marriage is undoubtedly a blessing, as long as the divine principles are recognized and obeyed. It preserves purity and happiness and provides for social needs while elevating physical, intellectual, and moral nature to a higher level.”¹⁰ In the words of the American author, White,¹¹ it is clearly perceived that the author of marriage established principles that should be known and followed when someone, especially a believer, wants to get involved in marriage.

According to J. Stott, as cited in Calvin B. Rock, “Marriage is an exclusive heterosexual covenant between one man and one woman, ordained and sealed by God, preceded by a public leaving parents, consummated in sexual union, issuing in a permanent mutually supported partnership, and normally crowned by the gift of children.”¹² Thus, Stott links marriage to be a permanent institution of shared responsibility and with a divine seal.

On the other hand, George Lotter and Petria Magdalena Theron focusing on Paul’s passage in 2 Corinthians 6:14, seek to clarify that it is crucial for Christians to

¹⁰ Ellen G. White, *Patriarcas e Profetas* (Sao Paulo, Brazil: Casa Publicadora Brasileira, 2018), 46.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² John Stott, *Involvement: Social and Sexual Relationships in the Modern World* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1985), 2:163, quoted in Calvin B. Rock, “Marriage and Family,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 729.

comprehend the kind of behaviour that must be learned in Paul's writing in order to obey God in relationships such as the one between believers and unbelievers.¹³

The *Harper Study Bible* when commenting on Paul's text in 2 Corinthians 6:17, states that: "Scripture strongly recommends keeping oneself apart from the world and non-believers. ... Therefore, separation does not involve physically leaving the world—whether by solitude, demise, or monasticism. Although Christ was 'in the world,' He was 'not of the world'" (2 Cor 6:17).

According to Paul, Christians should not associate with non-Christians in a compromising manner since doing so is to be *mis-mated* or "unequally yoked." It is undoubtedly true that this tenet encompasses the following applications:

1. It is not appropriate for a believer to marry a non-believer.
2. Choosing intimate companions who are not believers is not recommended for him/her.

He/she cannot be in cordial communion with those who are theologically apostate. However, this does not prevent a missionary from having contacts with infidels to convert them to God. There are positive sides to this separation and not only negative sides. Being separated from God is accompanied by being alienated from someone or something. This attachment to God will frequently provide solutions to many common problems. Separation from non-believers includes both isolation from non-believers and from attitudes and behaviours that are a part of the world and its system. Therefore, according to 1 John 2:15–17, believers are to run from the lust of the flesh, *the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*. The Christian must adhere to everything that is good and avoid anything wicked" (2 Cor 6:17).

¹³ George Lotter and Petria Magdalena Theron, "Do Not Be Yoked Together with Unbelievers': New Testament Perspectives on How Christians Should Live and Act in a Society of Diverging Convictions," *In die Skriflig* 42, no. 2 (2008): 282.

The SDA Bible Commentary notes: Since there are such stark differences between Christians and non-Christians, believers and non-believers, in terms of beliefs and behavior, entering into any legally binding relationship with them—whether in marriage, business, or other circumstances—forces Christians to choose between abdicating their principles and dealing with the challenges brought on by those differences. One would be breaking God’s laws and making a deal with the devil if they entered into such a union. In the Scriptures, separation is emphasized plainly (Lev 20:24; Num 6:3; Heb 7:26).¹⁴

In such a scenario, is considered a disobedience to God. In view of this fact, the SDA Church has long discussed and debated the desirability of marrying non-Adventists. Our stated position as the remnant church along with our prophetic understanding of the progress of present truth in our time, has contributed to a widespread belief that it is not correct for us to get married to those outside the faith.¹⁵

Such marriages are considered by many young people and the society in general including other religious denominations spread across Angola, as being more like a traditional custom rather than a divine directive. As a result, the SDA Church strongly discourages such marriages.¹⁶

¹⁴ “Unequally Yoked” [2 Cor 6:14], *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary (SDABC)*, ed. Francis D. Nichol (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1976), 876.

¹⁵ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1990), 22; General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe...: A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005), 332-333; Asociación General de los Adventistas del Séptimo Día, *Manual de La Iglesia* (Lisbon, Portugal: Inter-America’s First, 2015), 178, 179; Asociación Ministerial de la Asociación General de los Adventistas del Séptimo Día, *Guía de Procedimientos Para Ministros* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: ACES, 1995), 324; Nancy L. Van Pelt, *We’ve Only Just Begun: A Guide to Successful Courtship* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1985), 155, 156.

¹⁶ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* (2005), 183.

Despite biblical teachings, Ellen G. White advice, and pastoral guidance on the challenges of mixed marriage, some Adventist Church Members in Cuíto (Angola) continue finding their soul mates among non-Adventists. This phenomenon presents a major concern as it brings major implications such as marital conflicts, increased separations, divorce and children in single parent homes amongst SDA Church members. This paper argues that church through the family life department should prepare biblical marital counselling materials to assist the youths and young couples make informed decisions before and after marriage.

Statement of the Problem

Marrying non-Adventists has compromised the tenets and mission of the Adventist Church in the District of Esmirna in Cuíto, Angola. With the advent of peace, the movement of people and goods, the expansion of various evangelical religious movements, charismatic Pentecostals, the cautious introduction of Islam, as well as urban growth and globalization, have created more approximation and interaction between people than ever, hence providing different viewpoints on the choice of spouses to marry among Adventist members. Others contend that Adventists should stick to the limitations imposed by the teachings of God's word, while some claim that social and religious realities have changed and call for a new approach.

This study attempted to answer the following research questions: What are the principal pastoral implications of unequally yoked marriages in the context of Cuíto's District of Esmirna, Angola? What are the basic biblical and theological foundations needed to critique marriage relationships between Adventists and non-Adventists? What are the pastoral implications of marriages forged between Adventist and non-Adventist?

Purpose of the Study

The primary goal of this study was to engage in a biblical and theological analysis of marriage principles and their pastoral implications within the context of the Esmirna Districts of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It also sought to highlight the difficulties faced by gospel ministers as a result of misunderstandings about Adventist fundamental principles, particularly the unequal yoke or mixed marriage practice used by church members in deciding who to marry.

Justification of the Study

This study has three important contributions it wishes to make to the general body of knowledge. They include:

1. There was no evidence of a related study that had been done in the setting of Esmirna District SDA Church or in the entirety of Angola.
2. It made an effort to identify the pastoral implications of the unequally yoked marriage within the setting of Esmirna District SDA Church.
3. Understanding biblical or doctrinal concepts has positive or negative effects on the life of the congregations that comprise the church district of Esmirna, and researching unequally yoked marriage adds pastoral values.

Significance of the Study

The Bible indicates that marriages were arranged between family members and within the same clan in Israel,¹⁷ it also depicts foreign women who were prisoners of war marrying Israelites under heavenly guidance with explicit restrictions to follow as depicted in Deuteronomy 21:10-14 (KJV). With this knowledge, the study intends to assist the members of the Adventist Churches making up the Esmirna District of Cuíto in dealing with their challenges regarding the selection of potential spouses and in the end fulfilling the Seventh-day Adventist Church distinct mission. This will keep

¹⁷ Mike Beaumont, *Enciclopédia Bíblica Ilustrada*, s.v. “Marriages.”

the Esmirna Cuíto District in preaching the second coming of Jesus Christ in accordance with the message of the three angels in Revelation 14:6-7, as indicated in the church's mission statement.¹⁸

Delimitations of the Study

The study was carried out in the Esmirna District of the Seventh-day Adventist Church with church members who used empirical evidence and practice to put irregularities in context whenever possible. However, due to its connection to the mission, the study did concentrate on the biblical and theological analysis of the unequal yoke marriage, with a particular attention on the pastoral implications. The study also aimed at identifying the issues created by different approaches to the issues raised.

Methodology

The study includes a biblical and theological analysis of the specific issues in order to help understand the pastoral implications. It also examined diverse theological perspectives on mixed marriage and its consequences, employing a variety of theological and biblical study tools such as a brief exegesis of Greek texts, grammar, lexicons, and commentaries. Additionally, the writing of Ellen G. White was consulted by the researcher.

The following is the study's structure: The first chapter has an introduction that describes the background of the study, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the delimitations, and the methodology of the study (Chapter 1). It was followed by descriptions of the issues (Chapter 2), in-depth Biblical- Theological-

¹⁸ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Working Policy of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2012-2013* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2019), 29.

Analysis (Chapter 3), suggested solutions (Chapter 4), summary and conclusion (Chapter 5) and the appendices at the tail end. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are taken from the New King James Version (1997).

Definition of Terms

Interdenominational marriage is marriage between spouses who belong to different denominations of the same world religion, such as Christianity.

Interfaith marriage is a marriage between spouses who belong to different world religions, such as Christianity and Judaism

Mixed marriage is a general term that may imply to a marriage between two people who belong to different races, ethnicities, nationalities, cultures or religions.

The term “*yoke marriage*” is used in this paper only in the sense of association through marriage between people of different religious beliefs.

CHAPTER 2

ANALYSIS OF THE VIEWS OF DIFFERENT RELIGIONS ON MIXED MARRIAGES

Christians have different views on interfaith and interdenominational marriages which create escapism to harmony hence making Christianity irrelevant in modern society. Given the nature of the problem relating to “Unequal Yoked,” as outlined in 2 Corinthians 6:14, there is a need to clearly articulate the biblical position to help midwife this critical teaching and avoid further misunderstanding in local church settings. The evaluation of opposing viewpoints aids in charting a course on how the Adventist Church can address the issue, particularly in Angola’s central region.

This section of the study evaluates the various views of different religions on the concept of mixed marriages¹ in the Bible. Several academics and researchers state unequivocally that the degree of similarity and difference between spouses influences the results. The higher the similarities, the higher the probability of achieving marital stability. Ellen G. White addresses the subject with the requisite seriousness when she claims that unequal yoking in religious affairs is undesirable due to its repercussions and blatant disobedience to God’s Word. This is what happened to the antediluvians, who gradually intermingled with the disobedient, and as they mingled, they lost their

¹ Emil Sehling, “Marriage,” *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopaedia of Religious Knowledge*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book, 1968), 7:192-206; Roland Bainton, *Sex, Love and Marriage: A Christian Survey* (Glasgow, CA: William Collins Sons, 1958), 49-77; John C. Howell, *Can Interfaith Married Succeed?* (Nashville, TN: Southern Baptist Convention, 1993), 1-6.

peculiar and holy character, resulting in disastrous events. Religious values are emphasized above all others in the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah, two young people who feared God, as well as in the marriage of Esau, who broke the rules and married idolatrous women, and in the marriage of Moses and Zipporah.

When discussing the unequally yoked, Ellen G. White² cites various biblical texts to corroborate the apostle Paul's recommendations, most notably Amos 3:3, Deuteronomy 7:23, 24 and 26, Matthew 18:19, Luke 17:26-27, and 18:22. Two factors in her writings help to grasp the term of "unbeliever": a) not sharing the same religious beliefs and practices, and b) not accepting the truth for this time.

The official Adventist stand on this issue is that members should only get married to other members of the Adventist faith, and that pastors should not officiate in marriages contrary to this. The scriptural argument that being unequally yoked is a clear breach of divine norms at all times is supported by Adventist authors. Deep rifts can as a result of such marriages emerge over issues like offerings, church and home services, music, food, and leisure activities.

This idea is shared by authors of other faiths who are not Adventist. Some regard Paul's admonition as being at par with a divine command. The path of disobedience in this regard leads to a lot of sorrow and suffering. Despite this fact, there are still some who feel there are no issues with interfaith or interdenominational marriages because God forbids getting married to "unbelievers." Adventists are members of a Christian denomination with diverse beliefs; hence, it is relevant that they marry those who share these beliefs. An Adventist, more than any other Christian, must take great care in this regard to avoid marrying someone who does not

² Ellen G. White, *Mensagens Aos Jovens* (Santo André, Brazil: Casa Publicadora Brasileira, 1985), 464; Ellen G. White, *O Lar Adventista* (Tatuí, Brazil: Casa Publicadora Brasileira, 1990), 8:61-66; Ellen G. White, *Testemunhos Seletos* (Tatuí, Brazil: Casa Publicadora Brasileira, 1985), 3:574-577.

share their beliefs and religious practices. The gap between the relationship between a believer and a non-believer poses numerous challenges.³

Positions of the Major Biblical Religions and non-Christian Religions

It is evident that there exist many concerns on the rising challenge of marriages between believers and non-believers, whether among Protestants, Evangelicals or Catholics. The question that arises therefore, is; if churches typically adhere to biblical teachings, why then does the prevalence of unequal yoking keep increasing?

Disobeying the guidelines of the Bible is considered the main reason for this issue of marriage. Jaime Kemp, puts the biblical warning on the same basis of a divine commandment which unfortunately, is not taken seriously.⁴ Other authors discussing mixed marriages look at it from a social, economic, racial, national, and religious standpoint, giving the spiritual or religious part due priority or importance. Mónica Muoz and Carmen Reyes, for example, discuss solid and weak pairings in their book *A Look at the Interior of the Family* and comment that, “Whatever the situation, there is a significant propensity to conduct weddings between partners who are equivalent in terms of age, marital status, educational attainment, socioeconomic status of the family of origin, size of the city or town of origin, religion, and notions

³ Ellen G. White, *Testemunhos Seletos* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 2:123.

⁴ Clark E. Vincent, “Interfaith Marriages: Problem or Symptom?” in *Encounter: Love, Marriage and Family*, ed. Ruth E. Albrecht and E. Wilbur Bock (Boston, MA: Holbrook Press, 1972), 215.

of the family and other values.”⁵ They also identify religion as a quality of a strong partnership.⁶

Due to numerous factors, social and economic changes, urban configurations, and religious diversity do affect all societal structures and change everything. Comparative beliefs are essential if people want to take religious diversity and commitment seriously. Interfaith marriage is viewed differently by different religious groups; certain religions prohibit it while others appear to oppose intermarriage but permit it under certain circumstances or within certain restrictions. Numerous religious groups have yet to reach a conclusion on this matter, while others may consent it with certain conditions or limits. The lack of resolution on this matter within certain denominations appears to be perplexing in terms of interfaith marriage uniformity.

Some dispute the vow of engagement made during a marriage ceremony which is understood differently by various denominations when it comes to marriage, interfaith marriage, families, and related topics.⁷ The definition of interfaith marriage varies depending on one’s religious beliefs or denomination. Some denominations allow their members to marry people of different faiths with a few religious denominations, however, strictly prohibiting their members from marrying people of other faiths.

⁵ Juan Manuel De La Serna Herrera, *Pautas de Convivencia Étnica En La América Latina Colonial* (Castillo Palma, México: Norma Angélica, 2005), 177.

⁶ Dan Rodríguez García, *Inmigración y Mestizaje Hoy: Formación de Matrimonios Mixtos y Familias Transnacionales de Población Africana En Cataluña* (Bellaterra, Spain: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2004), 24:129.

⁷ Stuart M. Matlins and Arthur J. Magida, *How to Be a Perfect Stranger: The Essential Religious Etiquette Handbook* (Andover, MA: Skylight, 2006), 9.

As a result, there is a need for a biblical analysis to serve as a foundation for emphasizing the gaps and limitations of such propositions and provide a preferred biblical teaching that might resonate with the position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in this regard, specifically the Esmirna District Church in the Southwest Angola Union Mission.

To acknowledge the presence of religion in our lives and cultures as well as the existence of other peoples' religions does not require us to be professional scholars of religion.⁸ Religion has left its mark on history and is still influencing and being influenced by modern life.⁹ Religion "is the recognition of all obligations as divine commands."¹⁰ Judaism, Orthodox, Christianity and Islam are the major religious groups that are considered biblically based when defining an interfaith marriage.

The Orthodox Judaism View

Judaism has persisted for a very long time despite many changes, difficulties, and hardships, displaying an astonishing capacity to survive while staying faithful to its original nature:

Judaism is a tradition with a lengthy history ... the term 'Judaism' was not originally used in the Bible or early rabbinical literature. It was, in fact, introduced by the Hellenized Jews during the second century B.C.E. to describe their religious practices. It is noteworthy that Judaism paved the way for the concept of monotheism, it served and laid a solid foundation for the

⁸ Byron Earhart, ed., "Journeying through Religious Traditions: Religion and the Study of Religion," in *Religious Traditions of the World: A Journey through Africa, Mesoamerica, North America, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, China, and Japan* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1993), 2.

⁹ Ibid., 1.

¹⁰ Jennifer A. Glancy et al., *Introduction to the Study of Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 63.

development of both Christianity and Islam. All of this accomplishment, and more, make Judaism a religion worthy of study.¹¹

According to Judaism, the creator recognized that it was undesirable for man to be alone and as a result, God created the animals as prospective companions, still, none of these satisfied the basic desire of the vast majority of the lonesome for an equal, complementary partner.¹² Intimacy is a fundamental human need that only marriage, a divinely ordered union, satisfies and extends into the conception of new human life.

According to Paul Gwynne, “the relationship between a husband and wife is referred to as kiddushin in Jewish theology as a way for them to sanctify one another in an exclusive and sincere bond of love in accordance with God’s plan. The ancient Jewish custom of looking for one’s bashert (soul mate) reflects this idea of the God-given companion who fills the void in a person’s life. The prophetic tradition of Israel also adds a third level of significance to marriage: the marital love between the bride and groom being a representation of God’s transcendent love for Israel. In a certain sense, God and His people are married.”¹³

While referring to the dialogue between Jews and Christians, Richard Robinson says: “The need for continual communication, acceptance and respect on both sides remains a fundamental problem in Jewish-Christian relations. For Jews, this meant accepting the legitimacy of Judaism and rejecting Christian efforts to

¹¹ Richard D. Bank, *101 Things Everyone Should Know about Judaism: Beliefs, Practices, Customs and Traditions*, ed. James B. Wiggins (Avon, MA: Adams Media, 2005), 1.

¹² Paul Gwynne, *World Religions in Practice: A Comparative Introduction* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 177.

¹³ Ibid.

“proselytize” or evangelize Jews.”¹⁴ In contrast to mixed marriages, Judaism has maintained the same position throughout the centuries, with roots in the Old Testament, specifically Deuteronomy 7:1-4.¹⁵ The preservation of Jewish tradition is most important to Orthodox Jews. These marriages endanger the purity and strength of the Jewish faith.¹⁶ In considering the importance of marriage in Judaism, selecting a spouse requires careful thought—not just in terms of social and financial considerations, but also in terms of religious considerations. Traditionally, a matchmaker, or shadchan, would choose a potential spouse and set up a series of encounters to determine the compatibility of the couple. The Shadchan may be a relative, a rabbi, or even a specialist hired for this reason.¹⁷

Gwynne, says in line with the clear biblical restrictions against intermarriage with certain Gentile nations, Orthodox Judaism requires that the pair adopt the same Jewish faith.¹⁸ According to this perspective, the kiddushin ritual is of little significance if one of the spouses is a non-Jew and the marriage is not recognized by the Jewish religion. However, the number of interfaith marriages among Jews in the west is rapidly increasing nowadays, and Reform Rabbis will frequently permit such a marriage if the children are taught in the Jewish faith.¹⁹

¹⁴ Richard Robinson, “Judaism: Current Issues,” in *Handbook of Religion: A Christian Engagement with Traditions, Teachings, and Practices*, ed. Terry C. Muck, Harold A. Netland, and Gerald R. McDermott (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 137.

¹⁵ Vincent, “Interfaith Marriages,” 214.

¹⁶ Evelyn M. Duvall and Reuben Hill, *Being Married* (Boston, MA: Association Press, 1960), 80.

