

The Role of Premarital Counselling for Marriage Stability: A Pastoral Examination of the Interface between the Christian and Alago Indigenous *Epawoza* Concept of Marriage Preparation

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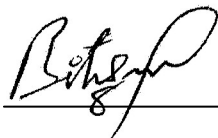
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**COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
DECLARATION**

I, Bitrus Yusuf Bawa, declare that

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Bitrus Yusuf Bawa (215073354)

As Supervisor, I hereby approve this thesis for submission to be examined.

Abstract

This study focuses on the pastoral examination of the interface between the premarital counselling methods of the Evangelical Reformed Church of Christ (ERCC) and the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* concept of marriage preparation in a quest to help curb the spate of marital instability among the Alago people of Nigeria. The study argues that neither the ERCC current model of premarital counselling nor the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* methods of premarital counselling are able to provide adequate help to couples for marriage stability among the Alago when allowed to operate independently. This study therefore seeks to answer this key research question: What aspects of premarital counselling from the Alago indigenous knowledge systems can be inculcated by the church to improve stability in Alago marriage in Nigeria in a context that is full of domestic violence and alarming rates of divorce? Hence by using prevention, contextualization and the see-judge-act frameworks as tools, the ultimate objective of the study is to develop a synergistic premarital pastoral counselling model that the ERCC ministers can use towards improving marriage stability among the Alago Christians. The foundation upon which the proposed model is built is the ERCC theological justification for church engagement in reaching out to each ethnic group through the proclamation of the gospel alongside pastoral care through counselling within the ambit of their contexts. The research methodology is qualitative in nature, in which case data was obtained through individual in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with four categories of participants: the ERCC ministers/church elders, elderly Alago persons, wedded Alago couples, and divorcees among the Alago Christians. The philosophy of the study is to obtain views from both the ERCC and Alago indigenous perspectives as well as insights from literature on the major sources of the challenges resulting in domestic violence and divorce. Analysis of the research findings shows that the underlying factor accountable for instability in marriages among the Alago Christians of the ERCC is the absence of synergy between the church and the Alago indigenous methods of doing premarital counselling, given the fact that the Alago are currently caught up in-between their culture and the influence of Christianity, Westernization and modernity. This dissertation offers a synergistic premarital pastoral counselling approach that seeks to promote greater marital stability as a benefit of this interface.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to the Evangelical Reformed Church of Christ (ERCC), a model in fulfilling God's will regarding marriage.

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Abbreviation and Acronyms

ACRC	African Communion of Reformed Churches
AGC	Assemblies of God Church
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AP	Action Partners
CAN	Christian Association of Nigeria
CBTS	Conference Bible Training School
CC	Class Council
CCN	Christian Council of Nigeria
CCP	Christian Central Pharmacy
CEAC	Christian Education Advisory Committee
CFC	Conference Council
CHAN	Christian Health Association of Nigeria
CHEW	Community Health Extension Worker
CID	Criminal Investigation Department
CMF	Christian Media Fellowship
CRI	Christian Religious Instruction
CRUDAN	Christian Rural-Urban Development Association of Nigeria
DRC	Dutch Reformed Church
DSS	Department of State Security
EC	Executive Council
ECWA	Evangelical Church Winning All
EKAN	Ekkliyyar Kristi a Nigeria
EKAS	Ekkliyyar Kristi a Sudan
ELFON	Evangelical Literature Fellowship of Nigeria
ERCC	Evangelical Reformed Church of Christ
FCCN	Fellowship of the Churches of Christ in Nigeria
GCC	General Church Council
GSPM	German Sudan Pioneer Mission
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus

JCHEW	Junior Community Health Extension Worker
LTI	Lutheran Theological Institute
LCC	Local Church Council
LGA	Local Government Area
NCE	National Certificate in Education
ND	No Date
NEMI	Nigeria Evangelical Missionary Institute
NLA	New Life for all
OMC	Observatory Methodist Church
PCN	Protestant Churches of Netherlands
PSLC	Primary School Leaving Certificate
RCM	Roman Catholic Mission
RECON	Reformed Ecumenical Council of Nigeria
RUCON	Rural Urban Christian Organization of Nigeria
SPM	Sudan Pioneer Mission
SPPC	Synergistic Premarital Pastoral Counselling
SSCE	Senior School Certificate Examination
STDs	Sexually Transmitted Diseases
SUM	Sudan United Mission
TCNN	Theological College of Northern Nigeria
TEKAN	Tarayan Ekklisiyoyin Kristi a Nigeria
UKZN	University of KwaZulu–Natal
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund
WARC	World Alliance of Reformed Churches
WCC	World Council of Churches
WCRC	World Communion of Reformed Churches
YMCA	Young Men’s Christian Association

CHAPTER ONE

Preliminary Discussions

1.1 Introduction

This study focuses on the role of premarital counselling for marriage stability by attempting to do a pastoral examination of the interface between the Evangelical Reformed Church of Christ (the ERCC)¹ and the Alago Indigenous *Epawoza* Concept of Marriage Preparation with the view to developing a Synergistic premarital pastoral counselling (SPPC)² model that is more comprehensive in addressing marital challenges among the Alago people.