¹⁷ Gwynne, *World Religions in Practice*, 181.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

The Catholic View

The Catholic Church being a large church with members all over the world, it can be difficult to control all of them, even in the case of marriage. The Catholic Family Handbook contains an insightful chapter titled "How to Avoid a Mixed Marriage in Your Family," advises Catholic parents on how to help their children avoid a mixed marriage.²⁰ Kelly recommends to Catholic parents:²¹

1. *Educate him of its danger from an early age.* Of course, you should never adopt the fallacious notion that Catholics are "better" than other people. Nevertheless, you can emphasize how different we are.
2. *Give your youngster opportunities to naturally interact with other Catholics.* You may accomplish this by registering him for Catholic schools or by enticing him to get involved in the Newman Club in areas without Catholic education. Attempt to engage him in church activities.... Make an effort to establish friendships with other Catholic families in communities where they are a small minority and urge their children to socialize out with yours.
3. *Encourage your youngster not to date anyone who is not Catholic.*²²

Kelly concludes with a statement that any protestant minister or Jewish rabbi might fully endorse in thinking about his own young people: "Instruct your child that he must not date a non-Catholic long before he starts dating. When it is demonstrated as a tenet earlier than any individuals are involved, he will consent to these directions."²³ However, Catholics, on the other hand, are the ones who marry the most people from other churches.²⁴

²⁰ Kistler, *Marriage, Divorce And...*, 101.

²¹ George Anthony Kelly, *The Catholic Family Handbook* (Garden City, NY: Random House, 1965), 236-238.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Kistler, *Marriage, Divorce And...*, 102.

²⁴ John Burke, *Catholic Marriage* (Lagos, Nigeria: Society of Africa Mission, 1999), 108.

The Roman Catholic Church's position is rooted in the New Testament, specifically in Paul's admonition to the Corinthians, "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Cor 6:14). The gradual systematization of their position can be traced back to the Council of Elvira, which prohibited Christian girls from marrying "infidels, Jews, heretics, or pagan priests" at the beginning of the fourth century.²⁵

The final form was given later, through councils and writings, at the Council of Trent in the mid-16th century, with the implementation of the Prenuptial Agreement.²⁶ Catholics regard their religion as the "only true faith, the only form of Christianity that is complete and without error."²⁷ When a Catholic marries a non-Catholic, he automatically leaves the Church and loses his "true faith." A Catholic priest will only perform the ceremony if the non-Catholic signs the Prenuptial Agreement, promising that the children will be raised in the Catholic faith.²⁸

The Orthodox View

The Orthodox Church, like many other Christian churches, believe that "marriage unequivocally refers to the sacrament and inviolable union between a man and a woman, whose complementary traits serve as the foundation of procreation and propagate the human race."²⁹ However, their belief and concept of marriage is often perceived as a way to foster spiritual development among family members, including the children, contributing to spiritual development. "Orthodox Canon Law

²⁵ Vincent, "Interfaith Marriages," 215.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Duvall and Hill, *Being Married*, 78-80.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Matlins and Magida, *How to Be a Perfect Stranger*, 9.

discourages all types of intermarriage” because of these reasons. Furthermore, faithful Orthodox who intermarry lose their sacramental rights.³⁰

Orthodox Christians who choose to marry someone from a different religion

1. will not be permitted to marry in an Orthodox Church, and
2. have their sacramental rights taken away.³¹

Even so, before a marriage can take place between an Orthodox regular member and a member of another church, certain requirements must be met.

Orthodox Church doctrine holds as follows:

1. Their marriage ceremony has to be held at an Orthodox Church.
2. The non-Orthodox Christian partner has to be immersed in water and baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity.
3. The married couple must commit to raising their children in the Orthodox Church.³²

Finally, once a person is baptized in a church, they are no longer considered members of the previous church but of the new one, hence the Orthodox Church does not recognize interfaith marriage.

The Protestant View

Protestants argue against interfaith unions typically focusing on the risks of marital conflict and divorce as well as the threat of the member’s religious (denominational) faith being weakened.³³ Generally speaking, protestant designations

³⁰ Charles Joanides, *Inter-Religious Marriage and the Orthodox Church*, PDF file, n.d. <https://www.goarch.org/documents/32058/2576322/interfaithmarriage-interreligiousmarriage.pdf/eb7ab8-6dd0-4b73-96d6-9b7910eedaa6?t=1447160951000>.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Vincent, “Interfaith Marriages,” 215.

take the form of resolutions that contain warnings against interreligious marriages and emphasizes the risks of doing so with Catholics in particular.³⁴

Considering Catholicism to be a “serious theological error,” many Protestants do not want to expose their children to these “false teachings.” They want their children to grow up as men and women free, disagreeing with attitudes that imply a “dictatorial ecclesiastical rule.”³⁵

The Islamic View

The word Islam, which means submission in Arabic, is a term used to describe faith in the one God.³⁶ According to Abdalati, the Arabic root “SLM” which Islam is derived from also stands for peace, purity, submission, and obedience.³⁷ There is a clear and strong connection between the religious and original meanings of the word. One can only find true peace and enjoy enduring purity by bowing to God’s will and obeying His Law.³⁸ There is a debate about the origin and name of the religion, with some outsiders calling it “Mohammedanism” and referring to Muslims as “Mohammedans,” something that Muslims both reject and protest the use of.³⁹

³⁴ Vincent, “Interfaith Marriages,” 215.

³⁵ Duvall and Hill, *Being Married*, 80.

³⁶ Sarmad Qutub and Musa Qutub, “Islam: Adherent Essay,” in *Handbook of Religion: A Christian Engagement with Traditions, Teachings, and Practices*, ed. Terry C. Muck, Harold A. Netland, and Gerald R. McDermott (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 177.

³⁷ Hammudah Abdal-Ati and Hammudah Abdulati, *Islam in Focus* (Washington, DC: American Trust, 1975), 7.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

Therefore, the true name of the religion is Islam and those who follow it are

Muslims.⁴⁰ Their beliefs basically hold that:

1. Around 6000 years ago, Yakub instituted a series of birthing restrictions (all-black couples were forbidden from getting married, while all-brown couples were permitted). All of the black babies born to brown couples were killed. Babies of color were accepted;⁴¹
2. Islam allows a Muslim man to get married with up to four wives, and he may only marry a Muslim.⁴²

One of the religions that is rigid about its beliefs is Islam. Muslims adhere to their religion with great rigor. Muslim girls in particular are devout to their religion, and even though they do not have a Muslim boyfriend, they are unable to accept marriage to someone of another faith. Nevertheless, there are notable exceptions where a Muslim marries a non-Muslim.

According to a comprehensive agreement, a religiously sterile Muslim woman is officially prohibited from marrying a non-Muslim man regardless of his religion, while a Muslim man is permitted to join in matrimony a non-Muslim woman, normally a Christian or a Jew, who is regarded by the Islamic schools as “People of the Book.” Allah claims:

It is advisable not to marry idolatresses until they have converted to your faith. A believing slave is preferable to an idolater, even if they are pleasing to you. The same applies for slaves. Idolaters lead to destruction, while Allah invites

⁴⁰ Abdal-Ati and Abdulati, *Islam in Focus* 8.

⁴¹ Steven Tsoukalas, “Nation of Islam: History, Beliefs, Practices,” in *Handbook of Religion: A Christian Engagement with Traditions, Teachings, and Practices*, ed. Terry C. Muck, Harold A. Netland, and Gerald R. McDermott (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 503.

⁴² Larry Poston, “Islam: Current Issues,” in *Handbook of Religion: A Christian Engagement with Traditions, Teachings, and Practices*, ed. Terry C. Muck, Harold A. Netland, and Gerald R. McDermott (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 174.

us to the garden and offers forgiveness through His grace. Allah's revelations are clear to humanity so that they may remember. (Qur'an 2:221)⁴³

Islam followers use study tools to learn from the Bible and Qur'an. Despite the fact that the letter or Christian Bible is considered toxic, it is quoted and used as study aids. Dietary restrictions, abstinence from adultery, alcohol, and drugs, attendance at NOI⁴⁴ schools, and running intra-NOI commerce and industry are all examples of NOI practices.

Seventh-day Adventist View

Christians have expressed a great deal of interest in elevating the sanctity and dignity of marriage as a result of the moral climate in society. Marriage has always been a risky endeavour, especially for those who are willing to disobey divine instruction.⁴⁵ Many Christian authors have made an effort to add to the church's concern over the problem. They offer contributions that are both therapeutic in character and preventive in orientation.⁴⁶ A mixed marriage can be difficult due to threats, prohibitions, jealousy, and the subject of offerings, church services, and house services.⁴⁷

⁴³ American Society for Muslim Advancement, "What Does Qur'an Say about the Interfaith Marriage?" last modified 2023, accessed April 17, 2023, <http://www.asma-lamrabet.com/articles/what-does-the-qur-an-say-about-the-interfaith-marriage/>.

⁴⁴ [The Nation of Islam] (NOI) is an Islamic and Black Nationalist movement founded in Detroit, Michigan by Wallace D. Fard Muhammad in 1930. National Archives, "The Nation of Islam," last modified 2016, accessed July 5, 2022, <https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/black-power/nation-of-islam>.

⁴⁵ Gerald Wheeler, *Wisdom: Timeless Treasures from Proverbs* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 143.

⁴⁶ C. S. Lovett, *Unequally Yoked Wives* (Baldwin Park, CA: Personal Christianity, 1968); Reinhold Bietz, *Happiness Under One Roof* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1977), 43-44.

⁴⁷ Raymond H. Woolsey, *Planning the Ideal Home* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1975), 30.

Things are particularly challenging in marriages with children. While the other wants to take the kids somewhere else, one wants to take them to church. These tensions become stronger each week. When one of the Christian spouses is an Adventist, the pressure is multiplied because the choices of music, food, fun, and leisure differ. The cult family, which should be a blessing to the family, is frequently a source of contention and mockery on the part of the unbeliever. Children's religious education suffers in such circumstances.

Reinhold Bietz provides four elements that can help an Adventist who marries a Catholic, or a Baptist who marries a Jew appreciate the problems they face:

1. They need to be quite mature. If you both have strong convictions in your beliefs, they will need an extra amount of patience and grace to live in peace.
2. Need of superior ability to deal with common and uncommon problems, mainly with the intrusion of relatives of the other religion.
3. Need of the ability to rationally discuss problems that arise solely because of the difference in convictions. These are generally more difficult to resolve.
4. Children in these marriages are often the focus of disputes between the parents.⁴⁸

Although there are others, the main issue with these unions is exposed when the children are born. The main question is, where will they be baptized? Will they be baptized by immersion or sprinkling? What kind of fundamental education will they receive and where will they obtain it?

Alfonso Valenzuela discusses various studies that confirm religious differences as predictors of marital instability. This includes both the union of believers and non-believers, as well as believers of other denominations. Marriages

⁴⁸ Natanael Bernardo P. Moraes, *Teologia e Ética Do Sexo Para Solteiros* (Engenheiro Coelho, Brazil: Imprensa Universitária Adventista, 2000), 129.

with a strong religious component have the highest level of marital happiness. People who are deeply religious are less likely to divorce and separate.⁴⁹

Today, people are mixing and socializing like never before, thanks to global migration and modern communication technologies.⁵⁰ The Adventist Church has spread worldwide, bringing together people of all races, cultures, and languages. This combination results in two overlapping marriages.⁵¹

The Seventh-day Adventist Church acknowledges that marriage is a divinely instituted lifelong commitment between a man and a woman in a loving relationship. A marriage should only be entered into between partners who have the same faith because, in the eyes of a Christian, it is a commitment to both God and the spouse. This relationship between a Christian and His church is built on reciprocal love, honour, respect, and responsibility.⁵²

A major factor for those considering marriage is their religious affiliation. Families who attend church together frequently remain together. The Seventh-day Adventist Church believes that marriage is a divine institution created by God and supported by the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White. The church manual

⁴⁹ Alfonso Valenzuela, *Juventud Enamorada* (Berrien Springs, MI: Promise, 1998), 72.

⁵⁰ Chantal J. Klingbeil, "Mixed Marriages among Adventists," *Dialogue*, last modified 2023, accessed April 11, 2023, https://circle.adventistlearningcommunity.com/files/CD2008/CD2/dialogue/articles/14_2_klingbeil_e.htm.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe...: A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988), 294.

stipulates that, “the Church, however, recognizes that each individual member has the right to choose their own marriage partner and this decision is respected.”⁵³

Additionally, it is evident that if someone decides to select a partner from another church, they must be aware of the fact that, “a pastor of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, who has committed to upholding the above principle, should not be expected to perform the marriage. If a member does enter such a marriage, the church is to demonstrate love and concern with the purpose of encouraging the couple toward complete unity in Christ.”⁵⁴ The Seventh-day Adventist Church encourages their members to choose a partner in marriage within the church, based on the same understanding⁵⁵ of the Bible’s meaning. Reinforcing and supporting that position on who can get married in the church, *Guía de Procedimientos Para Ministros* [The Guide to Procedures for Ministers] quotes that the congregation may adopt a rule such as this: “Any couple in which both are Seventh-day Adventists; any couple who are non-Adventists. The couple must be willing to maintain Adventist norms in the church. No one will be authorized to marry in the church when one is Adventist, and the other is not.”⁵⁶

It is clear that only people who profess the same religion and respect the rules of the church can marry in the SDA Church. However, the relationship itself must be based on the priorities, standards, and social norms associated with homogamy if it is to enhance the marriage’s beauty and strength. The effort and understanding needed

⁵³ General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists, 1990), 148.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Kistler, *Marriage, Divorce And...*, 103.

⁵⁶ Asociación Ministerial de la Asociación General de los Adventistas del Séptimo Día, *Guía de Procedimientos Para Ministros*, 326.

to succeed in mixed marriages are much greater.⁵⁷ Hope for eternal life is based on shared religious convictions.

Interfaith Marriage and Its Challenges: The Adventist Perspective

It has been observed that the definition of a concept plays a significant role in its application within research. Several individuals define interfaith marriage on the basis of their interest. Faith may consist of a mental belief or cognitive reasoning that leads to conclusions; alternatively, it can be a sensation or effective sentiments of the heart. Interfaith marriage is a partnership in which two people of different faiths marry.

This section discusses interfaith marriage, its understanding, and its difficulties, with a particular emphasis on the Seventh-day Adventist Church's view that discourages its members from getting married to people of other faiths. However, it is all about the Adventist members who marry outside the Church; "If a Seventh-day Adventist minister refused to officiate at a marriage ceremony of an Adventist marrying a non-Adventist, would an Adventist feel at ease with a Buddhist priest officiating at an Adventist's wedding?"⁵⁸

It has become increasingly common for people from different religions and denominations to marry each other; the culture of having meetings among people of different faiths has become norm practices even in the Adventist Church. However, "the risk of forming an alliance with the world is high. Satan is fully aware that the

⁵⁷ Kistler, *Marriage, Divorce And...*, 103.

⁵⁸ Samuel Koranteng-Pimpim, *Here We Stand: Evaluating New Trends in the Church* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2005), 48.

hours that mark the end of many young men and women's religious experience and usefulness are the hours when they marry. They have been lost to Christ."⁵⁹

Despite the fact that this type of marriage involves a lot of people, its implications arise immediately or a little later. Paul's teachings occasionally discuss the wedding of unbelievers. "If any brother of yours has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, she must not divorce him" (1 Cor 7:12). In this sentence, Paul underlines the approach to separation and in the same line he also claims that the husband cannot divorce his wife if she accepts the gospel while they are cohabitating.

The Bible restricts this condition to the case where both the husband and wife are still living. "The point of the illustration is that death and death alone release a person from the bond of marriage."⁶⁰ Paul says that "a woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. However, if a husband passes away, she is free to mate with whoever she pleases, provided that he belongs *to the Lord*" (Cor 7:39). "Paul's illustration sheds light on his view of marriage as a lifelong covenant which can be terminated only by death,"⁶¹ indeed since the God-seekers joined the church, it's possible that some of them are already married, with the spouse refusing to join the Seventh-day Adventist Church. If a person embraces the teaching of Adventism, they are not permitted to divorce their partner if they are of a different faith, or their partner is not an Adventist.

⁵⁹ Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1952), 66.

⁶⁰ Samuele Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant: A Biblical Study on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 2001), 25–26.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

The church's stance on young single Seventh-day Adventists considering marriage is consistent with what God told the Israelites: they must not depart from their beliefs. God has given the mandate that individuals who choose to follow His teachings or to be His people must wed another believer of the same faith. "God intended marriage to be as permanent as Christ's relationship with the Church."⁶² It is assumed that a young person raised in a Seventh-day Adventist family will learn about these hazards through his or her family, just as Israel's family did. The parents of Israel's children imparted to them knowledge of God's plan for their nation.

However, the church recommends that members follow Scripture, despite the fact that everyone has the freedom to select their own spouse in a marriage. Each one has the right to choose who they will marry, but the benefits or drawbacks of a sensible or dumb choice only become apparent when the individual starts to feel them.

Adventist Position on Interfaith Marriage

The SDA Church's understanding on interfaith marriage is consistent with biblical counsel on how people of different faiths should interact. The core doctrine of the Seventh-day Adventist Church explains the covenant of marriage and its parallels and claims: Jesus confirmed that marriage is a lifetime partnership between a man and a woman in a loving companionship that was divinely ordained in Eden. For a Christian, marriage is a commitment to both God and their spouse, and they believe that only those who have the same faith should get married.⁶³

God intended for the partnership or the covenant between man and woman to be eternal, yet the outcomes of today's marriage digress from God's intention. Many

⁶² *Church Manual* (1990), 149.

⁶³ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* (1988), 22.

denominations have approved the union of spouses of different faiths, which has accelerated the global divorce rate.

The intimacy in a marriage extends beyond the contract, the two merge in a mysterious manner, not only physically but also spiritually. Marriage is a symbol of the union between Christ and the church, not just a social or biological construct. The community is held responsible for the marriage itself by both the husband and wife.⁶⁴

The intention of God when He created the first family was for it to be the model for all generations, so that this intimacy would remain eternal.

Christian spouses are uncertain about the outcome of their marriages; thus the marital covenant is a covenant of faith. The only thing a spouse can be sure of is whether or not they have solemnly pledged themselves to God for a lifetime alliance relationship in which they will belong together as long as they live together.⁶⁵

The desire to live in accordance with God's will implies other factors, but there are choices or decisions that someone can make for themselves for their life of partnership according to His will. Keep in mind that marriage is not a part-time arrangement or covenant; the Bible requires the married to be together for as long as they are still alive.

The Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy are replete with counsel and guidance on interfaith weddings. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible forbids the mixing of God's offspring with idolaters and the world's unfaithful inhabitants. Additionally, the voice of God through Ellen G. White disputes and cautions those on the path to heaven, not to associate or to mix with individuals who are unwilling to uphold God's commands. "The relationship between a family from Judah and God's enemies had

⁶⁴ Mark Regnerus, Naomi Schaefer Riley, and Russell Moore, "Is Interfaith Marriage Always Wrong, Given that the Bible Teaches Us Not to Be 'Unequally Yoked'?" Christianity Today, last modified 2013, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2013/07/is-interfaith-marriage-always-wrong-given-that-bible-teache/>.

⁶⁵ Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant*, 42.

proven to be a trap for the populace. Several other people also got married to pagan people.”⁶⁶ White adds greater detail to what she already stated: “many who profess to love and fear God choose to follow the bend of their own minds rather than take a council of infinite wisdom”⁶⁷ in this view, people let their minds rule them instead of taking advantage of the right moment to ask God for something. The issue is that people are ignoring God and following their own judgments even within the Christian Church.

Therefore, a partner with a common faith is the only one who can make the covenant of enduring life and success between partners. In order for the family to carry out the divine design, God needs marriage to persist. Why does a family with members who share the same religious beliefs have greater chances of being happier than one with members who hold different ways of life, beliefs, and values?

Brief Overview of Esmirna District

The District of Esmirna of Seventh-day Adventist Church is located in the South Africa Indian Ocean Division of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is in the Central Mission of Angola Union Mission, which geographically is located in Cuíto, Bié Province. In the nine churches that make up the District of Esmirna, 98% of the people are of the Umbundo ethnic group, with the remaining 2% divided between Nganguelas, Cokwes and Lwimbi.

The District of Esmirna, is formed by Organized Churches such as: Esmirna, which is the central of the district, located in the Street Silva Porto, and within the city of Cuíto, Macedonia, Emanuel, Betel, Boa Esperança, Bereia, Mounts of Olives,

⁶⁶ Ellen G. White, *Southern Watchman: Heathen Plots*, Complete Published Ellen G White Writings [CD ROM] (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 2012).

⁶⁷ White, *The Adventist Home*, 61.

Nazaré and Maranata, It has 3193 Baptized Members, who make up 0.3% of the population of the territory where these churches are.

Cuíto the capital of Bié, is divided into five Communes, with the main Commune (Cuíto) having a population of 836,265, the Commune of Cunje having 70,824, and Trumba having 15,751. It is within this territory and population that the District of Esmirna is located, the total population covering the territory of the District of Esmirna is around 922 840 in the northern part of Cuito, Cunje, and Trumba.

The country's economy, which was heavily dependent on mining and agriculture provided a rich selvage life, all of which were destroyed during the civil war. The city of Cuíto was one of the most affected by this war because some of the fiercest battles were fought there. Agriculture, fishing, and trade are the main backbones of the economy with corn being the main good for export. Other religions and denominations in Cuíto, aside from the Seventh-day Adventist Church, include Roman Catholic, Protestant, Pentecostal, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, Evangelicals: IECA and IEIA, with the IECA being more prevalent and influent in Cuíto and the entire Province due to historical factors, especially in the establishment of the Missions. However, with the emergence of peace and the growth of the commercial sector, the Islam is becoming more noticeable, although not recognized by the Angolan State.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Angola has grown in several locations since its establishment in 1924, but the church's growth rate has greatly increased since 1975, owing to the civil war that began from 1975 and ended in 2022. It is worth noting that the war affected church growth here massively since the city saw some of the fiercest battles which also affected the education and learning of children. But today the situation has changed, many baptisms have taken place leading to the

establishment of Sabbath schools within the District of Esmirna. This has resulted in the emergence of many public and private institutions of secondary and higher education, and the establishment of an international University. Many people as a result have settled within the city and studying. It is also worth noting that many Adventist members are in the public sectors of all areas be it social, economic or military. What is worth noting in the religious scene is that in the post war period, Cuito was also affected by the proliferation of a series of new religious movements, most of which were of a Pentecostal or charismatic nature.

The city of Cuito borders Kwanza Sul to the north, Cuando-Cubango to the south, Moxico to the east, and Huíla and Huambo to the west, where the Southwest Angola union of Seventh-day Adventists is based, Central Mission, and the Seminary are located approximately 180 kilometres by car. The existence of the Benguela Railway in that city, particularly in the territory of the district of Esmirna, allows for the transportation of passengers who want to go to the three provinces in the east of Angola and those who want to go from the east to the capital as well as to the central and south of the country. Bié being the centre of Angola, those who want to reach the Republic of Zambia and Congo, pass through the territory of the district of Esmirna in the city of Cuito, through the Satellite Commune of Cunje, a station that facilitates taking the train. It is inhabited by many people of different cultures, ethnicities, and religions. It is also worth noting that Angola being an African country has diverse cultures, traditions, and religions.

Culturally for the Ovimbundu, since ancient times marriage has the primacy of taking place between those of the same ethnic group with mixed marriages with members of different languages, cultures, tribes, having been the target of many negotiations that the interested man and woman need to do together with their

families that due to several factors (intervention of a person close and respected by the family of one of the parties such as: Uncle, Aunt or member of the ethnic community arranged by the partners) the relatives sometimes end up giving in and at times, those interested choose to separate or to move forward without the consent of the relatives. In the marriage rite, the man is symbolized by a bow and arrow (*ohondji lusongo*) to indicate masculinity and the woman by an “*ohumba*” symbolizing femininity.

For two people to get married, it is the man who must express his interest in the woman in the first place. It’s not the other way around. Thus, the first “initiator” or “provocateur” of a marriage process is the man (*ulume eye ukwakufetika*). A man’s initial plan to like a woman can only come to fruition upon her consent when she crowns her desire. This process of initiation for the male (*fetikilo-Feti*) and completion by the female (*Ukwakwoya-coya*) is symbolized by the figures *Feti* and *Coya*. Therefore, it can be said that *Feti* is a male figure and *Coya* a female figure. However, the Bantu marriage that takes place in Cuíto seems institutionally monogamous and permissively polygamous.

Having served as pastor in the province of Bié for about 8 years, and for two consecutive years in the Ecclesiastical District of Esmirna - Cuíto, in the same province, I observed that among the reasons for loss of members are fornication, and marriages with non-Adventists in steep and worrying rates for nearly 68% of members.

These observations were made mainly in the year 2021 during pastoral visits, meetings with elders, meetings to prepare agendas for the church committee or meetings with the directorates of the departments such as youth ministry and family life. Most of the non-Adventist members did absent themselves from these meetings, it was also noted that some requested to leave long before the church committees

ended. It was also evident in the poor participation in Sabbath School and Bible studies. All these caused a serious concern amongst the Church leadership.

In addition, it was also noted that there are signs of intermarriage between some Muslims from African regions with some members in the district, and what is causing regrettable outcry within the church membership is that even some Church officials are following the same practice. It is evident that there are more women than men in the church as a result of the war and those women who marry non-members cite lack of men who are members as the main reason for their marrying non-members. The women further argue that there is no big difference between these non-members and members and the major difference is only on the day of worship. Such comments from baptized members and what the church officials do and practice with the non-members is causing a lot of friction amongst church members thus making pastoral work complicated within the district of Esmirna. Such activities and happenings have caused a lot of concern raising issues that need to be studied hence this study.

CHAPTER 3
BIBLICAL VIEW ON THE INTERFAITH
AND INTERDENOMINATIONAL
MARRIAGES

The union of a man and his wife is a commandment from God himself. He had the first marriage and sanctified his family and blessed the first home and family. In Matthew 19:6, Jesus stated, “What God has joined together, let no man put asunder.” Since it is God Himself who established the marriage relationship (Gen 2:22-24), only Him can provide appropriate marriage guidance.

The Bible presents marriage as a symbol of the unification of God and His people.¹ A person is able to understand the aspects of the relationship between divinity and humanity through the unity, self-sacrificing love, and interpersonal dependence that are frequently associated with romantic relationships. This is done through the use of the symbols of God’s covenants with Israel and the Church as the mother and body of Christ.²

It is also described as a contract or alliance that governs a personal relationship within a structure, institution, or organization that becomes public and is based on fulfilled and accepted promises.³ The Lord emphasized the significance of

¹ H. W. Perkin, “Costumes Do Casamento Nos Tempos Bíblicos,” *Enciclopédia Histórico-Teológica Da Igreja Cristã*, ed. Walter A Elwell (São Paulo, Brazil: Vida Nova, 1993), 240.

² Robert K. Bower and Gary L. Knapp, “Marriage,” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 265.

³ D. J. Atkinson, “Divórcio,” *Enciclopédia Histórico-Teológica Da Igreja Cristã* (São Paulo, Brazil: Vida Nova, 1993), 484.

marriage by using the marriage relationship as an example of the close connection between Him and everyone who believes in Him.

God's concern for His children's marriages must be disciplined for these reasons, which is why He established standards for selecting a partner. The most intimate unit that may exist between two people is the marriage relationship. In God's original design, this union was supposed to last longer so that a man and a woman would eventually fuse together.

According to the Bible, "therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Gen 2:24). The introduction of sin into the world has repercussions for the family, affecting both their intra-family ties and the bond between the creature and their Creator (Gen 3).

One component of coherence in the marriage must exist for there to be a perfect union between a man and a woman. For a marriage to serve its divine purposes, the divine presence acts as a unifying force in the family, forming a spiritual element that is essential.⁴ In a mixed marriage, one partner doesn't care about doing God's will and following His instructions.

Interfaith marriage, also known as interreligious marriage, is a marriage between a Christian and a non-Christian, such as a Jew or a Muslim. In this section, we will explore the biblical views on interfaith marriage in more detail and examine their implications for contemporary Christian couples who face this issue. The material of this section is divided into two parts: 1) the Old Testament views on the interfaith marriages, and 2) the New Testament views on the interfaith marriages with a special emphasis on 2 Corinthians 6:14-15.

⁴ Bruno Ognibeni, "El Matrimonio En El Antiguo Testamento," *WordPress*, last modified 2013, accessed May 11, 2023, <https://ferminjgm.files.wordpress.com/2009/01/antiguo-testamento-cap-1-y-2-espanol>.

Biblical Insights on the Interfaith Marriages

The primary responsibility of the authors of the Old Testament was to highlight the perils of interfaith marriage. From the moment Israel became God's chosen people until the Babylonian captivity's restoration, during the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah, the warnings have been present throughout the nation's history.⁵

In the Antediluvian Period

The first allusion to a relationship that can be considered as marriage, or at least as a sexual union between creatures of two distinct groups, emerges early in the Bible's first chapters. The Bible relates in the context of events preceding the flood (Gen 6:2), "that the sons of God saw daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose" (v. 2). Many authors expressed their worries and struggled to adequately explain this report. What exactly do "sons of God" and "daughters of men" mean? There are several ways to discuss this scenario.⁶

Some think that this mixing will include celestial angels, who will be "the sons of God," and human humans, who will be "the daughters of men." The angels participating in this circumstance could be the rebel angels,⁷ the giants Nephilim (v. 4).

⁵ Otto J. Baab, "Marriage," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (New York, NY: Abingdon, 1962), 3:281, 282.

⁶ Before and during the War between the Northern and Southern states, a contentious alternative was popularized among North American racists. They can deny black people a divine origin by identifying "the daughters of men" with "black women" in order to promote their views that white people are a better race. as cited in B. H. Carrol, *El Libro de Genesis*, 3rd ed. (El Paso, TX: Casa Bautista, 1966), 206-207.

⁷ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 248.

According to some, these “sons of God” represent a unique group of men who serve as kings, rulers, or other powerful figures.⁸ Others interpret this story as referring to the typical union of men and women. The daughters of other men, in this case the descendants of Cain or “the daughters of men,” were married to the sons of certain men, who would be the descendants of Seth, “the sons of God.”⁹ The marriage between two antagonistic groups—the Sethites, who worship God, and the Cainite rebels—would be the issue at hand. The idea that “the sons of God” would be the “great” or “powerful” descendants of Cain, as opposed to the “insignificant” women of Seth’s lineage, is held by some, who reverse the preceding position.¹⁰

The most obvious option is to realize that “the daughters of men,” the disobedient descendants of Cain, are “the daughters of men,” whereas “the children of God” are people, the descendants of Seth and worshipers of Jehovah. It would be consistent with the course of events to hold this belief. It is implausible that spiritual creatures could have a child after mating with a human.¹¹ Even if it’s challenging to explain what these verses represent,¹² or it is not impossible, to dogmatize about what

⁸ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 263-264; Merril F. Unger, *Nuevo Manual Biblico de Unger* (Grand Rapids, MI: Editorial Portavoz, 1987), 37.

⁹ Derek Kidner, *Gênesis: Introdução e Comentário*, Série Cultura Bíblica (São Paulo, Brazil: Vida Nova e Mundo Cristão, 1967), 78; Donald E. Gowan, *Genesis 1-11: From Eden to Babel*, International Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 82-84.

¹⁰ Joseph S. Exell, *Biblical Illustrator*, vol. 1, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book, 1977), 401; Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17*, 265.

¹¹ Exell, *Biblical Illustrator*, vol. 1, *Genesis*, 401; James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis, Volume 1: Creation and Fall (Genesis 1-11)*, Boice’s Expository Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1982), 245.

¹² Cuthbert A. Simpson and Walter Russel Bowie, “The Book of Genesis,” *Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1952), 1:533-534.

“sons of God” means in these,¹³ this is thought to be the first instance of unequal yoking in the Bible involving a marriage. The conflicting differences between “sons of God” and “daughters of men” exist in temperament, profession, moral character, and everlasting destiny, which amply and illustrates the diametrically opposed positions in which the two groups interact.¹⁴

The divine attitude of destroying just the world and its inhabitants (vv. 3-7) leads to the conclusion that there is no divine condemnation of the attitudes of the “sons of God,” and that only the “daughters of men” will be punished. But this mixed union of entities in opposing positions is identified as the source of divine wrath and, as a result, the reason for mankind’s destruction by flood.¹⁵ This reinforces the view that the Bible reader is reading the first account of intermarriage in human history in these verses. In an externalization of the divine feeling, as stated in verses 3-7, God’s wrath becomes apparent, which would have been one of the causes of humanity’s disastrous annihilation.

In the Patriarchal Period

There are numerous instances from the era of the patriarchs where the preservation of marriage inside the family unit may be observed.¹⁶ To address the issues involved in a marriage brings out the presence of the leader of the family, invariably a man.

¹³ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17*, 265.

¹⁴ Exell, *Biblical Illustrator*, vol. 1, *Genesis*, 401-402.

¹⁵ Simpson and Bowie, “Genesis,” 1:533-534; Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17*, 262-263.

¹⁶ Marriages between relatives are depicted in the following biblical passages: Abraham married Sarah, his half-sister (Gen 20:12); Nahor married Milcah, his niece (Gen 11:26-29); Isaac married Rebekah, a cousin (Gen 24:15); Esau married Maalath, a cousin (Gen 28:9); Jacob married Rachel and Leah, cousins (Gen 29); Amram married his aunt Jochebed (Num 36).

We observe Abraham's concern to find a wife for his son Isaac outside the environment of religious and cultural differences in which he lived (Gen 24), we also see Isaac himself guiding his son Jacob to look for a wife within the same family (Gen 28). This proves to be real when Esau chooses two Canaanite women as his wives, something which causes some family difficulties (Gen 26:34-35).

In the story of Isaac's marriage, Abraham directs his loyal servant, who is tasked with finding a bride for the boy, through two solicitations. The first is that Isaac should not marry the women of their region. Through a solemn oath, Abraham formed an agreement with the servant: "You will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell; but you shall go to my country and to my family and take a wife for my son Isaac (vv. 3-4)." The second request from the old father was for the servant to prevent Isaac from returning to Mesopotamia¹⁷ (vv. 5-6). As he gave these instructions, Abraham was concerned about his personal obligation to uphold the terms of the covenant he had made with God by founding a distinct nation exclusively for the Lord God (Gen 12:1-3).

With all the religious considerations involved, Isaac's marriage to an idolater Canaanite might have had an impact on the terms of the covenant's creation. As the covenant made between God and Abraham was based on the Promised Land, Isaac's potential return to Mesopotamia would also imperil its fulfillment.¹⁸

We can imagine what an idolatrous spouse may do to deceive Isaac the young man after his mother Sarah passed away (Gen 23 and 24:67). The actions and attitudes of Isaac during this incident and the sacrifice on Mount Moriah (Gen 22:1-

¹⁷ Raymond F. Collins, "Marriage," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 562-563.

¹⁸ E. A. Speiser, ed., *Genesis*, Anchor Bible 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 183.

12) may indicate total obedience to the will of God. Isaac showed full and voluntary obedience at the outset of marriage to a person with a similar religious background by accepting fatherly leadership.

Isaac was fortunate because he patiently allowed God to guide his decision for a life partner. After agreeing on a course of action with God, Abraham's servant tells the father of the girl everything that happened on the route to Mesopotamia. He furthers the notion that, by solemn pledge, it was forbidden for him to take a wife for Isaac from among the idolaters of the area when he describes the specifics of his task: "Now my master made me swear, saying, You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, ... but you shall go to my father's house and to my family, and take a wife for my son" (Gen 24:37-38).

The progression of the story shows how much God cares. He is concerned for His children's marital health. It can be argued about Isaac's marriage that heaven orchestrated that marriage.¹⁹ According to the biblical story, Rebekah provided him with comfort and support, especially following the passing of her mother (Gen 24:67).

The story of the couple's two sons presents very varied nuances. While Esau engages in mixed marriages with the women of the region, the youngest son of the couple, Jacob, is forced to depart his parents' home because of intrigues with his own brother (Gen 27:41-28:5), and he finds refuge with his mother's family, where he ends up getting married (Gen 29).

The account of Esau's marriages shows the difficulties that mixed marriages can bring to families. Esau was forty years old when he married two Hittite women, Judith and Basemath. These choices brought serious family problems that are not

¹⁹ Carrol, *El Libro de Genesis*, 361.

identified in the biblical account, but what is certain is that Esau's two Hittite wives "became bitterness of spirit to Isaac and to Rebekah" (Gen 26:34-35).

Rebekah expresses her unhappiness with the daughters-in-law to Isaac when the two brothers disagree: "I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth; if Jacob takes a wife of the daughters of the land, what good will my life be to me?" According to Genesis 27:46, the situation appears to be very serious.

After providing Jacob with blessings, Isaac commands him to go: "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan...go to Pad 'an Aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother's father; and take yourself a wife from there of the daughters of Laban your mother's brother (Gen 28:1-2). The fact that Jacob is the continuation of the lineage of the alliance justifies the clear demonstration of concern in choosing the ideal wife for him.

On the other hand, Esau is even more enraged by the brother's blessing and advice. With a rebellious attitude: "He went to Ishmael and took Ma'halath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebahjoth, to be his wife in addition to the wives he had (Gen 28:9)". Even though Ma'halath was an Ishmaelite,²⁰ of Abraham's lineage, was it not the desire of the parents, already manifest in the directions given to Jacob, who sought a wife from among the peoples of the earth.

Esau and Jacob's different approaches to looking for spouses highlight the challenges a mixed marriage brings to the family unit. Disputes can start with disagreements, hostility, and intolerance and have core effects on the stability of a family unit.

²⁰ Kidner, *Gênesis*, 165.

In the Mosaic Period

New guidelines surrounding Israelite marriages emerged during Moses' leadership. Marriages between members of the same family were restricted because of consanguineous marriages.²¹ Restrictions on relationships with foreigners were reinforced because of its importance in the formation of the Israelite nation. Such restrictions on the choice of a mate were also emphasized to help ensure the continuity of the Hebrews as a nation. A strong opposition is found at this period against intermarriage with foreigners.²²

Marriage with Canaanites was clearly prohibited in the context of the conquest of Canaan (Exod 34:11-16; Deut 7; Josh 23:11-13). God's concern for His people is evident in the language used by Moses to warn the Israelites. "You shall make no covenant with them...nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son (Deut 7:2-3)." The greatest of all dangers was that such unions would "turn your sons away from following Me" (Deut 7:4).

Through a marital partnership, intimacy with those people would be the same as self-prostitution or spiritual adultery.²³ And this is the term used by Moses in his warning: "Lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land... and you take of her for your sons, and his daughters play the harlot with their gods and make your sons play harlot with their gods" (Exod 34:15-16).

²¹ See Leviticus 18:6-18; 20:10-21 for restrictions on in-law marriages, which forbids marriage between parents and children, brothers and sisters. Previously practiced relations between uncles and nephews were likewise outlawed.

²² Bower and Knapp, "Marriage," 422.

²³ R. Alan Cole, *Êxodo: Introdução e Comentário*, Série Cultura Bíblica (São Paulo, Brazil: Vida Nova e Mundo Cristão, 1990), 223.

The prohibitions against mingling with idolatrous peoples served two purposes: the first one was to avoid religious syncretism, and the other one was to strengthen Jehovah's worship.²⁴ The divine concern in providing these principles was not based on ethnic, socioeconomic, or even cultural factors, but rather on religious factors.

Joshua led the military operations in the takeover of the promised land. At that time, the Lord God gave the order to destroy the Canaanites,²⁵ in addition to their sanctuaries,²⁶ as the cities were conquered. The emphasis placed on these instructions amplifies the risks that Israel, a nation yet in its embryonic stages, would encounter if its children formed contacts with the Canaanites through familial ties.²⁷ Here, it is amazing to see how concerned God is with preserving the authenticity and continuity of the Israelite faith, which runs the risk of being lost if unapproved relationships take place.²⁸

The Canaanites were being judged because of their patent iniquity and the Israelites were not to mix with them. Mixed marriages could not only corrupt the common people of Israel but would also place them on an equal footing with the

²⁴ Madeleine S. Miller and J. Lane Miller, "Marriage," eds., *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1973), 422.

²⁵ Clyde T. Francisco, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, Shield Bible Study Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1964), 39-40; Ian Cairns, *Word and Presence: A Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1992), 88-90.

²⁶ J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronômio: Introdução e Comentário*, Série Cultura Bíblica (São Paulo, Brazil: Vida Nova e Mundo Cristão, 1985), 125.