Marriage is one of the oldest and surviving social institutions entered into by both men and women (Geneses 2:18-25) as almost every human society on earth has a form of marriage both in the past and in the present (Danmbaezue & Okeukwu 2015). People who desire to succeed in any venture they consider to be important in their lives such as education, driving or games usually start with adequate preparation or planning (Riechmann ND: Website), as the proverb says, “He who fails to plan, plans to fail” (Giffin ND: Website). However, as important as marriage is to human relationship, little investment seems to be accorded to its preparation among the Alago Christians of the ERCC today. During the pre-colonial era there was a high level of discipline in the Alago community (Oyigbenu 2005:60), because each individual behaved within their age-group which had economic, social and military significance (2005:58). The age-group arrangement provided a platform, among others, in which the young men known as *Isonwo* and the young women known as *Isonya*, who range between the ages of eighteen to twenty-five, were prepared for marriage and this was a community affair in what was known as the *Epawoza* (2005:60). Each of these groups of young people was educated thoroughly by experienced elderly men and women respectively on their responsibilities with regards to marriage as assigned by the community (2005:60). Although there might be overlap in these responsibilities,

¹In this study the Evangelical Reformed Church of Christ or its acronym ERCC will be used interchangeably.

²The acronym SPPC will be used in this study for the Synergistic Premarital Pastoral Counselling model that this thesis seeks to develop for the ERCC toward improving the stability of Alago marriages and beyond.

each group was conscious of its boundaries of relationship and operation (2005:60). Hence the pre-colonial period witnessed fewer cases of domestic violence and divorce among the Alago people as it was the case among other Africans than today (Mwangi 1998:24-28) partly because of the quality of marriage preparation provided for the young people by the community, and also, as Onuegbu (2013) rightly puts it, “marriage was so revered and married couples were cherished and viewed as most responsible people in the societies”. However, a critical examination of pre-colonial marriage practices among many African tribes, including the Alago, would suggest that women were often dominated and marginalized with little or no impetus to contend for their emancipation let alone contemplate a divorce (see Taylor 1994:185; Carrington 1961:92). Hence in such a context it cannot be taken for granted that marriage preparation among the indigenous Alago people was a guaranteed preventative measure against divorce and other marital challenges.

The Alago indigenous way of preparing young adults for marriage is now a shadow of its self, due to the influence of Christianity, Islam, westernization and modernity. For instance, like other tribes in Nigeria during the pre-colonial era, a young man in Alago land was only qualified to contemplate marriage after he had endured the long tutelage under his father and was able to “make his own nest as a fowl does when it is preparing to lay eggs” (Danmbaezue & Okeukwu 2015). But today, sons still living under the roof of their parents are getting married in Alago land as young men now see hard work as a form of punishment meted on them by their parents (Omaku 2014:68). Sometimes fathers are called upon to pay the bills for an engagement toward formalizing a marriage when their son impregnates a girl through premarital sex, a situation resulting in the existing rise in the number of irresponsible husbands in Alago communities (see also Danmbaezue & Okeukwu 2015). Similarly, the pride mothers used to have in presenting their daughters as virgins and women of good character on their wedding day has given way to the current desire to accompany the bride to her matrimonial home with expensive *iyoko onyape* or *gara* as it is called in Hausa, meaning dowry, even at the expense of her fidelity and virginity (Omaku 2014:71). In such a scenario, chances for stable marriages are likely to be low; hence the compelling need for a proactive pastoral approach in dealing with marital problems. This study uses the theories of prevention and contextual frameworks as primary tools toward the

formulation of a comprehensive premarital counselling model that will be relevant to the Alago Christians. In addition, the see-judge-act framework is used to appraise the effectiveness of the current ERCC methods of premarital counselling among the Alago people.

This chapter provides an overview of the study, which is structured around the following subheadings: introduction, background and motivation for the study, research problem, key research question, sub-research questions, research objectives, brief overview of the literature, overview of theoretical frameworks and methodology. Other aspects of the chapter include significance of the study, definition of terms, limitation of the study, contribution to knowledge, structure of the study and conclusion of the chapter.

1.2 Background and motivation for the study

1.2.1 Historical background of the Alago people

Aspects to be covered under this section include the origin of the Alago people, their location, political structure, religious beliefs, social and economic life. The discussion under this section helps us understand the background to the research problem.

1.2.1.1 Origin of the Alago people

The Alago people are believed to have migrated from the Middle-East along with other ethnic groups like the Yoruba, Jukun, Igala, Idoma and other smaller groups, and settled in Kwararafa Kingdom (Omaku 2014:15). This migration was said to have taken place during the medieval era. Oyigbenu sheds more light on the above claim when he says, “The early history of Alago like the history of most Nigerian and African people is the history of frequent migration” (1990:3). He further explained that when the Kwararafa Empire collapsed and disintegrated, Alago people moved down the Benue River in company of the Idoma and Igala and settled in the present Igala and Idoma land (1990:3). Erim submits that “... Alago traditions claim that the ancestors of their rulers were with the new rulers of Idah and to have been part of Idoma

people”(1975). While in Idah (Igala land), the Alago people assisted their Igala kindred to fight such hostile tribes as the Bini and Yoruba (Oyigbenu 2005:8). But as time went on, misunderstanding ensued between the Alago and the Igala which resulted in the subsequent relocation of the Alago from Idah to settlements where they are presently found. Their migration from Idah was said to have been motivated by political reasons as the Igala would not allow the Alago a chance for the throne of Idah chieftaincy (2014:15).