²⁷ Matthew Henry, *Mathew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 1, *Genesis to Deuteronomy* (Wilmington, DE: Sovereign Grace, 1972), 440, 441; John I. Durhan, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary 3 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 460-461.

²⁸ Baab, "Marriage," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 281.

inhabitants of the land. To allow the divine judgment descends to annihilate the Canaanites, Israel would run the risk of being included as well.²⁹

The Hebrews had already been subjected to Egyptian captivity, which had a variety of physical and spiritual implications. For hundreds of years, they had struggled to worship the Lord God of their fathers in the midst of Egypt's paganism and idolatry. Now the Lord wished to entirely deliver them. There was a need to protect the new nation from the Canaanites' corrupted religion³⁰ and the dangers that those peoples' idolatry represented for Israel.³¹ Serafin de Ausejo claims that Israel leaders became aware of the foreign woman's impact on her husband as they battled the worship of other gods.³²

Mixed marriages were first just discouraged, but after the establishment of the Hebrew people, they were strictly prohibited because of the risk of exposing the Israelites to the pagan rituals of their neighbors.³³ Israel's spiritual glory is a direct result of its people's loyalty to God. Not mixing with other religious beliefs was a necessity for the fulfillment of the mission and survival of the nation itself, and mixed marriages were the greatest obstacle to the realization of divine goals. Israel was to

²⁹ Russel Norman Champlin, *Antigo Testamento Interpretado* (São Paulo, Brazil: Hagnos, 2001), 2:789.

³⁰ Donald F. Ackland, "Deuteronomy," *Teacher's Bible Commentary: A Concise, Thorough Interpretation of the Entire Bible Designed Especially for Sunday School Teachers*, ed. H. Franklin Paschall and Herschel H. Hobbs (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1972), 119.

³¹ Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 111.

³² Serafin de Ausejo, *Diccionario de La Biblia (DB)*, 8th ed. (1981), s.v. "Marriage."

³³ R. Allan Killen and John Rea, "Marriage," *The Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Charles F. Pfeiffer, John Rea, and Howard F. Vos (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1975), 2:1081.

become an instrument for making known the name and power of God among the nations.³⁴

There was one rule that may be viewed as the exception to the norm among the laws and regulations the Israelites had, regulating mixed marriages. It made reference to the Israelite's right to wed female prisoners of battle (Deut 20:14 and 21:10-14).³⁵ This apparent exception conveys the underlying idea that an Israelite might marry a captive or slave woman without violating the laws.³⁶ In that situation, there was no real risk of religious contamination,³⁷ due to the female slave's attitude of submission and the fact that the male slaves started to feel like they belonged to the land's inhabitants, like property.

In the Period of the Judges

The laws prohibiting intermarrying with native peoples after the settlement in Canaan served to safeguard not just the religion but also the vital interests of the country³⁸ that was emerging on the world stage. Some Canaanite people were not totally destroyed during the Judges period. Because Israel did not follow God's directions in completely destroying the Canaanites, God would have a new

³⁴ Champlin, *Antigo Testamento Interpretado*, 2:789.

³⁵ The guidelines on how an Israelite woman should behave in a relationship with a war prisoner are found in Deuteronomy 21:10-14.

³⁶ P. Trutza, "Marriage," *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible (ZPEB)*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975), 4:96.

³⁷ Ausejo, *DB*, s.v. "Marriage."

³⁸ Trutza, "Marriage," *ZPEB*, 4:101.

purpose with the presence of the Canaanites there. They would serve as a test form to prove the Israel's faithfulness (Judg 2:21-23; 3:1-2).³⁹ This looked to be a planned risk by divine design.⁴⁰

Following the death of Joshua and the elders who attended the land distribution, a new generation of Israelites who "did not know the Lord" (Judg 2:10) turned to Canaanite religion (Judg 3:5-7). Unity through family ties with the peoples of the earth led Israel into idolatry, for in an act of open disobedience "they took their daughters for themselves to be their wives and gave their daughters to their sons" and "they served their gods" (v. 6).

They provoked the divine wrath with these two behaviors—idolatry and mixed marriage—because by worshiping the Canaanite gods, they "did evil in the sight of the Lord" (Judg 3:5-7). The subsequent decades were spent at the service of the surrounding nations. The judges were, for the most part, men of valor who freed the Israelites from adversaries that Israel had approached and had to bear the consequences of their influence (see Judg 2). When confronted with the force that idolatry and physical attraction controlled over them, decisions in favor of faithfulness to God were immediately forgotten.⁴¹

The story of Samson, a leader who was granted unique power by God to deliver His people from oppression, is told in the book of Judges (Judg 13). When Samson's feelings for a Philistine girl ignite, he begs her father to arrange for the marriage (Judg 14:1-2). The Parents pose to young Samson a question that

³⁹ Arthur E. Cundall and Leon Morris, *Juízes e Rute: Introdução e Comentário*, Série Cultura Bíblica (São Paulo, Brazil: Mundo Cristão e Vida Nova, 1986), 70.

⁴⁰ E. John Hamlin, *Judges: At Risk in the Promised Land*, International Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 60.

⁴¹ Cundall and Morris, *Juízes e Rute*, 71.

demonstrates the real danger involved in that situation, seemingly innocent for the boy: “Is there no woman among the daughters of your brethren, or among all my people, that you must go and get a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?” (14:3). Samson’s response reveals his folly: “Get her for me, for she pleases me well” (14:3). In this case, Samson breaks two patterns of behavior for his time: first, he disregards parental advice in choosing his own wife, and second, he picks a non-Israeli.⁴²

Samson merely allowed his impulses and emotions to carry him away. He ended up having relationships with three wives, all of whom were enemies of his people: Dalila from the Valley of Sorek (16:4), the prostitute from Gaza (16:1), and the wife from Timna (14:1). Even though he judged Israel for twenty years, it did not affect a real deliverance from the Philistine yoke.

Samson just allowed his emotions and feelings to take control of him. Eventually, he became entangled with three wives: the Timnite wife (14:1), the Gaza prostitute (16:1), and Dalila (Valley of Sorek, 16:4), all of whom were enemies of his people. Despite ruling over Israel for twenty years, the Philistine yoke was not truly lifted. Samson was brought to death after having his eyes removed, suffering humiliation, and being held prisoner because they failed to consider the effects of their decisions.⁴³ The account of Samson is a true portrayal of Israel’s suffering as a result of its own transgression.

Israel faced threats from a number of its neighbors, but the Philistines posed an even bigger menace. The threat posed by the Philistines was greater than that

⁴² Cundall and Morris, *Juizes e Rute*, 229.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 148.

posed by the Moabites, Midianites, and Ammonites because, in contrast to their brutal and direct aggression, the Philistines gained through trade and intermarriage.⁴⁴

There is a statement in the recounting of Samson's story that appears to be conflicting. By becoming fond of who would be his bride in Timna, the biblical writer claims that his parents "did not know that it was of the Lord" (14:4). What exactly is "this," "it was of the Lord coming"? Against the advice of his parents and all past counsel, would it be the will of the divine that he marry the Philistine? Was God reawakening in Samson the desire to bond with that woman in order to draw him nearer to the Philistines so that he could subsequently kill them?

Samson's approach to the Philistines appeared to be motivated by God's plan, which was apparently in contrast with Israelite behavioral norms.⁴⁵ Samson had a mission to fulfill, and God would use his disobedience to put him in a position where it would be challenging for him to maintain neutrality.⁴⁶

According to some authors, the Samson Narrative author only used this phrase as commentary when the Philistine threat had long since passed. The author would be reflecting on what he believed to be a manifestation of God's strength, but in reality, Samson was looking for a reason to turn against the Philistines.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Cundall and Morris, *Juízes e Rute*, 129.

⁴⁵ Robert J. Boling, *Judges*, Anchor Bible 6A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 229, 230.

⁴⁶ Champlin, *Antigo Testamento Interpretado*, 2:1056.

⁴⁷ Boling, *Judges*, 229, 230; Cundall and Morris, *Juízes e Rute*, 156.

In actuality, Samson was deviating from God's plan, and by marrying, he allowed God to utilize him.⁴⁸ Even if God, in His sovereignty,⁴⁹ had placed such a desire in Samson's heart, contrary to divine laws on marriage, it is most likely that the Lord, in order to fulfill His purpose with Israel, utilized the hero's carnal desires.⁵⁰

Samson does not specifically state this if he was aware that God was pressuring him to be married,⁵¹ instead, he makes it clear in verse 3 that his enthusiasm was genuine. God intended to use Samson's physical might to overcome the Philistines, but he actually accomplished this via human weakness and passion. God delivered His people, but He did not deliver Samson so that he would face the consequences of his actions. Any person will not be free to bear the results of rash action, even if he is being guided by God.⁵²

In the Period of the Kings

Between the time of the Judges and the establishment of the monarchy, the Philistines ruled over the Israelites for a considerable amount of time. During the reigns of monarchs, particularly Saul and David, the same defiant spirit as in Samson's days was evident.

⁴⁸ Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger III, eds., *Zondervan New International Version Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, *Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 355; Charles F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I & II Samuel*, *Commentary on the Old Testament 2* (Grand Rapids, MI: Associated Publishers and Authors, 1971), 57.

⁴⁹ Champlin, *Antigo Testamento Interpretado*, 2:1057.

⁵⁰ Matthew Henry, *Comentario Exegetico Devocional a Toda La Biblia: Libros Históricos* (Barcelona, Spain: Editorial Clie, 1989), 222.

⁵¹ Joseph S. Exell, *Biblical Illustrator*, vol. 3, *Judges* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book, 1975), 213.

⁵² Edward R. Dalglish, *Juizes*, *Comentário Bíblico Broadman* (Rio de Janeiro: JUERP, 1990), 509-510.

The monarchy of Israel introduces a new era of mixed marriages. The rulers of Israel followed the terrible example of neighboring kings and in addition to polygamy, chose idolatrous women as spouses; a practice that God forbade from the start.⁵³ Most of these marriages were political agreements to reaffirm alliances with foreign countries.⁵⁴ These examples are seen in the lives of several Israelite kings, most notably David, Solomon, and Ahab. However, it is on Solomon's account that the harmful influence of these forbidden unions has the most devastating results.

The king considered the wisest man on earth (1 Kgs 3:3-28; 4:29-34; 10:1-13), spears apart from all his reputation, when he gives vent to the desires of the carnal heart. Chapter 11 of the first book of Kings mentions some of his amorous adventures that ended perverting his senses and arousing the anger of God against him and against the royal house.

In addition to the daughter of Egypt's Pharaoh (1 Kgs 3:1), the Bible says Solomon loved "many foreign women," and then lists them: "Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites" (1 Kgs 11:1). The biblical author continues by adding the divine prohibition and the consequences of disobedience after this relation. Solomon was associated with "whom the Lord had said to the children of Israel, you shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely, they will turn away your hearts after their gods" (v. 2).

The result could not have been different: seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines, among them numerous idolatrous foreigners who "turned his heart after other gods" (vv. 3-4). In his old age, Solomon became an idolater,

⁵³ P. Miller, *Deuteronomy*, 161.

⁵⁴ Charles G. Martin, "1 and 2 Kings," *International Bible Commentary*, ed. F. F. Bruce, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 407.

worshipping “Astarte, goddess of the Sidonians, and Milcom, the abomination of the Ammonites” (v. 5). The following verses relate the indignation of the Lord God against King Solomon, due to his disobedience (vv. 9-13)

The narrative of monarch Ahab is another example of tragic results involving an Israelite monarch. Ahab married Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians,⁵⁵ as depicted in 1 Kings 16: 29 -34. He became embroiled in their idolatry, bringing divine disfavor upon Israel as well as catastrophic drought and famine upon Samaria.

According to the biblical account, King Ahab “did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him” and committed four abominable sins: 1) He married a Baal-worshipper, the daughter of a Baal-worshipping king; 2) He worshiped Baal and bowed down to the Phoenician god; 3) He built a temple to Baal in Samaria with a public altar; and 4) He built an idol-shaped image of the Phoenician goddess (vs 31-33).⁵⁶

King Ahab is described as having “committed more abominations to enrage the Lord God of Israel than all the kings of Israel who preceded him” (v. 33). Another cause could be the influence of his wife, Jezebel. If Israel had only a decent trading relationship with the Phoenicians during the reigns of David and Solomon, Ahab married a Phoenician princess, and she became the queen of Israel. Although

⁵⁵ Gene Rice, *Nations Under God: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Kings* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 138.

⁵⁶ Simon J. DeVries, *1 Kings*, Word Biblical Commentary 12 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 204; Rice, *Nations Under God*, 138.

Solomon married the daughter of Egypt's Pharaoh, the main distinction was that Jezebel was highly intolerant.⁵⁷

The Phoenicians' idolatrous worship of Baal was brought into the Northern Kingdom by the influence of only one woman, together with all its ritualistic practices.⁵⁸ Because of how she established the Baal cult in Israel (1 Kgs 21:25–26), she killed the godly prophets (1 Kgs 18:4, 13), and particularly persecuted the prophet Elijah (1 Kgs 19:1-3), Jezebel became a figure of apostasy as well as of religious intolerance.

The experiences of Ahab, David, and Solomon, as described in chapter 11 of 1 Kings, demonstrate the implications of diplomatic and political marriages,⁵⁹ not just for the king, but also for all of Israel. Solomon, in most of his adventures, and Ahab are examples of the flagrant disregard for religious rules, even though the development and consolidation of political authority drove part of these views.⁶⁰

In general, whenever God's people rejected His commands, they suffered horrible personal and societal consequences. There are no scriptural references prohibiting marriages when one is banned or residing in distant places for an extended period of time. Under some conditions, these marriages were tolerated, and they did

⁵⁷ DeVries, *1 Kings*, 138.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Trutza, "Marriage," *ZPEB*, 4:95.

⁶⁰ Hamilton, "Marriage," 564.

not appear to be disapproved of.⁶¹ Joseph's marriage in Genesis 41, Moses' union in Exodus 2, and Queen Esther's union in Esther 2 are a few examples.⁶²

Ruth, a Moabite, and Boaz, a Jew, were married; this is one of the most blatant exceptions. As an Israelite who converted to Judaism and adopted her mother-in-law's religion,⁶³ Ruth's own account attests to this truth (Ruth 1:16–17), together with the testimony of Boaz (2:12), the elders of Israel, and all the people (4:11).

In the Post-Exilic Period

This was a difficult period for the Israelites after returning to their homeland. Unmarried men found it challenging to find entirely Jewish women with whom to form marriages because of the population mix in the area.⁶⁴ Many foreign people arrived in Palestine and took control of most of Judea during the years when the Jews were exiled in Babylon.⁶⁵ Before this circumstance, there was a real danger that the small community of exiles would be absorbed by the strongest neighbors' religious syncretism.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Jacob M. Myers, ed., *Ezra-Nehemiah*, Anchor Bible 14 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 84.

⁶² Mark A. Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1992), 56; H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra/Nehemiah*, Word Biblical Commentary 16 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 130.

⁶³ Myers, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 84.

⁶⁴ Raymond A. Bowman and Charles W. Gilkey, "Nehemiah: Text, Exegesis, and Exposition," *Interpreter's Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1954), 3:817; Aulsebrook, *DB*, s.v. "Marriage."

⁶⁵ Williamson, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 1:160.

⁶⁶ Myers, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 85.

The complicated situation experienced in the post-exilic period is described in the books of Ezra 9 and 10 and Nehemiah 13. These testimonies reveal four difficult issues namely:

1. The intermarriage of the exiled Jews who were still alive with the foreign women who lived in Palestine (Neh 13:23)
2. The children of these mixed marriages struggled to learn the Jewish language and spoke a mixture of languages (v. 24).⁶⁷
3. The Jewish princes and magistrates, who headed the list⁶⁸ of individuals who had entered into mixed marriages (Ezra 9:2).⁶⁹
4. Some Levites were also implicated (Ezra 10:18, Ne 13:29) for defiling the priesthood⁷⁰ with one of the grandsons of the high priest being among them. During the restoration of Jerusalem, Eliashib married the daughter of Sanballat (Neh 13:28), one of the Jews' deadliest foes (Neh ch. 6).⁷¹

The actions adopted by the leaders Ezra and Nehemiah,⁷² regarding mixed marriages included not only religious features, but also cultural aspects (Exod 9:2).⁷³

There was significant fear about losing not only the Jewish language but also the Torah's precepts⁷⁴ which were verbally passed down from parent to child in each generation. The mother's effect on the children, which begins with language

⁶⁷ Ralph G. Turnbull, *The Book of Nehemiah*, Shield Bible Study Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book, 1968), 102-103; Myers, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 216.

⁶⁸ Myers, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 87.

⁶⁹ Williamson raises the notion that these foreign ladies were actually prostitutes rather than wives; see Williamson, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 1:150.

⁷⁰ Billy E. Simmons, "Ezra," *Teacher's Bible Commentary: A Concise, Thorough Interpretation of the Entire Bible Designed Especially for Sunday School Teachers*, ed. H. Franklin Paschall and Herschel H. Hobbs (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1972), 265.

⁷¹ Stephen S. Short, "Nehemiah," *International Bible Commentary*, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 507.

⁷² Bowman and Gilkey, "Nehemiah," 3:816; Kidner, *Genesis*, 74.

⁷³ Aulsebrook, *DB*, s.v. "Marriage."

⁷⁴ Fredrick Carlson Holmgren, *Ezra, Nehemiah: Israel Alive Again*, International Theological Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Continuum International, 1987), 154-155.

acquisition, makes evident the risk that mixed marriages provide in the religious realm as well as for the children's future spiritual development.⁷⁵

The statement "holy seed is mixed with peoples of those lands," as found in Ezra (Ezra 9:2), relates to the concept of a "holy people" chosen by God from Abraham's descendants to bless the nations (Gen 12:1-3, 7).⁷⁶ The manner in which the situation was resolved reflects the Israeli people's unity in accepting Ezra's invitation to repentance, which culminated with all men, beginning with the priests, who after reaching an agreement dismissed their foreign spouses (Ezra 10:17, 19).⁷⁷

In Nehemiah, we also observe the Jews' willingness to accept the leader's reforms, particularly those addressing the priesthood. Malachi, a prophet who lived in the post-exilic period and was most likely a contemporary of Ezra and Nehemiah, reprimanded the people as well, even calling the foreign woman a "daughter of a strange god"⁷⁸ (Mal 2:11). This implies not just the evil of interfaith marriages in general, but also the inevitable religious syncretism that such unions in those days would inevitably include.⁷⁹

The prophet states unequivocally: "Judah was unfair." Then he lays the responsibility squarely on Judah, saying, "Judah... married the daughter of a strange god" (v. 11). This is how Malachi puts it: mixed marriages are the main issue. The issue is not presented here as largely cultural, as is commonly presented in the Old Testament, but rather as essentially a spiritual issue. The foreign women brought

⁷⁵ Myers, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 216.

⁷⁶ Williamson, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 1:132.

⁷⁷ Holmgren, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 80-81.

⁷⁸ According to Malachi 2:11 in the Portuguese translation *Almeida Corrigida*.

⁷⁹ Hamilton, "Marriage," 564.

unusual religious components with them, causing them to be “disloyal to one another” and “profaning the covenant of our fathers” (v. 10).⁸⁰

Biblical Insights on Interfaith Marriage in the New Testament

When it came to marriage in the Old Testament, particularly after the creation of the nation of Israel, the primary goal was to keep the Israelites from mixing with non-Jewish people. However, during the New Testament era, it is felt that generally speaking, Christian orientations were similar to those given to Hebrews or Israelis. The emphasis on guiding the new Christian, particularly those who come from paganism and who after conversion continue to be married to someone who still practices the old religion, is the only additional feature.

In the New Testament, a new component is included, since in the Old Testament the “unequal yoke” was directly determined by mixed marriage. In the Christian era, a person becomes unequally yoked through mixed marriage as well as indirectly through conversion and subsequent baptism. There is some teaching on marriage relationships between believers and non-believers in the writings of Paul and Peter.

In the Writings of Paul

It is possible to find evidence in Paul’s writings that the prohibitions against mixing believers and unbelievers also apply to relationships in the social and commercial spheres among other things. Two issues regarding those who are unequally yoked are addressed by the apostle Paul: guidance on how to avoid

⁸⁰ Andrew Cornes, *Divorce And Remarriage: Biblical Principles and Pastoral Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 159-160.

becoming “unequally yoked” (2 Cor 6) and what to do if one is already “yoked together” “unequally” due to conversion (1 Cor 7).

Some of the questions that Corinthian Christians posed to the apostle Paul regarding marriage and family life are addressed in the first epistle’s instructions. The instructions found in the second epistle, in turn, are a collection of warnings Paul issues while justifying his apostleship.

In the First Epistle to the Corinthians

The central point of interest for this study in the first epistle to the Corinthians is chapter 7 from verse 10 to 16. The guidance addressed to “the married” (vv. 10 and 11) certainly refers to where both of the couple are Christians. According to Thoralf Gilbrant, Ralph W. Harris, and Stanley M. Horton, the phrase “to the rest” (v. 12) explicitly refer to unions in which there is only one Christian.⁸¹

The apostle distinguishes between what he advises Christian couples as a divine order, “not I, but the Lord” (v. 10) and what he advises other couples as personal instruction, “I say, not the Lord” (v. 12). Commentators generally agree that this does not lessen the significance of guidance in any way because it contains words that have the force of inspiration and apostolic authority.⁸²

The apostle plainly does not promote divorce on religious grounds (vv. 11-12), but when the unbelieving spouse wishes to separate from the Christian spouse (v. 15),

⁸¹ Thoralf Gilbrant, Ralph W. Harris, and Stanley M. Horton, *The Complete Biblical Library*, vol. 7, *The New Testament Study Bible Romans-Corinthians* (Springfield, MA: World Library Press, 1989), 333.

⁸² Paul W. Marsh, “I Corinthians,” *International Bible Commentary*, ed. F. F. Bruce, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 1361; Fred L. Fisher, “I Corinthians,” *The Teacher’s Bible Commentary: A Concise, Thorough Interpretation of the Entire Bible Designed Especially for Sunday School Teachers*, ed. H. Franklin Paschall and Herschel H. Hobbs (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 1972), 727.

the Christian spouse should not object because he would be free from the other's bondage, according to the apostle.

Some, including Calvin and Luther, interpreted the phrase "is not subject to bondage in such cases" (1 Cor 7:15) to mean that the Christian would be released from servitude, able to divorce, and free to remarry before God⁸³ as long as he or she fought for the continuation of the marriage despite the unwillingness of the intimate believer. The only criterion in this scenario is that she does it "in the Lord," that is, marry another Christian as understood from 1 Corinthians 7:39 and chapter 6 of the second epistle to the Corinthians.

This same expression has come to be understood by another set of believers to signify release from only that unequal relationship between one believer and one unbeliever, without releasing the abandoned believer to forge a new married partnership.⁸⁴ Additionally, it argues that as is clear from the texts of Matthew 5:32 and 19:19, divorces or separations caused by reasons other than disobedience to the marriage vow do not grant either spouse the biblical right to wed again. This is true unless one of the parties involved died, engaged in adultery or fornication, or had already been married.⁸⁵

According to Paul, in a mixed marriage the Christian spouse should never initiate divorce proceedings. The reason for this is that the Christian's example has the

⁸³ William F. Orr and James A. Walther, *I Corinthians*, Anchor Bible 32 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), 214; Herschell H. Hobbs, *The Epistles to the Corinthians*, Shield Bible Study Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book, 1969), 41; Russel Norman Champlin, *Novo Testamento Interpretado*, (São Paulo, Brazil: Milenium, 1983), 4:101.

⁸⁴ Carlos R. Erdman, *La Primera Epistola de Pablo a Los Corintios* (Grand Rapids, MI: TELL, 1974), 85-86.

⁸⁵ Igreja Adventista do Sétimo Dia, *Manual Da Igreja Adventista Do Sétimo Dia* (Sao Paulo, Brazil: Casa Publicadora Brasileira, 2007), 201-208.

potential to sanctify family life. The good effect of a man or woman guided by the Holy Spirit of God could achieve both the unbelieving spouse and the children of that union (v. 14).

In this verse (v. 14), the phrases “sanctified,” and “holy” refer to the blessing of Christ’s presence in the house and not to the automatic development of a connection with or experience of salvation in Jesus Christ by each family member.⁸⁶ The believing spouse should work to make the unbeliever and the children happy in the marriage.

According to some commentators, the apostle does not intend to validate the belief that a Christian should marry a non-Christian to evangelize to him or her, despite the possibility that a Christian spouse could be a blessing for the unbelieving partner and for the children by helping in their conversion.⁸⁷

According to the apostle’s interpretation, Christian spouses who divorce would be violating Christ’s commandments (Matt 19:3-12).⁸⁸ No husband and wife or Christian couple should divorce (vv. 10-11). If this occurs, the couple has just two options: remain separated without remarrying or be reconciled (v. 11).

Exegesis of 2 Corinthians 6:14

Adventism throughout the world including SDA Esmirna District of Angola is currently impacted by the marriage between Adventists and non-Adventists. There are

⁸⁶ Matthew Henry, *Mathew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 2, *Joshua to Esther* (Wilmington, DE: Sovereign Grace, 1972), 1033; F. W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, *New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 164-165.

⁸⁷ Gilbrant, Harris, and Horton, *The Complete Biblical Library*, vol. 7, *The New Testament Study Bible Romans-Corinthians*, 337.

⁸⁸ Jay Adams, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 51-69.

extensive and ongoing discussions on the subject, and there is little agreement among members regarding the practice's theological and moral implications.

Some have argued that the standard understanding of 2 Corinthians 6:14 is exegetically flawed, which has led to opposition to such marriages. In order to demonstrate that a systematic-based approach is preferable to a merely exegetical one, this section addresses this difficulty in the context of one such exegetical treatment.

Several Adventists feel that in 2 Corinthians 6:15, the term “believer” refers to Adventists, while the term “unbelievers” to non-Adventists. They interpret the phrase “unequally yoked” to imply “to marry.”

This has generally been the church's understanding as well.⁸⁹ Therefore, the definitions of an unbeliever in the context of marriage policy in both the *SDA Church Manual* and the *Minister's Handbook* are completely congruent. Furthermore, at least a portion of their arguments are supported by both citations of 2 Corinthians 6:14.

Many have raised exegetical objections to this position, such as Daniel Berchie, who contends that 2 Corinthians 6:14a is more concerned with broad associations between believers” and “unbelievers” than with marriage⁹⁰ and that far from being potential spouses, these non-believers were at best false teachers who were misrepresenting the teachings of Paul, Timothy, and Titus, and had been serving

⁸⁹ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Ministerial Association, *Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Handbook* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2009), 175-176; For instance, Ellen White strongly condemns “the pastors are not to perform weddings between Seventh-day Adventists and adherents of other religions” in several of her books. The *Church Manual* does go on to define the non-member as someone who is “not a member of the Church.” “The Church” refers to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, as is made clear in the introduction's explanation of terminology (p. 18). *Church Manual* (1990), 154. Specifically mentions non-Seventh-day Adventist marriages when he advises against ministers performing at such weddings.

⁹⁰ Daniel Berchie, “Marrying an ‘Unbelieving’ Partner: An Exegetical Study of 2 Corinthians 6:14,” *Valley View University Journal of Theology* 3 (2014): 13.

the church at Corinth.⁹¹ He clearly declares as a conclusion that, “this relationship has nothing to do with marital relations and from a theological perspective, it seems appropriate to encourage interdenominational marriages.”⁹²

In this section, this study investigates this specific challenge via the prism of two questions and one proposition. Does marriage fall outside of the spectrum of links or affiliations that Paul had in mind according to a literal reading of 2 Corinthians 6:14a? Is the application of Paul’s counsel in this passage something that even remotely merits its own exegesis?

Context. It is well recognized that the sociological, economic, and religious aspects that influence Corinth’s environment have a significant impact on how the church there interprets the letters written by Paul to them.⁹³ As a result, this section provides a brief overview of Corinth’s historical, geographical, socioeconomic, and religious contexts.

Corinth was a Greek city-state that flourished before and after Athens’ golden age (5th century B.C.). Due to conflict with Rome, it was destroyed by Lucius Mummius in 146 B.C., only to be rebuilt one hundred years later, in 44 B.C., “as a sentinel of the isthmus of only 5,950 meters wide that served as a bridge between the Peloponnese and the mainland, and that separated the Saronic Gulf from that of Corinth,” thus dominating both terrestrial trade such as trade between Italy and Asia.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Berchie, “Marrying an ‘Unbelieving’ Partner,” 14.

⁹² Ibid., 16.

⁹³ Goldon D. Fee, *Primera Epistola a Los Corintios* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Nueva Creación, 1994), 3.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 3, 4.

According to Goldon Fee, the city possessed all of the necessary ingredients for an economic boom: a natural defense on the Acro Corinth; adequate water supply from the streams; a relationship with Rome; being the lady of two ports for trade between East and West; and being the domain of the Isthmian Games, which were only second to the Athens Olympics. Furthermore, it was repopulated by Roman freemen, providing an opportunity for socioeconomic growth. The city's success drew a large influx of people from both the West and the East,⁹⁵ and it became one of the most populous cities in the Roman Empire in the first century.

A small group of wealthy merchants, bankers, and industrialists made up the majority of Corinth's population, along with thousands of slaves and artisans.⁹⁶ Corinthian affluence drew artists and philosophers, as well as street merchants and charlatans. The metropolis was influenced by two great forces: the Roman rulers' laws, culture, and religion, and the Greeks' religion, philosophy, and arts.⁹⁷ Following his sojourn in Corinth, Paul worked as a tentmaker alongside Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:1-3).

There were many different religious beliefs present in Corinth. In addition to many types of mystery cults from Asia and Egypt,⁹⁸ Greco-Roman polytheism, Hebrew monotheism, and Christianity, as preached by Paul and other missionaries, were all present (Acts 18:1-18). This religious expression was manifested in at least twenty-six sacred places dedicated to the "many gods" (the Greco-Roman pantheon)

⁹⁵ Fee, *Primera Epistola a Los Corintios*, 5.

⁹⁶ Juan M. Díaz Rodelas, *Primera Carta a Los Corintios* (Estella, Spain: Editorial Verbo Divino, 2003), 14-15.

⁹⁷ Fee, *Primera Epistola a Los Corintios*, 4.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

and “many lords” (mystery cults) mentioned by Paul in I Corinthians 8:5⁹⁹ as well as the Jewish synagogue (Acts 18:7) and Christian house-churches (I Cor 16:19).¹⁰⁰

However, immorality and religion coexisted so well that the term κορινθιαζω (to act like a Corinthian, to fornicate) was coined by Aristophanes as a result (about 450-385).¹⁰¹ According to Mario Velozo, “Corinthian immorality became proverbial” as indicated in the common word to Corinth (*κορινθιαζομαι*), that is, to practice fornication. “Immorality acquired religious value in the worship of Venus, the city’s main goddess.”¹⁰² Corinti girl, another term, was administered by a huge number of consecrated prostitutes who served in their ostensibly existing temple in the city. The vast immorality explains Paul’s warnings that wrongdoers, the immoral, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, invert, thieves, covetous, drunkards, slanderers, or swindlers will not inherit God’s kingdom (1 Cor 5:9-10).¹⁰³

When Paul arrived at Corinth, he “found a very rich city, with a cosmopolitan, idolatrous, and immoral population.”¹⁰⁴ Perhaps as a result of this confluence of factors, the apostle made Corinth “his headquarters for work,” remaining there for nearly two years and establishing a large and active church. (Acts 18:7-8)¹⁰⁵ Sadly,

⁹⁹ Fee, *Primera Epistola a Los Corintios*, 5.

¹⁰⁰ Elias Brasil De Souza, *Teologia e Metodologia Da Missão* (Bahia, Brazil: CePLiB, 2011), 344-369.

¹⁰¹ Fee, *Primera Epistola a Los Corintios*, 4.

¹⁰² Mario Veloso, *Hechos: Contando La Historia de La Iglesia Apostolica* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Asociación Casa Editora Sudamericana, 2009), 171.

¹⁰³ Rodelas, *Primera Carta a Los Corintios*, 14-15.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ John Drane, *Pablo: Su vida y su obra* (Estella, Spain: Editorial Verbo Divino, 1984), 68.

the church turned into a reflection of the city after Paul was forced to depart.¹⁰⁶ Paul visited the church in Corinth three times (13:1) as a result of this, in addition to writing letters to the local Christians (1 Cor 1:1, 9; 2 Cor 1:1).

Ernest Renan claims that II Corinthians is regarded as a Pauline book without a doubt because of the abundance of internal and external evidence.¹⁰⁷ At least four texts attest that “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ,” wrote to the Corinthian church of God (1:1; 7:12; 9:2; 13:2). Their writing style, subject matter, and vocabulary are unique.¹⁰⁸ External evidence is provided by documents from the time as well as Patristics from the second and third century. Classical writers like Homer, Pliny, Pausanias, Cicero, Aristophanes, Aelius Aristides, and Flavius Josephus refer to Corinth in their works, describing circumstances that are comparable to those that Paul describes.¹⁰⁹

Literary genre. In 2 Cor 6:14a, Paul uses the Greek verb *ετεροζυγουντες*, which means to “yoke differently,” to describe the cross-relationship of Corinthian believers with unbelievers, something which is a striking and vivid Old Testament figure (Lev 19:19; Deut 22:10). It refers to mixing different species of animals when used in the Old Testament. Murray J. Harris believed that Paul might have used it as a metaphor for the interbreeding of humans in this context.¹¹⁰ By emphasizing his prior close relationship with the church and his devoted commitment to them, Paul has just

¹⁰⁶ Fee, *Primera Epistola a Los Corintios*, 5.

¹⁰⁷ Ernest Renan, *Paulo: O 13º Apostolo* (São Paulo, Brazil: Martin Claret, 2004), 3.

¹⁰⁸ Jordi Sánchez Bosch, *Escritos Paulinos* (Estella, España: Verbo Divino, 2002), 16, 226-227.

¹⁰⁹ Rodelas, *Primera Carta a Los Corintios*, 14-17.

¹¹⁰ Murray J. Harris, “2 Corinthians,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary with the New International Version of the Holy Bible*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), 10:359.

made an appeal for peace. The church would have to stop cross-communing with unbelievers if this reconciliation were to succeed.

This metaphorical usage also applies to the five rhetorical inquiries that are expected to have negative replies in light of verse 14a (vv. 14b-16), where the Greek word *γὰρ* “for” is used in 2 Corinthians 6:14b. These inquiries are in oppositional parallelism. It’s possible that Paul didn’t intend for each parallel to exactly match what it stands for. They serve to highlight how unbelievers and believers cannot coexist in Corinth.

Paul clearly states that Christians, including himself, are God’s temple in verse 16b. Paul queries whether there is any connection between God’s temple and idols in verse 16a, verse 16b also follows this. The metaphorical reference to believers as the temple of God in verses 16b-18 is further explained by several Old Testament allusions (see Exod 4:22; Lev 12:12; Isa 52:11), closely followed by 16b. The metaphorical allusion to believers as the temple of God in verses 16b-18 (Exod 4:22; Lev 12:12; Isa 52:11) is further explained in Chapter 7:1 which follows the OT references in clear language, urging believers including Paul and his associates to cleanse themselves (*καθαρισωμενεαυτους* “let us purify ourselves”).

Paul begins to identify with them because of this inclusive language because of their Siamese connection. The purging does not imply that Paul, his associates, or the church participated in joint idolatry. The most important thing to remember in this passage is that they are the temple of God and that in keeping with their Siamese interaction, restoration entails severing ties with nonbelievers. Additionally, exhibiting the genre of writing of 6:14a in the framework of 6:14-7:4:

(A) Corinthians, do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers (6:14a)

For what fellowship has right	with lawlessness? (v. 14b)
or what communion has light	with darkness? (v. 14c)

and what agreement has Christ	with Belial? (v. 15a)
or What part has faithful	with faithless (v. 15b)
what agreement has the temple of God	with idols? (v. 16a)

For we are temple of the living God (v. 16b)
 God promises to dwell among believers (vv. 16c)
 Wherefore, God invites believers to come out of them (v.17)
 and the Lord promises to be their God (v. 18)
 therefore, exhortation to clean themselves from all filthiness (7:1)
 (A) Believers entreated to receive Paul and his associates (vv. 2-4)¹¹¹

The metaphorical aspect of Paul’s remark in verse 14a is further enhanced if verses 6:14b-16a consisting of rhetorical inquiries that support the incompatibility of Corinthian believers and unbelievers. The literal meanings of these diametrical parallels, according to Berchie, need not be interpreted literally. Words like righteousness, light, Christ, faithful, and the temple of the living God are antagonistic and parallel Corinthian believers¹¹² and unbelievers are metaphysical dualists of mind who believe in divine salvation and demonic evil (lawlessness, darkness, Belial, faithlessness, idolatry).¹¹³ In verse 15b, the words “faithful” and “faithless” are used again possibly underlining the key issue with the act of believing.¹¹⁴

Paul appropriates Old Testament scriptures (Exod 4:22; Lev 26:12; Isa 52:11) to emphasize that believers, including Paul and his companions, are the temple of the Lord. This emphasizes the promise of God of living inside believers and is supported by the fact that Paul and his associates are believers.

¹¹¹ Berchie, “Marrying an ‘Unbelieving’ Partner: An Exegetical Study of 2 Corinthians 6:14,” 21.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Hans Dieter Betz, “2 Cor 6:14-7:1: An Anti-Pauline Fragment?” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92, no. 1 (1973): 90.

¹¹⁴ Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, *The Theology of the Second Letter to the Corinthians* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 69.

The Greek word οὖν “therefore,” used inferentially in 2 Corinthians 7:1, seems to restate the idea first stated in 6:14a in a more exhortative manner.¹¹⁵ It is very obvious from the structure that Corinthian believers should separate themselves from unbelievers and welcome Paul and his companions.¹¹⁶ Subsequently might be reasonable to interpret the use of “believers” (πιστοί) and “unbelievers” (απιστοί) as metaphors.

Lexico-syntactical Analysis

To determine the context-specific meaning of “unbelievers” (απιστοί) and “believers” (πιστοί), a lexico-syntactical analysis is mostly conducted in this section. The negative present imperative (μη γινεσθε) is used to express the command in 6:14a. The expression is literal “do not become” and it is accompanied by ετεροζυγουντες “yoking differently”, a present participle. According to Friedrich Blass and Albert Debrunner, the periphrastic imperative is present because of the way the present imperative and the present participles are structured.¹¹⁷ In regard to the current periphrastic imperative, various viewpoints have been expressed. It is conative, according to Richard C. H. Lenski, meaning “do not being so yoked up.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Scott J. Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, New International Version Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 404.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 276.

¹¹⁷ F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. Robert W. Funk (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 180.

¹¹⁸ Richard C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Columbus, OH: Wartburg Press, 1957), 1077; Victor P. Furnish, *II Corinthians*, Anchor Bible 32 (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 361.

This interpretation implies “that Paul was thinking primarily of the future, instead of past events.”¹¹⁹

In light of this, it is advised to avoid getting married, starting a business, and other relationships that can damage a person’s faith in the future.¹²⁰ Combining Friedrich Blass and Albert Debrunner’s grammatical aspect of the “γινεσθε” with a present participle, Ralph P. Martin as well as Paul Barnett translate the prohibition as “do not get into,”¹²¹ indicating “the beginning of a state or condition.”¹²²

Both Martin and Barnett, however, appear to have different interpretations of certain details. Martin believes that the Corinthian Christians were “already involved in the process of connection themselves to the unbelievers in marriage relationship, (1 Cor 7:12-15), eating food presented to idols (10:27-28), and resolving problems in Pagan courts” (6:1-8).¹²³ But Barnett recognizes that “the readers were about to do what Paul here forbids,” and that was the “cultic life of the metropolis.”¹²⁴

In 2 Corinthians 6:14, Paul addressed the problems that prompted his impromptu trip to Corinth and his subsequent “sorrow-ful letter,” as Barnett correctly notes. The First Epistle to the Corinthians (B), which is the name by which the Second Epistle is known to us, outlines several vices and affiliations that Corinthian

¹¹⁹ “Be Ye Not” [2 Cor 6:14], *SDABC*, 5:456.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, World Biblical Commentary 40 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1986), 195-196; Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 344.