When they left Idah, the Alago people had to cross the River Benue. Omaku affirms that the crossing of the River Benue was a miracle which was performed by a medicine man called Oseshi, who later became the founder of Oleshi (Aloshi) town (2014:15). According to Omaku, it is traditionally claimed that Oseshi mysteriously provided a chain that was used to cross the river to the other side (2014:15). Oyigbenu’s narrative on the event of the crossing of the Benue River reveals that with the help of an invisible “tail” the Oseshi demonstrated his hand by a push and created a long chain that ran across the River Benue. “The mystic chain was used as bridge over the water to the end” (2005:9; *Coronation of Oseshi* 2004:5-6). After the miraculous crossing of the Benue River, the migrants settled at a place called Ojabita which is located between Makurdi and Lafia. After staying at Ojabita for a while, they discovered that the topography of the land was not conducive for habitation, hence the Alago community moved further again to Obasidoma, just about three kilometers away from the present day Keana. The resettlement at Obasidoma is strategic to the historical background of the Alago people owing to the fact that it was at this point that the different Alago clans chose their present settlements. Omaku reports that while the Alago family was in Obasidoma, Osana Akyana, in one of his hunting expeditions found a salt pond, but kept this discovery to himself. Upon the discovery of the salt, Akyana decided to remain in Obasidoma while his brothers migrated further (2014:15). Later, when his elder brother (Andoma) realized the reason behind Akyana’s preference to remain in Obasidoma, he uttered the word, “*Elagogo*” meaning “different talk”. The appellation *elagogo* later became the tribal name of a people called *Alago* (2014:15). According to Oyigbenu, It was at Obasidoma that Osabonya Ogoshi went his way and founded Doma, while Akyana Adi went to Ogede to found Keana. In the course of time, Osoho found Olosoho (Agwatashi), Oseshi (the medicine man) found Oleshi (Aloshi), and Agbo Ibi found Ibi (Ribi).

The founders of Obi, Assakio and Agaza arrived later (2005:10; *Keana in Perspective* 2004:4; Omaku 2014:16).

Alago ethnic community is one of the one hundred and fifty ethnic groups that make up the middle belt region of Nigeria. They are also one of the many conglomerate groups that constituted the now disintegrated Kwararafa kingdom among whom are the Jukun, Ankwai, Idoma, Igala, Afo, Igbira, Koro etc (Oyigbenu 2005:2). Armstrong argues that the Alago share some common characteristics with the Yoruba especially in language and culture (1955:19; Oyigbenu 2005:2). Armstrong further posits that the Alago-Yoruba similarities can be seen clearly in the fact that they both eat yam flour food, called *Amala* in Yoruba and *okporo* in Alago; bean soup called *alakpa* in Alago and *gbegiri* in Yoruba as well as green leaves draw soup called *ewedu* in Yoruba and *owoho* in Alago (1955:19; Oyigbenu 2005:2). The Yoruba and Alago also dress in similar attire, especially the hand-woven cloths, *adire* (Alago) and *aso-oke* (Yoruba). These are in addition to similarities in language such as the word *wa*, meaning “come” both in Yoruba and Alago languages (1955:19; Oyigbenu 2005:2). Oyigbenu remarks that “These similarities are so striking that were it not for geographical distances in location, the distinctions can hardly be discerned between both ethnic groups. In fact even names bear both similarities in codification and meanings” (Oyigbenu 2005:3).

According to Omaku, the 2006 Nigerian census reveals that the Alago population is estimated at about 475,000(2014:20). The last census that was conducted in Nigeria was the 2006 census; the subsequent census was expected to take place in 2016 according to the recommendation of the United Nations (UN), but it could not hold. However, *Daily Trust* has it that the National Assembly of Nigeria has recommended that the next census should take place in 2018 (Ogunjuyigbe 2016). One can therefore approximate that the Alago population is over 500,000 presently (Omaku 2014:20). Omaku further argues that the Alago are a growing population, especially considering the fact that their system of marriage is largely polygamous in nature. He also points out other factors responsible for their growing population to include early marriage and lack of child spacing (2014:21). Erim concurs that “the Arago (Alago) form the majority of

the population in Doma, Keana, Obi, and Assokio districts, they are followed closely by a substantial Tiv majority” (1975).

1.2.1.2 Location of the Alago people

The Alago are mostly located within the southern Senatorial district of Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Nasarawa State shares boundary with Kaduna State in the north, the Abuja Federal Capital Territory in the west, Kogi and Benue States in the south and Taraba and Plateau States in the east. The area is about 27,117 kilometers (‘Nasarawa State, Nigeria: Website). Preliminary census figures obtained in 2016 show that Nasarawa State has an estimated population of 1,863,277 ranking 35th out of 36 States (‘Nigerian States Population Ranking List’ 2016).

The Alago land is bounded to the North-West by Lafia and Nasarawa Eggon Local government areas and to the South-South by Awe Local government Area. It shares boundaries with Kokona Local government area to the North-East and Jenkwe Local government area to the South-West. The land is suitable for agricultural activity giving the fact that it lies on the plains of the river Benue (Oyigbenu 2005:8). According to Oyigbenu, the rich alluvial deposits over the years make Alago land conducive for the cultivation of both temperate and tropical crops. The weather in the area is mostly hot, making the cultivation of tree crops such as citrus, mangoes and cashews quite encouraging. Other fruits that are cultivated in commercial quantities include watermelon and pineapples. The topography of the land also promotes the cultivation of sugar cane and livestock activities (2005:8). The Alago land is heterogeneous in terms of ethnicity and linguistics. Oyigbenu describes the land as “an amalgam of ethnic configurations that include Alago, Gwandara, Eggon, Hausa, Jukun, and Tiv. Living side by side with the aforementioned are the Yoruba, Igbo, Kwalla, and Migili (2005:8). Omaku argues that the present settlements of Alago people include Assakio, Agaza, Agwatashi (Olosoho), Adogi (Adogyo), Anah, Igbabo (Alakeni), Omako (Olonya), Oleshi, Akuruba-Osonya, Akpanaja, Ataya, Doma (Idoma), Keana, Ibi, Obi, Owena, Odoibu, Okpatta, Alagye, Ogeisa, Okpari and Kadarko (see Fig. 1 in Appendix 2). This study covers five of the above Alago settlements namely, Keana, Oleshi, Agaza, Obi and

Agwatashi because the Alago Christians of the ERCC Keana Conference are predominantly located in these towns.

1.2.1.3 Alago political administrative structure

Though the title of the highest political figure in each Alago town differs from those of other towns due to differences in terms of clan, there is a common political structure in all Alago towns. In this study the researcher presents the political structure of Agwatashi to represent other Alago towns and villages, hence the titles used for the various administrative offices are those of Agwatashi town (the *Ajiga* clan). The reason for the choice of Agwatashi in this case is that Agwatashi is the present headquarters of ERCC Keana Conference, the location of this research. This coincidence makes Agwatashi a preferred town representing other Alago towns in discussing the political life of Alago people in this study.

The Alago people had a centralized system of administration long before the advent of British colonial masters. Armstrong anchors this view when he tables that "...North of the Benue ... are the so-called Arago (sic) with two kingdoms, Doma and Keana" (1955:125). He further argues that apart from Doma and Keana, there were other autonomous units such as Agwatashi, Obi, and Assakio among others. However, as Oyigbenu argues, each of these towns is politically independent of the others as they do not have "a commonly recognized paramount chief as obtained in other ethnic communities that were British colonial creations" (2005:15). Therefore, each Alago town and village has its distinct chief called *Ose* who is not a subject of any paramount chief irrespective of his class (2005:15). The *Osoho* is the highest political leader in Agwatashi and by virtue of his position he has the final authority over matters that have direct bearing on his people. According to Oyigbenu, the *Osoho* exercises control not only over political matters but also over the economic and spiritual life of the community (2005:16). In view of the fact that the *Osoho* is considered as an embodiment of the community deity, any act of violation of his instructions is equally considered an act of disobedience to the Almighty God and would attract serious punitive measures (2005:16). The traditional seat of government is at

the *Ofonu* (shrine) where the *Osoho* discharges both his secular and spiritual functions. For effective discharge of his administrative duties, the *Osoho* has his *igabo* (lieutenants) who serve as his advisers on matters of governance, religion and the military (Oyigbenu 1999:9). Top in the hierarchy of the *Osoho's igabo* (advisers) are the *Ikpokwani (ogya)*, *Osude (kaura)* and *Ando (jawa)*, this group of advisers are usually aged princes who by their age can no longer aspire for the position of the *Osoho*. They function as checks and balances on both the *Osoho* and the royal title holders of the town (Oyigbenu 2005:17). Next in the hierarchy of the *Igabo* are the *Osiki* and *Osuzo* groups who function as the legislative and the judicial arms of the administrative parlance respectively. There are other title holders under the *Osuzo* such as the *Osuzo leke*, *Osuzo egwa*, *Obandoma*, *Ciroma*, *Turaki*, *Waziri*, and *Ma'aji* who are within the age bracket of seventy and beyond (2005:17). The *Osiki* and *Osuzo* groups of the *Igabo* also carry the responsibility of checking overambitious princes who may want to overthrow the *Osoho*. Coming down the ladder of the *Igabo* hierarchy are the *Oshinya* and the *Atakawe* groups. These are usually title holders who are younger in terms of age as most are in their forties and fifties. They are followed by the *Asadu* and the *Atakwe leke* groups who form the lowest cadre in the hierarchy of *igabo* (the chief's advisers). These two lower groups of *Igabocarry* out the *Osoho's* errands, and because of this function, they are men who are full of energy (2005:18). Title holders who make up the *Osoho's* executive council include *Osava*, *Ogbolosoho*, *Okuba*, *Ogbole leke*, and *Osava leke*. The members of the *Osoho's* executive council have no right to vie for the stool of the *Osoho* (2005:20).

Each Alago community is divided into *agwa* (wards) for smooth running of the administration. Each *agwa* is headed by *Osekagwa* (ward leader). Under the ward leaders are other title holders known as *igabokagwa* who are not answerable to the *Osoho* but to the various *Osekagwa*. The *Osikyara* who is the ward youth leader is also a title holder under the *Osekagwa*. The function of these young title holders include carrying out community development services such as communal group farming, and maintenance of roads leading to farms and the market square, as well as roads connecting the various wards within the Alago community.