¹²² Blass and Debrunner, *Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 180.

¹²³ Edgcumbe Hughes, *Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthians: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 245; R. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 169.

¹²⁴ Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 334.

believers are not to start but rather refrain from engaging in. In 1 Corinthians 1:11-12, Paul, for instance, warns against spiritual ties to well-known Christian leaders. In 5:1-2, he criticizes the church for its lax stance on an incestuous union.

Paul once more warns believers against associating with unbelievers who engaged in fornication, covetousness, extortion, and idolatry in the original first Corinthians (letter A), verses 9-10. Given their recent conversion from such practices, according to his *midrashic exegesis* of Exodus 12:15 in 1 Corinthians 5, any such relationship may be infectious (1 Cor 5:12a).

He bans fellowship with any believer who practices these same vices in the second epistle (B) (vv. 11, 12b). He criticizes Christians who resolve disputes in pagan tribunals (6:1-8). In terms of judgment, this is equivalent to affiliation with the outside world. Evil communicators may have planted doubt about the veracity of the resurrection in the minds of the Corinthians (15:33). According to verses 12 and 14, these invaders were merely Christian in name but not in faith. As of now, Christians are expected to take the initiative to sever their ties to these associations.

However, a believer shouldn't actively seek to leave an unbeliever after they are already married to them (7:12-15). Paul fundamentally respects marriage's sanctity (v. 10). Though he advocates a second marriage in the Lord (v. 39), Paul would vehemently denounce marriage between believers and unbelievers if it were fundamentally wrong, as is in the case of fornication. Those who are already married to unbelievers are exhorted to stay together (v. 17).

Paul was conscious of fraudulent gospel preachers infiltrating the church who might have undermined the church's loyalty to Paul by challenging his apostolic authority (11:1-12:13). It is conceivable that some outsiders who had interacted with the Corinthians were attempting to convert them while Paul was away. However,

according to all standards, Paul and his companions had established themselves as God's servants (3:6-4:5; 6:1-10).

It is useful to consider that Corinthian believers were courted by fraudulent ministers/teachers who may have inspired some members to reject Christian teachings such as resurrection (1 Cor 15:12). The periphrastic imperative of the negative present (μη γινεσθε ετεροζυγουντες) (“do not be heterogeneously yoked”) can be expressed as “do not continue to become heterogeneously yoked.” This interpretation implies that the Corinthian believers had begun to permit themselves to be attracted by fraudulent teachers who praised themselves rather than Christ. As a result, Paul and his friends persuaded the Corinthians to welcome them again and distance themselves from the fraudulent ministers, since Paul and his companions are the true ministers of Jesus (2 Cor 5:20).

Who are the believers and unbelievers, it seems evident, is the key question. In Paul's texts, *απιστοι* “unbelievers” technically refers to non-Christians (1 Cor 6:6, 7:12–15, 10:27, 1 Tim 1:13, 5:8, and Titus 1:15).¹²⁵ However, it is important to keep in mind that context, rather than the other way around, determines the meaning of words. If Paul had been worried about paganism, he should have made other unwelcome associations a part of his command (5:10-11; 6:18), not just idolatry. Paul envisions a circumstance in which believers can nevertheless fail to maintain their faith. One is not in the faith if they do not acknowledge the ministry of Paul and his companions (2 Corinthians 13:5-6). He abides in the faith of Christ, as do his companions (vv. 3-4).

¹²⁵ R. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 2; Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 196.

It implies that, in terms of the Corinthian dialogue, a believer can effectively be referred to as “unbeliever/unbelieving” if they preach any doctrine that departs from the fundamentals of Christian religion. Paul classifies both non-Christians and Corinthian Christians who engage in the same vices as “unbelievers” and advises against interacting with them (1 Cor 5:10-12).

Despite the term *απιστοι* “unbelievers” isn’t employed here in a formal sense, believers might be considered *απιστοι* “unbelievers” conceptually. Contrarily, in Paul’s dealings with the Corinthian church, a “believer” (*πιστος*) is someone who voluntarily accepts Paul’s message of salvation and acknowledges his apostolic office. Any doctrine that challenges the validity of his gospel message to the Corinthians is a farce, and anyone who promotes it is either an unbeliever or an unbeliever. Additionally, given the metaphorical character of the verse in question, it seems more sense to interpret *απιστοι* “unbelievers or unbelieving” as false gospel ministers given the context.

Logical Implications for the Expression “Unequally Yoked”

While most of the exegesis presented above is generally sound, we must examine whether its fundamental premises can be applied logically and appropriately to the problem of marriages between Adventists and non-Adventist Christians. According to the first final analysis, being “unequally yoked” refers to having “a relationship that continues in matters of the true Christian faith.”¹²⁶

The conclusion that follows, “this relationship has nothing to do with marriage to pagans or non-Jewish Christians, which received apostolic approval with a mission-

¹²⁶ Berchie, “Marrying an ‘Unbelieving’ Partner: An Exegetical Study of 2 Corinthians 6:14,” 13.

oriented outlook,”¹²⁷ is troubling for the following two reasons. To begin with it appears that Paul was not thinking about marriage when he wrote 2 Corinthians 6:14, it does not mean that the statement has no relevance on the matter. Marriage is undoubtedly included in the “relationship in matters of true Christian faith” because of its broad definition. It is possible for something to be hinted at even if the author has not done so on purpose.

The second point is that the seemingly incidental claim that “marital relations with pagans or non-Jewish Christians” “received apostolic approval” is true only for marriages that were already in place at the time of writing. Paul says that marriages with pagans or non-Jewish Christians should not be dissolved (vv. 12-14). Paul advises people to stay where they are when God summons them, and to make a positive difference in their situation when there is an opportunity.

Paul refers to marriages between believers and unbelievers as an exception rather than the rule because they are included at all in the wider narrative on marriage. It’s probably safe to presume that intra-religious marriage is at question for the rest of the story. This would imply that his final advice to widows who remarried (v. 39) that their new spouses “must belong to the Lord” (Greek: *μονον εν κυριοσ*, only in the Lord) is not only a weak suggestion within a general openness to interfaith partnerships, as some appear to imply, but a robust recapitulation of the anticipated intra-faith norm.

¹²⁷ Agana-Nsiire Agana, “Marrying an Unbeliever: Systematics over Exegesis of 2 Corinthians 6: 14a,” *Asia-Africa Journal of Mission and Ministry* 15 (2017): 76.

The Unbelievers: Putting the Metaphor into Practice

Some academics have concluded that the term “unbelievers” in 2 Corinthians 6:14a refers to Paul’s ministry adversaries, those who were subverting the gospel in Corinth. However, *απιστος*, is defined as someone without faith, disbelieving, unbelieving, unbelievable and incredible.¹²⁸ The conclusion above is the metaphor’s limited, contextual goal of the goal of *απιστος*. In his commentary on Greek terminology, Gerald F. Hawthorne notes that the Greek word *απιστος* is used to characterize people who are not Christians, perhaps with full knowledge of the ambiguities. It is unclear if Jews are meant to be included or excluded. It is evident that Paul doesn’t care about developing technical vocabulary; instead, he employs whatever terms are available. More important is the conceptual division between Paul’s own family, who are the promised heirs of God, and everyone else, regardless of description.¹²⁹

Therefore, 2 Corinthians 6:14 clearly prohibits the marriages between Christians and non-Christians. However, since *απιστος* can refer only to those who do not embrace the Christian faith, this text cannot be used as a justification of the interdenominational marriages (marriages between Christians of different denominations).

¹²⁸ Walter Bauer, Frederick William Danker, and Frederick Arndt, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (2001), s.v. “*απιστος*.”

¹²⁹ L. J. Kreitzer, “Eschatology,” *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1993), 261.

Biblical Insights on the Interdenominational Marriages

Interdenominational marriages are marriages between people who belong to different religious denominations or sects. In the Old Testament times, interdenominational marriages were not known since all Israelites shared the same religion. Also, Christianity in the first century was homogeneous and at best dealt with unofficial internal movements and factions. These would have included the later Gnosticism and the Judaizer movement known as Asceticism.¹³⁰ These currents of thought, which emanated from and circulated within the Hellenized setting in which Christianity was developing, were not denominations in the traditional sense. Marcionism, Montanism, Monarchianism, and later Arianism (fourth century) are a few of the early denominations that some have traced back to the second and third centuries.¹³¹

However, it is generally acknowledged that the current profusion of organizationally different and independent denominations is a development of the modern era, first appearing in widespread use in the nineteenth century.¹³² Today's denominations differ in terms of their names, leaders, doctrines, rituals, ways of life, and worldviews.

Therefore, the issue of interdenominational marriage is one that we are currently facing in the twenty-first century. It bears with it the conditions and complexities related to the multiplicity of denominations we encounter today, how

¹³⁰ D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2005), 302-343.

¹³¹ Ethan R. Longhenry, "A Study of Denominations: Historical Overview," A Study of Denominations, last modified 2020, accessed September 5, 2023, <https://www.astudyofdenominations.com/overview/>.

¹³² Johan D. Tangelder, "Denominationalism," Reformed Reflections, last modified 2023, accessed May 9, 2023, <http://www.reformedreflections.ca/faith-andlife/denominationalism.html>.

they interact with one another in terms of doctrine, society, law, economics, philosophy, and a variety of other areas.

Although such phenomenon as interdenominationalism was not known in biblical times it is possible to find some examples in the Bible that are very similar to that, and this can help us to arrive at biblical principles regarding the interdenominational marriages. In the Old Testament such examples might be the marriages between Moses and Zipporah, David and Michal, Jehoaram and Athaliah, and between Jews and Samaritans during Ezra's and Nehemiah's time.

Marriage between Moses and Zipporah

There is a general agreement among scholars that marriages took place in families in the Ancient East, highlighted in Israel, preferably within the context of the tribe and were occasionally limited to the level of the clan. The most popular way to create a family (home) for oneself is without a doubt to get married within one's own ethnicity. A lady leaves her parents and moves in with her husband's family (Gen 24:58-59), however, it is possible for the wife to remain with her own family (Judg 8:31).

The wife is regarded as a piece of her husband's "property" in Jewish culture. Sons and daughters who aren't married are too, as well. Even financial transactions occurred in connection with marriage. Most of the time, family interests were prioritized over individual opinions and/or preferences while making marital arrangements. Convenience marriages, such as those consummated in wealthy households, were relatively common.

A family's choice to marry one of their daughters or sons to a foreigner (even if that foreigner is a local) is one that is socially motivated and has immediate effects

on the community.¹³³ When Moses left his Egyptian home, he went into exile and married a foreigner. The Midianite Zipporah is first introduced to the reader at a well (Exod 2:15-17),¹³⁴ later the text says: “Then Jethro was content to live with the man, and he gave Zipporah his daughter to Moses” (Exod 2:21). The book of Numbers records: “Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman” (Num 12:1). Several commenters have raised regard to this text, but some argue:

When compared to the established teaching on intermarriage, Moses’ marriage to a Cushite woman creates an uncomfortable tension. This quality connects to two objections made by Miriam and Aaron because it pushes against the camp’s established bounds. Their disagreement over Moses’ unique position as God’s representative and their discontent regarding his marriage to a Cushite cannot be separated.¹³⁵

The two reinforce each other.¹³⁶ “Miriam and Aaron are giving credence to their criticism of Moses’ intermarriage by asserting that God also communicates through them. Furthermore, the law supports their argument. Moses broke tradition, so they stand for the influence of tradition.”¹³⁷

Zipporah, however, was a Midianite and a descendant of Abraham.¹³⁸ It is difficult to say anything about her religious views. She was a daughter of Jethro who was a Midianite priest. The Bible does not provide any information regarding whether

¹³³ William César de Andrade, “União Mistas Em Israel: Indícios de Uma Realidade Multi-Étnica e Multicultural,” *Revista Interdisciplinar da Mobilidade Humana* XVI, no. 30 (2008): 190.

¹³⁴ Esther Fuchs, “Structure, Ideology, and Politics in the Biblical Betrothal Type-Scene,” in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 273-281.

¹³⁵ Robert B. Coote, “Joshua,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 2:109-110.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ White, *Patriarcas e Profetas*, 383.

Jethro worship Yahweh or not. However, Jethro is highly regarded by rabbinic writers. Rabbis interpreted Jethro's another name, Reuel, "friend of God." Furthermore, according to some rabbinic tales, Jethro was the one who saved Moses while he was still a baby from being killed by pharaoh and even predicted that Moses will deliver Israel from the Egyptian bondage.¹³⁹

While the rabbinic writings are often characterized by their speculative nature, it is possible that they contain a kernel of rationale. Thus, John Sailhamer points out the parallels between Melchizedek and Jethro. Melchizedek, the priest of Salem, greeted Abraham with gifts after his victory in battle, while Jethro, the Midianite priest, came to offer peace and praise to God after Moses' triumph over the Amalekites. Both priests blessed and acknowledged God's deliverance and authority. Additionally, Melchizedek brought out bread and wine as a priestly offering, and Abraham tithed to him, while Jethro offered burnt offerings and shared a meal with Moses and Aaron.¹⁴⁰ The purpose of these parallels seems to present Jethro as a counterpart to Melchizedek, highlighting him as a righteous Gentile figure.

Therefore, it is very possible that Jethro might be the Yahweh worshiper or at least a person who acknowledged God of Israel maybe among other gods (Exod 18:10). Most probably he inherited the knowledge of Yahweh from his ancestors and his daughter, Zipporah, must share the same religion accordingly. However, evidently, Zipporah had some different views on worshipping Yahweh. Most

¹³⁹ Beatrice J. W. Lawrence, *Jethro and the Jews: Jewish Biblical Interpretation and the Question of Identity*, The Brill Reference Library of Judaism (Boston, MA: Brill, 2017), 101-102.

¹⁴⁰ John H. Sailhamer, "Genesis," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 101-102.

probably, she was the one who did not allow her youngest son to be circumcised.¹⁴¹

Therefore, we can classify the marriage between Moses and Zipporah as one that is very similar to our modern interdenominational marriages.

The marriage between Zipporah and Moses, although not explicitly condemned in the Bible, had its challenges. Exodus 2 sheds light on a particular issue within this marriage. Moses' life was endangered because he yielded to the influence of his wife and neglected to ensure the circumcision of their son. This incident highlights a conflict of priorities and decisions within their relationship. While the Bible does not provide a definitive verdict on their marriage, it implies that there were difficulties to navigate and lessons to be learned from this specific episode.

David and Michal

David and Michal seem to be a typical couple with a glaring contrast in their religious beliefs. Turning to 2 Samuel 6:16-23, we witness David dancing before the Lord with a spinning ardor that was born out of his thirst for his Lord. While all is going on, Michal despises his faith as he peers out of an upper-floor window (1 Sam 18:20). She had a young love for David. They were both Israelites and worshiped the same God.

The Bible first refers to Michal's narrative during the conflict between Saul and David, which took place at a time when Saul's influence was declining, and David's was increasing. They originally met because of Saul's great hostility toward a man by the name of Goliath. The moment David first encountered Goliath, he understood that Saul "would greatly enrich the man who slew Goliath, and would give

¹⁴¹ E. G. White says the following, "Moses remembered that he had disregarded one of God's requirements; yielding to the persuasion of his wife, he had neglected to perform the rite of circumcision upon their youngest son." White, *Patriarcas e Profetas*, 255-256.

him his daughter, and make his family free in Israel” (1 Sam 17:25, NRSV). David seemed perplexed by this award, as seen by his frequent attempts to confirm its veracity with others.

Despite all the past, Michal is first introduced after David has defeated the Philistines and Saul has chosen to give Merab to another man (1 Sam 18:20-21) “*Now Saul’s daughter Michal loved David* [...] Therefore, Saul said to David a second time “*You shall be my son-in-law*”. [...] David was well pleased to be the king’s son in law. [...] Saul gave him his daughter Michal as a wife. But when Saul realized that the LORD was with David, and that Saul’s daughter Michal loved him, Saul was still more afraid of David 1 Samuel 18:20-21.

“This passage shows the critical issue that there is no indication David entered this marriage because of any affection for Michal.”¹⁴² Instead, David was motivated to marry Michal because he desired to become Saul’s son-in-law. He was glad to find a family connection with Saul, as the verse says.

From the two passages alone, these details highlight the fact that Michael did not act independently. Michal is nearly always alluded to in terms of her connection to Saul or David in every place where she is regarded. Michael is treated in every way as property rather than as a free individual, not just by Saul and David but also in the written text, where the reader is continuously reminded of Michal’s rightful owner. The tension between Saul and David grew after Michal and David were married. Saul wanted to directly confront David and murder him because he feared him. After learning of the threat, Michal reacted (1 Sam 19: 11-17). David began to collect

¹⁴² Scott Monsma, “Retelling the Fragmented Story of Michal,” *Journal for the Sociological Integration of Religion and Society* 3, no. 2 (2013): 21.

additional wives, including Abigail, Ahinoam, and Michal, but Saul had given Michal to Palti (1 Sam 25:42-44).

Saul again exploited Michal for his own ends,¹⁴³ and David risked a battle to rescue his second wife, but didn't take any action when Michal was given to another man. Michal won't appear again in the biblical story for a while after this brief appearance. Instead, the story keeps concentrating on David's ascendance to power and Saul's deterioration and end of his rule.

David is crowned ruler of the tribe of Judah following Saul's death. Ishbaal, the son of Saul, continues to rule the northern tribes. David and Ishbaal resume their battle for control of all of Israel after Saul's death. The struggle continued for seven and a half years, during which time David rose to power and Ishbaal lost ground. Then, in a shocking turn of events, Ishbaal's principal general Abner changed sides and assured David that he could assist in subduing the northern tribes. The biblical story returns to Michal during this tribal strife and shifting military alliance.

But one thing I require of you (Abner): You shall not see my face unless you first bring Michal, Saul's daughter, when you come to see my face." So, David sent messengers to Ishbosheth, Saul's son saying, "Give me my wife Michal, whom I betrothed to myself for a hundred foreskins of the Philistines." And Ishbosheth sent and took her from her husband, From Palthiel the son of Laish. Then her husband went along with her to Bahurim, weeping behind her. So, Abner said to him, "Go, return!" And he returned (2 Sam 3:12-16).

David had done nothing about his first wife for at least seven and a half years, if not much longer. But when Abner offered a chance to defeat Ishbaal's influence, David now tried to regain Michal. More crucially, he was essentially asserting his right to succeed Saul's authority by asking for his wife and Saul's daughter back. So, Michal went back to the man she had loved before a man who had never shown any

¹⁴³ Monsma, "Retelling the Fragmented Story of Michal," 21.

signs of love for her, a man who consistently indicated to her and others that she was desired solely for her political values. Political and diplomatic marriages relate to David and Michal's marriage.

The marriage between David and Michal serves as an example of a union between individuals with different worldviews. While both David and Michal worshiped the same God, their understanding of worship differed. This discrepancy in their views eventually led to the breakdown of their marriage. Despite their shared faith, their divergent interpretations and approaches to worship created tension and ultimately resulted in their separation. Their story highlights the importance of mutual understanding and alignment in matters of faith within a marriage, as differences in interpretation can strain the relationship.

Marriages between Jews and Samaritans in Times of Ezra and Nehemiah

It is necessary to examine the origin, beliefs, religious, and cultic practices of the northern kingdom, or kingdom of Israel, composed of ten tribes, from the decision that occurred in 930 BCE before the Common Era, in order to properly understand who the Samaritans were, their beliefs and religion, their origins, and their relationships with the Jews.¹⁴⁴

Jeroboam I became the first king of the Northern Kingdom and founded the first capital of the realm in Samaria.¹⁴⁵ He established two worship centers, one of which was placed at Bethel and the other at Dan, both of which had a golden calf because he was afraid of losing control back to Rehoboam, king of Judah, the

¹⁴⁴ J. S. Schultz, *A História de Israel No Antigo Testamento*, 2nd ed. (São Paulo, Brazil: Sociedade Religiosa Edições Vida Nova, 2009), 199.