In the political sphere of the Alago community, there are persons who are specialized in handling deaths and burials. This group of persons is headed by the *Oseamiri*, which literally means the custodian of graves (2005:22). It is the duty of the *Oseamiri* and his members to conduct the burial rites of all the chiefs and title holders in the Alago community. There are also the *Osoho's* palace guards known as the *Ayakato* headed by the *Akato*. They are responsible for the safety and security of the *Osoho*, they cook his food, source the very best palm wine for the *Osoho*, and they keep the *Ofonu* (shrine) clean (2005:22). The Alago community is highly gender sensitive as their women are not left out of the political space of their life. Women are given judicial functions to discharge. The women folk in the land are headed by the *Omugaja*. She serves as the representative of the *Osoho* in the women's council. The *Omugaja* is appointed by the *Osoho* from among the aged female princesses. Like the *Osoho*, she also has her *Igabo* (advisers) who are usually elderly women who have passed their menopause age (Oyigbenu 2005:23). Together with the *Omugaja*, the women perform ritualistic functions during the funeral rites of the *Osoho* and those of the elderly *Igabo* by way of singing of songs and dirges preceding the funeral rite (2005:23). A close associate of the *Omugaja* is the *Inoleka* who is regarded as the mother of all the community masquerades; apart from her, no woman can touch the masquerades. In fact, there are some masquerades that women were not permitted to even see, as violation of this taboo results in severe punishment such as barrenness or death (2005:23).

1.2.1.4 Religious beliefs of the Alago people

The Alago people believe in the existence of one God as the Creator of Heaven and earth (Oyigbenu 2005). The term *Owuso* is used as the name for God in Alago dialect. The same name *Owuso* refers to rain, thus the usage of the term *Owuso* can only be understood in relation to the context in which it is used. For instance, Oyigbenu explains that when *Owuso* is used in reference to rain, it is against a realization of God as the giver of life and the rain complementing his obligation and generosity to mankind. The Alago believe that apart from the Supreme God there are lesser deities called *eka* who function as intermediaries between the people and *Owuso*. God is believed to be dwelling in the sky, high above every one and above anything, which is why when an Alago man wants to swear, he points his finger to the sky where God dwells

(Oyigbenu 2005:57; see also Omaku 2014:16). The *eka* (lesser gods and spirits) are believed to be in constant interaction with members of the community to ensure their wellbeing (2005:57).

Omaku explains that the origin of belief in God among the Alago people came from three possible sources. The first is in relation to the question of “who brought me into existence?” The answer might be “my parent”. If one keeps asking such a question on and on, one realizes that the chain of bringing into being is an endless one, thus one gets to a point where one concludes that a Supreme being is responsible for bringing people into existence, and calls him “*Owuso*” (God) (2014:16). Secondly, the Alago people believe that God exists when they take into cognizance their limitations as human beings. They understand that human beings are so creative, yet they have little or no control over some forces of nature such as thunderstorms earthquake and death. In view of this realization, the Alago conclude that there must be someone who has control over these natural forces, and the person is “*Owuso*” (God) (2014:17). Thirdly, the attention of the Alago people are drawn to heavenly bodies upon which they depend for light, warmth and rain. Though these heavenly bodies draw their attention to the sky, the Alago person could not reach the sky hence they begin to associate the heavens with the one whom they call “*Owuso*” (God) (2014:17). There is the concept of reincarnation in the Alago religious belief system. They believe that those who lived a good life before they died are expected to reincarnate and be a blessing to their families again, while those who lived wickedly will reincarnate, not as humans, but in the form of evil spirits, causing misfortunes such as illnesses to the living in the families they left behind (2005:57). The *aleku* (ancestors) are highly regarded in the religious life of the Alago people. Once a good man or woman dies, he or she automatically assumes the new status of an ancestor. The ancestors are given supernatural powers that will empower them to assist the living in their respective families (2005:57). The *aleku* and the *eka* who occupy the spirit world work together for the good of the living as they mediate between them and *Owuso* through prayers and sacrifices. The beliefs of Alago traditional religion are manifested in their *inarigu* (incantations), *igye* (songs), *oba* (dances), *anasa* (myths) and *Ogiri* (festivals) (2005:58).

Annual festivals are usually celebrated as important religious activities among the Alago people. The festivals provide opportunity for members of the community to express their thanksgiving to *Owuso* for his blessings upon the land and supplication to him for their needs. (2015:64). For example, the *Amiri* festival is celebrated between February and March every year after the farm produce are expected to have been harvested completely to show appreciation to *Owuso* and *Aleku* for good harvests; and where harvests are lean, prayers are still offered for better yield in the coming years (2005:64). Another example is the *ogiri* festival which is celebrated between December and January every year as an occasion where the youths exhibit their physical strength and agility (2015:74). Masquerades usually surface during *Ogiri* festivals to give the people a sense of identity and pride. Oyigbenu describes the masquerades as "... colourful, brisk, agile, and energetic in their dancing and performance" (2005:74). Due to the spiritual significance of the festivals and their entertaining nature, members of the Alago community in diasporas travel home to join their families in the celebration (2005:65). Today, because of the highly religious character of the Alago people, many of them have embraced the two dominant middle-eastern religions – Islam and Christianity. The advent of both Islam and Christianity into Alago land was as a result of the influence and activities of the Jihadists and the Christian missionaries (2005:9). It is interesting to note that traditional worshipers are still prevalent in the communities, coexisting side by side with adherents of Christianity and Islam (2005:9). However, in recent times, where we are witnessing more religious fanaticism and social unrest, the attitude of tolerance which the Alago people were known for is gradually eroding.

1.2.1.5 Social life of the Alago people

The Alago ethnicity has a very rich social network that facilitates harmonious relationships amongst them. The very primary social unit in every Alago community is the *Ole*, one's residential home or compound which provides a sense of identity to individuals living in the community. According to Oyigbenu, "An ole is made up of a man, his wife, their immediate children and dependent members" (2005:54). The *ole* is headed by the most elderly man known as the *adole* or *ada-kole*. He is looked upon as the chief breadwinner and the chief security of the family, and because of the important role he plays in the family, he deserves to be respected by

every other individual in his house (2005:54). Since the *adole* (head of the family) earned his respect by the role he played in the family some of them, today, are no longer respected by their wives because of their failure in being the chief breadwinners and chief security of their respective families. The settlement pattern in Alago community is a nucleated type which is an indication of the high sense of communal lifestyle they exhibit. Hence two or more *ole* makes up the compound, headed by the *Orogu-ole* (head of the compound). Abdullahi reports that “male descendants of family units of the same origin develop their own separate family unit within the same compound” (2002:45). It is expected that the *orogu-ole* must be a traditional worshiper because, given his position, he is required to be the custodian of the family cult as well as the judge in any matters of disputes between members of the extended family (Oyigbenu 2005:55). The right to inheritance only goes to male children of a deceased as the Alago community is a patriarchal society. Generally, the traditional Alago family system is polygamous in the sense that a man marries two or more wives (2005:55). This is because of the idea that a man’s wealth is determined by the number of wives he has and the number of children he bears – the more their number, the larger the size of his farm. Additionally, a wealthy family head usually has a voice in the affairs of the community, which also qualifies him for any traditional title in the community (2005:55). However, due to civilization and the prevailing economic hardship in the country, the story is now changing as many Alago men no longer see the need to practice polygamy since it will mean spending more on feeding, children’s education, medical bills, housing and clothing. Control over the size of one’s family has become sacrosanct (2005:56).

The Alago people are a peace loving people, known for their high sense of hospitality towards strangers who come to settle among them. Campbell-Irons cited in Temple admits that the Alago “... are of peaceful disposition, and of fairly good physique” (1965:28). Oyigbenu corroborates that “...this claim is vindicated in the high incidence of their readiness to offer their own women to ‘strangers’ for marriage” (Oyigbenu 2005:4). The rate of intermarriage between Alago ladies and the Kanuri of Lafia as well as the Hausas of Adudu, Awe, and Azara bears testimony to the accommodating disposition of the Alago people (Oyigbenu 2005:4). From a personal experience, my immediate elder sister, Alheri who is Alago has been married to an Eggon man, James Alumbu over twenty years. It is also on record that recently, Senator Suleman Asonya

Adokwe gave his daughter, Ladi Adokwe in marriage to an Eggon man, Francis Ewuga on 16th November, 2013 in the wake of the recent ethnic crises that engulfed some Alago communities (Omake 2014:26). Oyigbenu further argues that the Alago people demonstrated their peaceful and hospitable nature when they willingly received and accommodated the Kanuri when they first arrived Anene, Lafia in 1777 (Oyigbenu 2005:4). It was the then Andoma of Doma, an Alago chieftain, who asked them to go and settle in their present location in 1777 under their chief Dunama with the wish that they might settle there with his people *Lafia* (Hausa expression for “in peace”) (*District officer i/c Lafia Division*, 1949:1; Oyigbenu 2005:4).

Today, the Alago community at Angwan Doka form minority group in a Kanuri dominated area of Lafia metropolis; most of them, if not all, have embraced Islam as well as the Kanuri cultures so that it is difficult to identify them as Alago except by genealogical trace (Erim 1975:1; Oyigbenu 2005:4). The peaceful, hospitable and generous characters which the Alago people are known for was one of the reasons why the early missionaries penetrated the Alago settlements more easily than other ethnic communities (Omake 2014:28). This claim can be attested to when viewed in the light of the fact that the South African missionaries that found the Evangelical Reformed Church of Christ (ERCC) in the year 1916 saw no other community fit for them to settle in as a base for their missionary exploits but Keana, an Alago community. Sunday Emmah captures this view when he documented that the chief of Keana, one of the most civilized Alago towns in the former Lafia Division, “was commended by both the colonial administrators and the missionaries as progressive and peaceful. These features influenced the mission’s choice of Keana (2011:117; *Keana in Perspective* 2004:12, 27).

Similarly, the Alago people have been able to assimilate their immediate neighbours, thereby subsuming them into a new culture, language and identity (Oyigbenu 2005:10). This total assimilation is common with people who now assume the Alago identity by losing their own very original ethnic identities. Common among them are people whom the Alago regarded as *Ashiki* (Koro origin) *Imishi* (Tiv origin), or *Adda* (Eggon origin). It is in the light of this

development that Abdullahi explains that “Alago as an ethnic identity is a conglomeration of diverse micro dialects and, or common roots with other ethnic nationalities through long physical contact and interaction. As a result Alago people and their culture had continued to influence and impact positively on their neighbours in a number of ways” (2005; Oyigbenu 2005:10). The rich social cohesion and hospitable disposition that the Alago were known for doesn’t seem to be true anymore in some Alago communities where people of other ethnic groups have been barred from returning to those communities and coexist as it were after the unfortunate ethnic disturbances witnessed in the past four to five years.