¹⁴⁵ J. Bright, *História de Israel*, 3rd ed. (São Paulo, Brazil: Paulinas, 1985), 312.

southern kingdom. He also chose priests from tribes other than the Levites and erected shrines “on high places.” This action was taken to stop his subjects from traveling to Jerusalem’s temple, the southern kingdom’s capital, to praise and worship God. These incidents are documented in 2 Chronicles 11:13-17 and 1 Kings 12:1.

Throughout the time that the kingdom of Israel in the North existed, practices that Jeroboam I either instituted or reintroduce persisted. The covenant that YHVH made with the Hebrew people was broken by these acts, which were against His laws. Following the destruction of Israel and its capital Samaria in 722 BCE (2 Kgs 17, 24-41), the mixed people, who made up a recognized people living in the region of the northern kingdom and by foreigners who were transported there by the Assyrian empire, adhered to the same customs. They worshipped pagan deities while also praising the God of Israel.

As a result, the locals of Samaria both Jews and outsiders created a syncretic religion. The cults Jeroboam I established shared many similarities with this type of religious syncretism (1 Kgs 17:34-41). According to Rudd,¹⁴⁶ the liturgical and syncretic worship practices of the Samaritans following their captivity in 722 BCE can be traced back to the reign of King Jeroboam I. Consequently, Jeroboam I might be seen as the creator of the syncretic religion in Israel, or the Northern Kingdom. These customs persisted even after the captivity in 722 BCE.¹⁴⁷

Ezra, Nehemiah, and his helpers were not overly hopeful about the state of Israel following the Babylonian exile. They understood right away that there was a lot to do. A few of Israel’s leaders had gone too far, disobeying the Lord’s commands

¹⁴⁶ Bible Archeology, “The Samaritans,” last modified 2023, accessed May 17, 2023, <https://www.bible.ca/archeology/bible-archeology-samaritans.htm>.

¹⁴⁷ Schultz, *A História de Israel No Antigo Testamento*, 235.

and getting married to neighbors. “For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, so that the holy seed is mixed with the peoples of those lands (Ezra 9:1-2), contrary to God’s Law, Deuteronomy 7:3 forbids Israel from entering into any agreements with the inhabitants of the country, including intermarrying.

According to E. G. White, in investigating the origins of the Babylonian captivity, Ezra verified that Israel’s apostasy was the result of her mixing with pagan nations.¹⁴⁸ According to Ralph W. Klein, Nehemiah’s final reform addresses mixed marriages.¹⁴⁹ He discovered that half of the children of men who married Ashdodite women spoke only Ashdodites, not Hebrew. According to 4:7, Ashdodites supported Sanballat and others in their opposition to the construction of the city wall.¹⁵⁰ White also endorses the same idea, after completing the Sabbath reforms that had long been neglected, Nehemiah “turned his attention to the danger threatening Israel posed by unions, marriages, and association with idolaters.”¹⁵¹ “I also saw in those days,” she says, “Jews who had married Ashdodite, Ammonite, and Moabite women, and their children spoke half Ashdodite, and they could not speak Jewish, except according to the language of each people” (Neh 13:23-24). Following Nehemiah’s reforms of the nation, particularly the priesthood, many women who had married idolaters fled the country. Those who had been banished from the congregation joined them.

¹⁴⁸ Ellen G. White, *Profetas e Reis* (São Paulo, Brazil: Casa Publicadora Brasileira, 1981), 620.

¹⁴⁹ Ralph W. Klein, “The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), 3:848.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ White, *Profetas e Reis*, 673.

According to Ellen G. White, the Samaritans were included in this group. To reinforce this cooperation, “the Samaritans pledged to accept more widely the faith and practices of Jews, and the apostates, strong-minded to outdo their former brethren, built a temple in Mount Gerizim, in hostility to the house of God in Jerusalem.”¹⁵² This split caused numerous problems. The Samaritan religion developed “a blend of Judaism and paganism, and their claim to be God’s people was a cause of schism, emulation, and enmity between the two nations, generation after generation.”¹⁵³

Finally, we may conclude that all these examples show that such marriages have a lot of problems and are prone to dissolution; such marriages are not encouraged. Biblically, marriages between persons who have differing perspectives on how to worship God are not encouraged, and interdenominational marriages can be classified into this category.

In biblical times, the phenomenon of interdenominationalism did not exist, making it challenging to draw definitive conclusions solely from explicit statements in the Bible regarding the permissibility of interdenominational marriages. However, the teachings of the Bible extend beyond explicit commands. Much of the biblical material consists of stories that contain universal principles. When examining examples such as the marriages between Moses and Zipporah, David and Michal, and encounters between Jews and Samaritans, we observe the potential dangers and threats associated with interdenominational unions. While the Bible does not explicitly prohibit interdenominational marriages, it becomes evident that such unions are not explicitly encouraged based on the lessons drawn from these examples.

¹⁵² White, *Profetas e Reis*, 673.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

CHAPTER 4

SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

In every marriage, both spouses bring with them their own unique cultures, values, beliefs, and customs. These aspects have a significant influence on each individual and shape the dynamics of the relationship. When two people hold different values or beliefs, it is inevitable that these differences will impact their marriage. The clash or alignment of cultural backgrounds, personal values, and religious beliefs can significantly affect how a couple communicates, makes decisions, and resolves conflicts. Cultural norms and practices may shape expectations; while differing beliefs can lead to disagreements or challenges in finding common ground. Understanding and appreciating each other's backgrounds and perspectives is crucial for navigating these differences and building a strong, harmonious relationship.

Culture

According to Lloyd E. Kwast, the first step in studying culture is to master the culture itself. Everyone has their own culture and nobody will ever be able to separate themselves from their culture.¹ Even though it isn't stated clearly in the Bible, the dispersion of humanity following the failed attempt to construct the tower of Babel

¹ Lloyd E. Kwast, "Entendendo o Que é a Cultura," in *Perspectiva No Movimento Cristão Mundial*, ed. Ralph D. Winter, Stephen C. Hawthorne, and Kevin D. Bradford (São Paulo, Brazil: Vida Nova, 2009), 385.

(Gen 11:8) may be considered the origin of the many different cultures that exist today.

Kwast acknowledges that while it is possible to respect other cultures and even have effective relationships with several of them, no one can transcend their own culture or that of other people in order to gain a truly supra-cultural perspective. This makes even studying culture itself a challenging endeavour. It is nearly impossible to look at something that is a part of oneself entirely and objectively.²

In any case, in order to effectively share the good news of the gospel with a particular human group, it is necessary to have a proper knowledge of the term's meaning.³ Therefore, as suggested by Paul Cobley, it is commonly acknowledged that the Latin verb *colere*, which also has the meaning "to cultivate," is the source of the term "culture." However, in everyday speech, this meaning has almost completely been forgotten.⁴

According to Kwast, culture is about offering "a standardized way of doing things," which is how a group of missionary anthropologists described culture. "Culture" can be thought of as the "superglue" that keeps people together and provides them with an almost impenetrable sense of identity and continuity. This identity is most visible in the way things are done, or in behaviour.⁵ Many behaviours appear to be influenced by similar decisions made by members of that culture because "culture most commonly goes unnoticed, and requires detailed inquiry."⁶ According to

² Kwast, "Entendendo o Que é a Cultura," 385.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Paul Cobley, "Culture: Definitions and Concepts," ed. Wolfgang Donsbach, *The International Encyclopedia of Communication* (London, UK: Blackwell, 2008), 2.

⁵ Kwast, "Entendendo o Que é a Cultura," 385.

⁶ Cobley, "Culture: Definitions and Concepts," 2.

Loyd, culture is divided into four levels: 1. Behaviour, 2. Values, 3. Beliefs, 4. The worldview, also represented in the Figure 1.

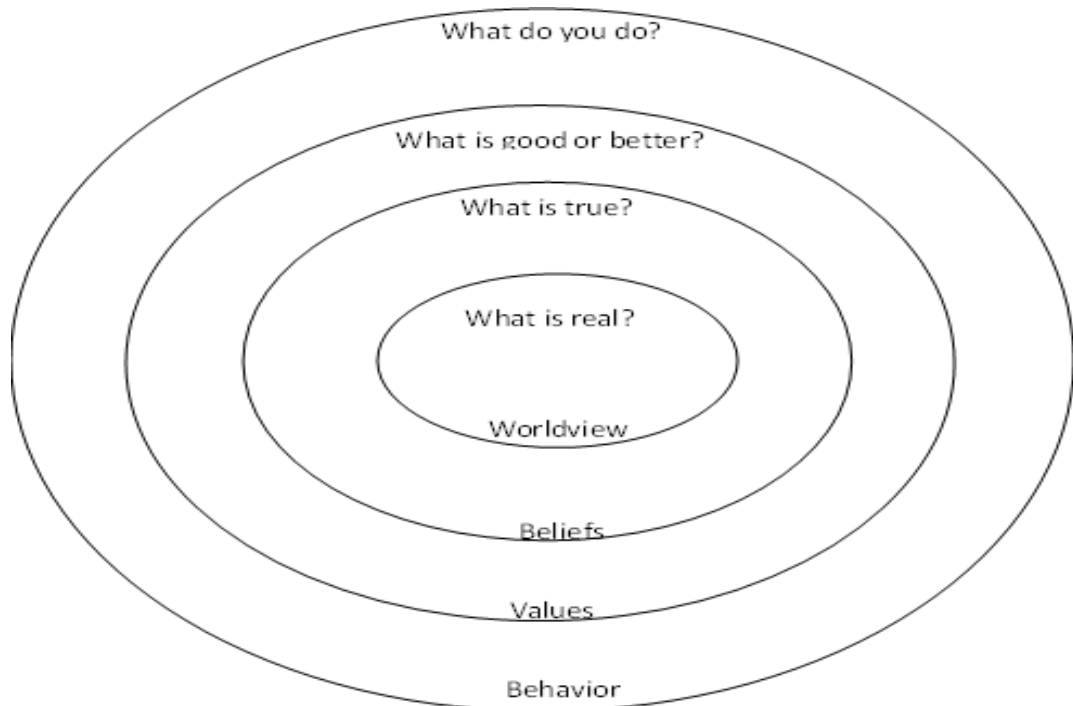


Figure 1. Four Levels of Culture⁷

Behavior

This level is concerned with the most external, superficial shell as seen from the outside. The first thing a newcomer will notice is people’s behavior. This is the outermost, most visible shell as seen from the outside. It answers the questions on the meaning of things.⁸

Values

This level is concerned with choices, which invariably represent cultural values. It’s the peel from the inside. These questions are always about what is “good,”

⁷ Kwast, “Entendendo o Que é a Cultura,” 387.

⁸ Ibid., 385-386.

“beneficial,” or “better” in this context. Values are “pre-established” cultural decisions made in the face of frequent options. Values instruct persons who live within a culture about what “must” be done in order to adhere or conform to a standard of living.⁹

Beliefs

At this level, we are confronted with a more fundamental question about the nature of culture, which propels us to a degree of comprehension that is more in-depth: that of cultural beliefs. These convictions provide the answer to the question “What is true?” for that particular culture because values within a culture are not arbitrarily chosen, but rather always reflect a core set of beliefs.¹⁰ According to this definition, culture is a “shared cognitive orientation” or “ways of perceiving things, ways that are learned and shared.”¹¹

Interestingly, an inquirer in one compartment may discover that people in that compartment, although having comparable behaviour and ideals, may have very different ideas about those values and behaviours. Perhaps the researcher will also discover that values and behaviours sometimes contradict the beliefs that supposedly produce them. This difficulty stems from a cultural misunderstanding of operational beliefs (convictions conveyed in words that have little or no impact on values and conduct).¹²

The Worldview

Any culture’s core is its vision, which provides an answer to the most fundamental question: “What is real?” The big “ultimate” questions of reality, which are rarely discussed but to which culture provides its most important responses, are

⁹ Kwast, “Entendendo o Que é a Cultura,” 386.

¹⁰ Ibid., 386-387.

¹¹ Ibid., 387.

¹² Ibid.

discussed in this field of culture.¹³ The idea of the worldview as the heart of each civilization explains many people's perplexity at the level of beliefs. The worldview of a person gives a belief system that is mirrored in their actual values and conduct. When a new or competing belief system is introduced, but the worldview remains unchanged, values and behavior follow the existing belief system.¹⁴ Kwast concluded that occasionally those who spread the gospel in cross-cultural contexts underestimate the worldview issue and are discouraged by the lack of actual change that their efforts should bring about.¹⁵

Given the excerpts, definitions, and explanations provided here, it is important to note that understanding humanity and what affects it necessitates knowledge of the cultural background in which that particular tribe or race finds itself. The study focuses on how culture and the advent of technology today effect church members' understanding of the doctrine of marriage, specifically who to marry as expressed in the Bible and taught by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Local Situation

The pastoral challenges regarding the "Unequally Yoked Marriages" in 1 Corinthians 6:14 in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Esmirna District Central Mission, Southwest Angola Union Mission served as the inspiration for this study. There are several ethnic groups from all across Angola in the district under study, which is mostly cosmopolitan and mixed-ethnic. Over 98% of the church's members are from the Ovimbundu ethnic group, which is the dominant one. A significant

¹³ Kwast, "Entendendo o Que é a Cultura," 387.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

number of members continue to wed people with different religious beliefs, which is against what the Bible teaches on the subject.

People today, even officials, frequently hold several marriage unions that for a long time sounded unusual, whether among Adventists themselves or even among different ethnic groups. They use statements and behaviors that suggest a departure from the church's orthodox view on rules for unequally yoked marriages, as well as common phrases and expressions that have become part of the fort of believers on many communication platforms, both written and verbal.

Statements such as "due to the war, the Church has more women than men," "I looked for him in the district and I didn't find anyone who wanted to marry me," "those who wanted me are from other churches," "we are all Christian, we are all children of God," "we are worshiping the same God, only the day of worship differs from us," and so on.

Additionally, there are still hints that members have wedded Muslims from African regions who are visiting on business. Some claim that Paul's context in II Corinthians has nothing to do with marriage, and even if it did, the social structure and its paradigms have changed, making personal marriage partner selection more democratic and open because we live in a more modern era. Not to mention the poor member participation in church activities, such as church boards, and the loss of members due to adultery with non-believers.

Despite the difficulty of obtaining written sources on the Ovimbundu people's culture, beliefs, and traditions, it is known that they are a Bantu Negro tribe from Angola, often known as Portuguese Southwest Africa. Historical evidence implies

that the Ovimbundu migrated from the southwest Congo region, and an assessment of their language and culture supports this theory.¹⁶

According to Mbiti's description of the significance of marriage in African communities, marriage serves a variety of functions and has multiple meanings. Examples include the duty to have children, a unifying link in the cycle of life, the creation of a family, new relationships between families, the remembrance of parents after death, restoring lost immortality, bringing people together, granting someone social prominence, and offering someone a sense of "completeness," the development of positive character traits, and multiple marriage.¹⁷ This is acceptable in Umbundo culture.

As stated by Mbiti, marriage satisfies the obligation, duty, and custom that every normal person should get married and have children. It is equivalent to breaking the law to not get married.¹⁸ Due to these perspectives on the significance and goal of marriage, African societies also practice other customs like marrying multiple wives, arranging for a dead son to be married while the father is away, arranging for the wives of impotent or frequently absent husbands to have children by close friends or family members, and so on. Where these traditions are observed, people honor and accept them without feeling guilty about doing so. Even if they are becoming more and more difficult to follow in the modern world due to developments, they are still in use.¹⁹

¹⁶ Wilfrid D. Hambly, *Spiritual Beliefs of the Ovimbundu of Angola* (Chicago, IL: Field Museum of Natural History, 2018), 565.

¹⁷ John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (London, UK: Heinemann, 1982), 110, 111.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

The Umbundus have made a number of claims concerning marriage. For instance, they claim that traditional marriage is a process in which economic, social, and religious elements are frequently intermingled, making it challenging to get rid of the barrier separating them. The traditional marriage, which is accompanied by the delivery of the doubts (ovilombo) to the woman's family, is described by the historian Festo Sapalo as "a place where all community members, including the deceased, the living, and those yet to be born, can meet."²⁰

Traditional marriages take place in the Umbundu ethnic group, often with the help of friends and family. Moreover, it is a responsibility, a communal activity, and a way of life in which all family members are expected to participate. Those who choose not to do so are cursed and treated as rebels.²¹ Marriage systematizes, regulates social life, and organizes links between relatives in the affixation of affiliation, therefore in the Umbundu culture, not getting married generally translates to being rejected by society and the community. Married men are left with two girls to help with home tasks until the wife gives birth to their first child.

After having two or three children, the woman's relatives presented her with a joint of goats, a corn meal, and chicken to thank her for the gift. According to customary law, the father is responsible for giving the names for the first children; only after that does the woman provide it to the others. In this culture, marriage is both a rite of passage and a legally binding contract that includes a number of formalities, including grooming, middlemen, witnesses, a parade, a presenting ceremony, and parties.

²⁰ Última Atualização, "Casamento Tradicional Na Cultura Umbundu," *Jornal de Angola*, last modified 2023, accessed May 1, 2023, <https://www.jornaldeangola.ao/ao/noticias/detalhes.php?id=206559>.

²¹ Ibid.

According to a 78-year-old woman who gave an interview to *Jornal de Angola*, “disobedient young people today live on illusions, do not anticipate the results of what they do, and do not embrace the advice of their parents, nor that of their aunts.”²² “When an adult advises on good sharing between couples, they trivialize it and say that this is a new era, and these values are out of date,” she explained. “You get pregnant and not even the boy assumes paternity, the girl is harmed, and the child is supported by the grandparents, all because of young people’s lack of maturity.” Josefina Ngalo noted that in the past, young people were supported differently, both for girls and for boys, who listened to the advice of uncles and aunts and “had the great task and patience of teaching how to share life as a couple.” The aunts also taught the girls how to wash, iron, cook, be humble in front of their husbands, and even have biblical knowledge. She claimed that in the past, each family lineage had its own location for choosing wives. “As soon as the young man reached the age to contract marriage, the bride was already chosen by relatives, ready to marry, and they followed the habits and customs of the land,” she said.²³

Ngalo, as an Umbundu defending cultural practices, encourages young people to adopt “the tradition and good customs of each region,” although with some adjustments indicative of the dynamic world in which we live.²⁴ She urged them to “follow the process of making the *alambamento* (the request to marry a woman) until the wedding day and comply with all the rituals of each ethnic group, be they

²² Atualização, “Casamento Tradicional Na Cultura Umbundu”.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

Umbundu, Kikongo, Kimbundu, Cokwe, or others, which dignify our tradition and culture.” “Because our culture and tradition are rich in values.”²⁵

Finally, according to the Umbudos, the bride and groom do not spend the night together after the party, which includes food and drinks in the “*othingalala*” hall. She sleeps in her new house alongside more than 30 “*katalamba*” children and young people aged 4 to 18, as well as her aunt. The groom sleeps alone and must return to the “*etambo*” residence, where the bride spent the night, at morning.

In some ways, culture still presents a significant problem. Teaching people about who to marry is a pastoral issue in the Smyrna district since Umbundu community has deeply embedded customs and practices around marriage and its purpose. However, some of the harmful cultural influences can be countered and a disciplined biblically sound approach to marriage practices and mate selection be restored with a well-planned and concerted effort.

A comprehensive annual report and a regular Bible study program should be developed for all age groups, with distinct and particular seminars on the dangerous implications of negative cultural characteristics in the face of strong biblical teachings. Strategic planning to counsel members on marriage difficulties, whether they are young singles or not, new or old, should be a priority as should divorce and remarriage.

Biblical seminars and workshops on Biblical marriage principles, culture, modernity, secularization, and postmodernism should also be organized. The church should then be divided into departmental groups which should then be divided into

²⁵ Atualização, “Casamento Tradicional Na Cultura Umbundu.”

age groups with appropriate subjects customized to the age group based on their level of comprehension of the issue.