The Alago man is naturally attractive, which makes him visible and acceptable by people around him. Perhaps this charisma and his rich and glorious past mark him out as highly civil and urbane (Oyigbenu 2005:10). He sees himself as culturally superior to non-Alago around him; explaining why he refers to them as *Ashashe*, meaning uncivilized persons. This understanding could be informed by the fact that, like all Kwararafa ethnic groups, the early Europeans met the Alago people, with their highly centralized administration and cherished culture (Oyigbenu 2005:10). Apart from that, at the point of this early contact, when other tribes were in nudity, the Alago man was dressed in rich hand-woven textiles of the *opa* (*Aso-oke*) and *adire* (*otena*) fabrics (Oyigbenu 2005:10). In terms of dressing, the Alago people were lovers of decent and attractive attire. They also cherished fashion, exhibited through wearing of *opa* (men’s beads) and *otena* (women’s beads) on their necks especially during festivities. Alago women were particularly known for fascinating and beautiful hair styles (the bridge pattern). This outlook gave them natural beauty (Omaku 2014:67-68; see Fig. 2 in Appendix 2). Today, some of the traditional attires that have distinguished the Alago from other ethnic nationals have gone into extinction as many Alago young people have now embraced the western fashion of dressing.

From oral tradition, respect for elders was highly esteemed among the Alago people. This was evident in their greeting patterns as each elderly person was greeted with a nomenclature peculiar to him or her. For instance *Obande* and *Agbadu* were the nomenclatures used to greet any elderly man and woman from *Akyana* (Keana) clan respectively, while *Ajiga* (male) and *Onowa* (female)

were the terms used in greeting elderly persons who hail from *Olosoho* (Agwatashi) clan. Inappropriate acknowledgement of an elder's greeting nomenclature was considered an act of disrespect and insensitivity to his or her family root. It was therefore expected that if a person was not sure what greeting code to use for an elder, he or she should inquire about it in a polite manner before saying the greeting. Young men and women were also expected to kneel down to greet their elders. Omaku corroborates that upon sighting an elderly person along the way carrying any load, a young person would offer to help carry the load to where the elder was going as a show of respect (2014:64). Another area in which the Alago demonstrate high respect for elders and sensitivity to the weak among them was during meal times. Oral tradition has it that during supper, every male in the family was expected to eat at the family shrine for the sustenance of their communal lifestyle, for security checks and for the purpose of discussing relevant matters of concern to the family. During the supper, it was the duty of the youngest among them to pour water into a wooden dish called *okpa* and then passes it round for everyone seated to wash their hands before eating. It was also the youngest's responsibility to share the food according to the different age-groups in the family. Each age-group ate from one *opka* (a wooden bowl). The eldest in a group must first dip their hand into the *okpa* for a morsel of the food, to be followed by the one next to them by age till it reaches the youngest among them. This process would repeat itself until a little part of the food called *otuokpa* remained in the dish. As a demonstration of sensitivity to the least among them, the *otuokpa* would be left for them to finish. With the influence of Christianity, Islam and westernization on the Alago people, these cultural values have changed significantly.

Death (*iku*) of a loved one in Alago community was considered not only as a loss to the immediate family, but as a loss to the entire community. Hence it was regarded as an urgent invitation to relations of the deceased and well-wishers who would travel from far and near to the deceased compound to mourn or celebrate the dead. The death of a young person was considered a loss and a tragedy, hence the community mourned, but the demise of an aged person was regarded as a transition to join the *aleku* (ancestors) – therefore the living celebrate more than mourn his or her exit. As a sign of deep regret over the demise of a loved one, a relation was expected to literally weep aloud upon his or her arrival at the deceased's compound; this happens

irrespective of how long before the death has occurred. Failure to mourn over the dead by weeping would send a negative signal of suspicion against such a relation. In most cases, if a male relation could not mourn by weeping aloud when death occurred, his case could be ignored, but that of the female was unacceptable. Mourning for the dead could last from two to three weeks before relations were expected to depart to their respective places of residence. This was due to the belief that the prolonged presence of the relations with the bereaved family conveyed love and support to the family during their trying moment. However, most sympathizers no longer stay with the bereaved family beyond three days due to economic hardship and for the purpose of relieving the deceased family of the burden of feeding sympathizers. Usually, on the third day after burial rites, prayers were offered for the relations of the deceased after which an elderly man from the family would speak to the sympathizers on behalf of the family and appreciate them for supporting them in their moment of grief as well as declare publicly that people were officially dismissed to return to their respective homes. When death occurred amongst the Alago, it was also an opportunity for the community to support the deceased's family by bringing choice food called *ona ki ishikapa kpo bobo ko alakpa* (rice pap with beans soup) and *ogwo* (soft drink locally brewed from corn) or *izhe* (beer locally brewed from corn or millet) to the bereaved family.