The teachings must be sustained throughout time and of a regular type in order to counter the already deeply embedded cultural influences as well as those brought about by expanding technology. For continuity, it's also important to identify prospective allies who could further the cause in the pastor's absence. The field must embrace this concern so that the successor continues the efforts in the pastor's new home.

Religion

According to Adriano Katiavala, a Catholic priest, marriage is an ancient act born of norms and promoted by moral, religious, and cultural considerations.²⁶ Despite several attempts to produce a singular definition or statement of the term "religion," none of these efforts have been successful in providing a precise definition of religion. This endeavor may be justified by the fact that it has long been a hotly debated topic among believers and non-believers alike throughout all eras and geographies.

Some contend that definitions can aid us in thinking systematically about an experience, such as religion. However, the definitions are not value-free; they reveal a lot about the preferences and viewpoints of those who create them.²⁷ While Durkheim establishes religion as "a harmonious system of holy things, beliefs, and practices, that is, things set aside, prohibited beliefs and practices that combine into one unified

²⁶ Atualização, "Casamento Tradicional Na Cultura Umbundu."

²⁷ Glancy et al., *Introduction to the Study of Religion*, 61.

moral people that is known as a church and those who adhere to them.”²⁸ Some people think that through the duplicity of action, religion may be utilized to combat particular worldviews in certain communities.²⁹

But according to Aloysius Muzzanganda Lugira, African religious adherents do not distinguish between religion and other aspects of their lives. Their beliefs are so inextricably linked to their culture that religion and culture are one and the same.³⁰ Religion, is a part of existence, with gods and people engaging through rituals, prayers, and sacrifices.³¹ Community, culture, and religion are inextricably linked among African peoples. The African worldview is fundamentally one of belonging to a community group. People are equally committed to sharing their resources and services, and they believe that others in the community should feel and do the same way.³²

According to Lugira, scholar Mbiti argued that individual acts have an influence on the entire group, whereas collective actions have an effect on an individual. The individual can only say, “I am because we are, and because we are, therefore I am. “Their safety is found in this sense of community.”³³

This study aimed to demonstrate how, when it comes to matrimonial rules in the selection of a partner, the Umbundos of the Central region of Angola, of the

²⁸ Andrew McKinnon, “Sociological Definitions, Language Games, and the ‘Essence’ of Religion,” *Method & Theory in the study of Religion* 14, no. 1 (2002): 4.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Aloysius M. Lugira, *African Traditional Religion*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Chelsea House, 2009), 17.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 17, 18.

³³ Lugira, *African Traditional Religion*; John S. Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2008), 108.

district of Esmirna in Cuíto, of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, practice their respective religions and beliefs differently from some aspects of their cultural heritage.

Despite different definitions and academics' struggles to define religion and culture in a single word, there is such a close connection between the two. However, it is abundantly clear that religion defines and complements culture. It can also serve as a belief system and a marker of identity. According to Charles H. Kraft, the first Christians were Jews. They innately believed that the cultural ways the gospel was given to them were the only ones that were correct. As a result, they believed that all Christians should acquire Jewish culture.³⁴ God used the Jew-born apostle Paul to impart to that age and ours a different approach.³⁵

When the Church insisted that everyone adopt Roman culture after the New Testament era, God sent Luther to demonstrate that people who spoke German and conducted their worship in the German manner could be accepted by the Lord. Later, Anglicanism emerged to demonstrate that God could utilize the English language and its customs, and Wesleyanism emerged to communicate to England's lower classes that God accepted them along with their culture. So, it has been throughout Christian history, and the emergence of each new denomination is always accompanied by significant cultural concerns.³⁶ Understanding the background carefully and with competence is essential due to the intricacy of studying religion. Some religious

³⁴ Charles H. Kraft, "Cultura, 'Cosmovisão E Contextualização,'" in *Perspectivas no Movimento Cristão Mundial*, ed. Ralph D. Winter, Stephen C. Hawthorne, and Kevin D. Bradford (Sao Paulo, Brazil: Edições Vida Nova, 2009), 392.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

affiliations have different perspectives and understandings of marriage and the decision of which partner to unite in marriage as a doctrine of the Bible.

Adventist missionaries overcame the local African religion in their effort to spread Christianity in central Angola, despite numerous obstacles. These unresolved, underlying difficulties still form a part of the pastoral challenges in dealing with unequal or mixed marriages since they were intrinsic problems that they were unable to solve and had to be left to the indigenous to cope with. Adventist Church African missiologist Professor Kelvin Onongha supports this thought by saying that: “Missionaries were successful in planting the gospel in Africa, but were unable to eliminate witchcraft and death beliefs, leading to locals turning to shamans for help.”³⁷

Unfortunately, the issue remains. New converts continue to be imposed by gospel communicators’ culture and denomination. [As a result, we strive to apply anthropological notions to missions in order to safeguard people whom we want to push to be like us.] If we utilize the biblical way, we must modify and adapt God’s message to the culture of the people who hear it. We must not portray God in the same way that some early Jewish Christians did (Acts 15:1), asking converts to follow Jewish rituals in order to be approved by God.³⁸ A method for reversing what has been fundamentally fostered in this reference should be offered to members beforehand and should be based on revisiting the concerns that missionaries did not address at the time. In order to repackage fundamental Adventist beliefs and biblical teachings on the subject and essentially address the problems caused by culture and

³⁷ Kelvin Okey Onongha, “African Pentecostalism and Its Relationship to Witchcraft Beliefs and Accusations: Biblical Responses to a Pernicious Problem Confronting the Adventist Church in Africa,” *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 13, no. 1 (2017): 4.

³⁸ Kraft, “Cultura, ‘Cosmovisão E Contextualização,’” 392.

religion, the church must adopt a culturally friendly approach that seeks to understand and contextualize the teachings so that they fit the positive cultural framework.

In order to handle an exponential rise, the Adventist Church in Africa needs to train and hire additional pastors, but there isn't enough money to pay their salaries. As a result, the church must find a solution to the wage issue, and large districts with many churches, such as Esmirna, should have more than one pastor to properly serve the spiritual requirements of the members.

There were not many churches when Christian missionaries first arrived in the nineteenth century. Today, there are a huge number of denominations surrounding Adventist Churches. These churches advance teachings that some Adventist Church members find confusing, especially those who are not devoted to the churches and the Bible's core doctrine. Syncretism involves integrating unbiblical beliefs into Christianity, which leads to "a dual or divided allegiance to both the God of the Bible and the gods and powers of traditional religion."³⁹

Some of the surrounding communities are traditional in nature, as are some of our associations. As a result, our intrinsic syncretic tendency prompted the entrance of unbiblical principles and behaviors. Syncretic practices provide a solution to the challenges associated with marital belief and practice. As a result, the church must devise a strong and effective strategy for combatting syncretism among its visitors. If the church is to succeed in effectively following fundamental principles, we must redesign our theological approach to doctrinal matters and build a culturally intuitive grasp of the Bible and prophecy texts.

³⁹ Gordon R. Doss, "An Adventist Response to African Traditional Religion," *Asia-Africa Journal of Mission and Ministry* 1 (2009): 82.

Doctrinal Issues

According to John Kelly, there is an important preliminary question that the learner must address before examining particular doctrines. This refers to the Church's attitude toward "Christian doctrines" itself during the time period under consideration, including its origins and authority.⁴⁰ According to George A. Lindbeck, who discusses the doctrine and its issues in terms of the doctrine's essence and its theories: "The ideas, beliefs, and practices that are deemed fundamental to the identity or well-being of the group in issue are referred to as church doctrines in the community. They outline the qualities of loyal community membership."⁴¹

But according to Millard J. Erickson, Christian doctrine is "descriptions of the core beliefs held by Christians, including their views on the character of God, His actions, us as His creatures, and what He has done to reconcile us to Himself."⁴² The Seventh-day Adventist Church bases its beliefs and practices on the teachings of the Bible, rejecting any creed as a foundation. But have past sometimes the Church adopted a Bible-based creed of core beliefs as the hallmark of other churches, as confirmed by Joseph Kidder.

As a Bible-believing church, Seventh-day Adventists hold that the teachings of Scripture should serve as the cornerstone of their beliefs and practices. Early on, the Adventist Church strenuously opposed using any creed as a foundation for its beliefs. However, as Joseph Kidder explains in the passage below, the movement later

⁴⁰ John Norman Davidson Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrine*, 4th ed. (London, UK: Adam and Charles Black, 1968), 29.

⁴¹ George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Post-liberal Age* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984), 74.

⁴² Millard J. Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 11.

agreed to create a creed of fundamental beliefs based on the Bible in order to set itself apart from other churches:

Any discussion about the development of statements of belief centers around 1872. This year, the Adventist Publishing House published *A Declaration of the Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by the Seventh-day Adventists*. The (unnamed) author was Uriah Smith, the Review and Herald editor. Adventists would draft this statement of belief from 1844 to 1931 as the most comprehensive statement of belief. Throughout this period, this document was the basis for all the fundamental belief statements that were published in church publication.⁴³

The following comments on the evolution of Adventist fundamental ideas come from Uriah Smith⁴⁴ and Ellen White.⁴⁵ The evolution of the Adventist crede of beliefs reveals the struggle of a movement that believed in being distinctively biblical, in being able to address concerns about their faith and belief in the Bible, and in combating their religious detractors. The fundamental components of theology are their doctrines.

Syncretism poses a serious problem for doctrinal matters, particularly marriage and Christian behavior. To help the members who still have strong ties to both Christianity and traditional religions recognize the hidden danger in their dual

⁴³ Joseph S. Kidder, "Creeds and Statements of Belief in Early Adventist Thought," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 47, no. 1 (2009): 6.

⁴⁴ Uriah Smith, *A Declaration of the Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by the Seventh-day Adventists* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1872), 3. The Seventh-day Adventists aim to present a brief synopsis of their faith, stating that they have no articles of faith, creed, or discipline apart from the Bible. They do not claim authority or uniformity among their people, but rather a brief statement of their beliefs. They seek to understand their position and address false statements, as many Adventists hold views they find subversive to the principles set forth in the Bible.

⁴⁵ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Washington, DC: Pacific Press, 1948), 3:446-447. God is guiding people away from the world upon the exalted platform of eternal truth, Jesus' faith, and commandments. He will discipline and fit them in order to maintain faith and unity. The church's diversity of gifts and governments will lead to this unity. Through thorough Scripture study and prayer, God gives a clear chain of Bible truth from heavenly origin.

loyalty, a particular strategy is needed. In this case, the church should adopt a culturally sensitive strategy rather than its customary presentations that explain the doctrine's value to a member on a spiritual level.

To help create a transitional understanding of the doctrine within the context of the Bible, the teachings should be open and honest, contextualized to fit the cultural framework, and seek to reintroduce the doctrines from a culturally friendly basis by incarnating and enjoining the positive aspects with the Bible. Members should be made aware of the process of the church's development of doctrines, allowing them to appreciate the process, because we can defend our faith based on biblically sound beliefs. To comprehend fundamental ideas as pillars of our faith and identity, they should be studied with the Bible and historical context.

In order to safeguard the membership against false teachings on church history, it is important to make individuals who spread half-truths about the development of our church's doctrines aware of the truth. Before the fall, everything was perfect, including marriage, thus God Himself created it as a divine institution. A marriage is also a lifetime commitment between the husband and wife to God and to one another. Our key principles show how the Bible fits with us, setting us apart from other experts in our industry.

Practical Considerations: Theology and Interfaith Divorce Rates

There are particular social concerns that can and probably should impact our theology on interfaith marriage as it relates to Adventists in addition to the larger evolving geopolitical context within which we carve our current truth niche. Although not all-inclusive, some factors are significant.

Numerous studies have revealed that interfaith partnerships of any kind are more likely to result in separation or unhappy relationships than marriages between partners who share the same religion.⁴⁶ Additionally, it is generally known that the chance of divorce increases with the degree of theological disagreement between the couple.⁴⁷

It is probably accurate to claim that Adventism differs from every other mainstream Christian denomination in both theory and practice. The Sabbath and diet are just two examples, but they can already show a significant difference in how an Adventist and non-Adventist live.⁴⁸ Similar trends were seen in Angola, where, in spite of the lack of data, at least the Pastoral observed reality in the region demonstrates that couples who share the same religious beliefs tend to have marriages that continue longer than the norm. Psychology highlights that a couple's chances of happiness increase with their level of compatibility in several areas. Conflicts caused by religious differences harm relationships in one way or another.⁴⁹ True connection is seldom ever achieved when there is no affinity in the spiritual sphere. When compared to individuals who choose to marry people of the same faith, divorce rates are three times higher among mixed marriages.⁵⁰ According to the CBASD, this divide between Christians and non-believers is so profound that a Christian must choose whether to "abandon principles or face difficulties" while forming a close

⁴⁶ Riley, "Interfaith Unions."

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Evelyn Lehrer, *Religion, Economics and Demography: The Effects of Religion on Education, Work, and the Family* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009), 24.

⁴⁹ A. Chagas, "Casamento Misto," *Revista Adventista*, January 1998, 30.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

relationship with them. In addition to the marriage union, existing variances in morals and preferences have an impact on how children are educated.⁵¹

Given the data offered by the statistical sciences, it is prudent to think about whether we should support a practice that seems to favor divorce rather than serve to prevent it (Mal 2:16), which we are aware is not God's will. These are but a few of the current issues. The impact on the continued vitality of religious communities, as well as the psychological welfare and religious destiny of children born via such marriages are some additional factors that may be important to take into account.

⁵¹ V. Dorneles, ed., *Comentário Bíblico Adventista Do Sétimo Dia: Gênesis a Deuteronômio* (Tatuí, Brazil: Casa Publicadora Brasileira, 2011), 1.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The unequal yoke or mixed marriage is still a contentious topic in Christianity according to a review of biblical texts where divine instruction and statements concerning marriage, specifically about the mixed or unequal yoke emerge. As a result, there are many combinations and problems with marriage principles and customs. In addition, the practices and the mission of Adventist Churches in the District of Esmirna in Cuíto, Angola, have been undermined by marriages with non-Adventist members. Additionally, the behaviors go against the biblical-theological principles outlined in 2 Corinthians 6:14 mainly if we approach the text in systematic theology perspective. Since we would find it impossible to prevent marrying with people who identify as conservative Protestants but belong to another Christian church from a purely exegetical standpoint.

Such unions involving followers of the three major religions—Catholicism, Protestantism, and Judaism—are typically regarded as interdenominational unions. For instance, a marriage between a Christian and a Muslim is seen as interfaith. When Adventists and members of other more conservative groups, or those who maintain distinct religious customs marry persons from other Protestant or Evangelical churches, they face the same issues.

Although the Bible is precise and clear about principles of taking into account the choice of a marriage partner as well as marriage itself, a theme in its pages and the

Seventh-day Adventist Church as an organization complementing the same in its fundamental beliefs numbered 22 and 23, there is still a challenge among some of its adherents in some parts of Central Angola in understanding this subject of important biblical principles. This study identified a gap in comprehension of these principles in the SDA Churches of the District of Esmirna, representing a challenge for the pastoral ministry.

As a result, this study suggests that a lack of understanding of the doctrine of marriage among members of the local Adventist Church, particularly the principles of marriage in II Corinthians 6:14, may have serious ramifications on their faith and spirituality, and on the church's pastoral ministry. It should also be highlighted that despite other causes such as urbanization, the advancement of globalization, and social interaction as a consequence of the movement of people and products as a result of the country's peace reached in 2022, the difficulty is mostly tied to the believers' cultural origins.

The Umbundus who are the majority tribe in the nation and mostly found in Central Angola, control the District of Esmirna church. The issue facing the Church in this area stems from the Umbundu's relationship with the spirits of their ancestors, who like those in most African societies, are very concerned and interested in their relatives' marriages, their economic success, and the expansion of their lineages.

This study concludes by looking at cultural, religious, and doctrinal factors, their apparent impact, and/or positive or negative relationships on unequal or mixed marriages in relation to the Pastoral Ministry. Additionally, the study makes some recommendations on how to resolve the complex problems pertaining to these three areas. The relationship between these three topics, which are closely related to one another because doctrine is an essential component of religion and culture, is what

makes them the most intriguing of the three we've been considering. Furthermore, it is worth thinking that none of the three can be treated separately, and it is improbable to try to define any one of them in terms of a single word or a simple assertion.

As suggested by Jahoda, "Culture is a set of explicit and implicit patterns of behavior, acquired and conveyed through symbols which represent the unique manifestation of human communities including their embodiment in objects," culture is found here as a determinant of ethics, characteristics and principles of a given community and it shapes religion.¹

Since religion is as complex as culture, culture must be taken into account as a force that plays a significant role in the formation of religion and doctrine due to each culture having its own set of values, cosmologies, and beliefs. However, culture and religion complement each other.

The incorporation of Christianity into African culture was similar to the incorporation of Christianity "into the Greco-Roman culture of the early Church and that of every subsequent era."² Christianity influenced African culture, shaping ancient religions like "African Christianity" (in Walls's words) and "American Christianity" (in Walls's words).³ The universal religion of Jesus Christ is represented by both local manifestations.⁴

The idea that religion is an incarnation into culture is presented here, and this creates the groundwork for the pastoral difficulties that the clergy encounter in

¹ Gustav Jahoda, "Critical Reflections on Some Recent Definitions of 'Culture,'" *Culture & Psychology* 18, no. 3 (2012): 2.

² Doss, "An Adventist Response to African Traditional Religion," 81.

³ Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Mary Knoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 119, quoted in Doss, "An Adventist Response to African Traditional Religion," 81.

⁴ Doss, "An Adventist Response to African Traditional Religion," 81.

relation to theological issues. According to this study, we can only find a solution if we comprehend the culture in which this religion is practiced. If Adventists are to fully understand, formally agree upon, and accept a shared interpretation and application of the doctrine of marriage and its principles, they must carefully examine the Adventist method and how the teachings are presented in the church. This is a triad that cannot be separated because doctrine is a fundamental component of both culture and religion. According to this study, doctrine is a crucial component of religion since it defines and distinguishes various religious subcultures. According to this study, there may be a problem with how members and officers are trained in certain areas. In light of this study's findings, it is recommended that the church use all reasonable efforts to preserve and solidify the biblical basis for this concept for the benefit of its members' knowledge.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study which was based on a biblical and theological analysis of the "Unequally Yoked Marriages" in 2 Corinthians 6:14 was to examine the pastoral implications in the context of the Seventh-day Adventist Churches in the Esmirna District, with a particular emphasis on the significance of correct doctrine understanding for the expansion of the church's mission and the implications for pastoral ministry. Religion, culture, and doctrine were found to be a crucial religious trinity that necessitates a high level of sobriety, comprehension, and clarity in order to contribute to the development of corporate/denominational church spirituality and increase pastoral success in ministry.

It is crucial that any religious organization consider critically examining these three aspects to promote a shared understanding of Scripture among its members, because religion and culture influence each other and ultimately determine whether a

denomination's biblical doctrines and core beliefs meet biblical standards and/or theological correction. Augmenting the body of knowledge within the Adventist Church, this study aimed to be both doctrinally and theologically accurate as well as to properly account for and integrate the cultural component so as to harmonize symmetrically with theology as well as the Bible. This study attempted to be both doctrinally and theologically accurate, as well as appropriately account for and integrate the cultural component such that it harmonizes symmetrically with theology and the Bible.

This study suggests that the church may be forced to reevaluate its approach to teaching doctrines that may be affected by culturally based bias and reassess whether adherence is not only religiously correct in the sense of doctrinal understanding and application but also highlights the danger of sync. The researcher is an Adventist frontline minister serving Central Mission of Angola.

Recommendations

This study hence recommends that:

1. We look for alternatives to scholarship such as the growth of research on the topic from the viewpoints of systematic theology and missiology.
2. Based on the facts above, the church should explore involving clergy from the Southeast Angola Union Mission Center in learning scripture, theology, and doctrine in order to improve pastoral care and spiritual growth of mission members and churches. In addition to scholarship, the expansion of research on the topic from the perspectives of systematic theology and in relation to missiology.
3. Pastors use the findings of this study to conduct seminars or teach youths and older church members.

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Radio journalism (2004)

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