1.2.1.6 The economic life of the Alago people

The Alago people are well known for hard work and industriousness. This fact is attested to by Mike Omake when he says, "The Alago people got fame and greatness from how many bags of grains or tubers of yam they harvested" (2014:65). Hard work is so much cherished among the Alago that parents would not want to give their daughters in marriage to a man that is known to be lazy in the community (2014:65). From oral tradition, Alago parents were good at teaching their children to be hard working. Fathers would wake their children up at dawn to start trekking to the farm so that they could begin work on the farm early enough. Sometimes male children were left to work on the farms under rainfall to maximize the use of time. A lazy boy was not given food to eat, especially at supper. Hard work and industriousness were among the qualities looked out for when the Alago wanted to choose a leader. The Alago believed that a lazy person

was equally a thief – that was why when a child did not want to work hard, such a child was called a thief even without an exhibit. Omaku anchors this argument thus: “Stealing was viewed as a manifestation of laziness and was considered a serious crime. A thief was not in the ‘roll-call’ of the community’s honorable” (2014:65).

From oral tradition, the Alago men are well known by their neighboring ethnic nationalities as yam producers. Every year, they produce high quality yam tubers and usually in large quantity because the land on which they live is conducive for agricultural engagements. Apart from meeting their domestic needs, yam dealers export tubers of yam to other states within the country, like Lagos, Onitsha and Oweri among others. Other cash crops produced by the Alago people include rice, maize, beniseed, egusi (melon) and millet. The Alago are also famous in terms of traditional medicine; people outside their geographical locality usually patronize them because of the efficacy of their herbal medicines (Oyigbenu 2005:10). Oral tradition has it that the Alago woman would not follow her husband to work on the farm. However, her area of responsibility was largely at home, and in the market. But at harvest season, she would accompany the husband to the farm to assist him with the harvest. Alago women are good entrepreneurs as many of them travel to neighboring *Tiv*, *Migili* and *Eggon* communities to purchase farm produce where they are obtained at lower costs, and then transport the same to towns and cities for sale at higher prices. By so doing, they contribute immensely to the economic wellbeing of their homes and the society at large. While the man supplies the food through his farming business, the woman supplies soup ingredients through her marketing. This kind of division of labor kept Alago marriages stable and families united before the influence of western civilization, Christianity and Islam came. The Alago women were known as salt hawkers by their neighboring ethnic communities. To this day, salt is locally refined from Keana, one of Alago’s ancient towns. With the influence of modernity and western civilization, today many Alago sons and daughters contribute to the economic development of their communities and country in the civil service as well as in the professional fields, both at local, state and federal levels (Omaku 2014:62).

1.2.2 Motivation for the research

This study is motivated by two factors: First, I have concerns about the state of marital instability in Nigeria today as domestic violence and divorce are becoming a common phenomenon, not only among the Alago people, but also among other tribes, top celebrities, political elites, business moguls and in fact, high profile men of God in Nigeria (Onuegbu 2013). There is yet to be a data base on statistics of divorce in Nigeria (Ewherido 2015) except for figures from previous research, court records and reports from news agencies. For instance, research conducted reveals that about 30 to 40 percent of married couples in Nigeria divorce (Powlison 2013). Records show that at the Customary court, Ikeja, Lagos, and the Customary court, Ojo, Lagos, 354 applications for divorce were filed between 2010-2012 alone (Sanders 2013). It was also reported that divorce rates in Northern Nigeria are among the highest in West Africa with one in three marriages said to fail within the first three years (Adow 2012). Recently, the Catholic Bishop of Lafia Diocese in Nasarawa State, Most Rev. Mathew Audu, is reported to have condemned the alarming rate of divorce in Nigeria (*Daily Independent* 2015). Such an alarming rate of marital instability in Nigeria calls for a research of this nature. Secondly, although the ERCC Constitution provides that intending couples undergo both pre and post marital counselling on regular basis (2014:16), my interaction with twenty-five (25) ordained ministers of the ERCC shows that twenty (80%) of them said that the only thing they do as premarital counselling with couples before their wedding was to ensure that bride prices were paid and medical tests were conducted. Five (20%) of the pastors said they do conduct premarital counselling a few weeks before the wedding. Eighteen (72%) of the pastors said they do try to provide post-marital counselling. However, all the pastors show that despite counselling couples, marriages have problems.³ In this study, I seek to make a contribution to the body of knowledge by examining the interface between the Christian and the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* concept of marriage preparation with the view to developing an effective synergistic premarital pastoral counselling (SPPC) framework that the ERCC can adopt toward promoting more stable Christian marriages among the Alago People.

³ This statistics were obtained from the researcher's interaction with ERCC clergy during a summer program at the ERCC Theological Seminary, Fadan Ayu in June, 2015.

1.3 Research problem and objectives

This segment discusses the research problem, key research question and the sub-research questions that this study seeks to address as well as the objectives of the study.

1.3.1 Research problem and questions

1.3.1.1 Research problem

The research problem which this study seeks to address is the eroding of the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* concept of marriage preparation that has helped them to maintain stable marriages over the years, a situation caused by the influence of Christianity, Islam, westernization and modernity.

1.3.1.2 Key research question

This study therefore seeks to answer this key research question: What aspects of premarital counselling from the Alago indigenous knowledge systems can be inculcated by the church to improve stability in Alago marriage in Nigeria in a context that is full of domestic violence and alarming rates of divorce?

1.3.1.3 Sub-research questions

The following sub-questions are crucial to addressing the key question:

1. What are the major sources of the challenges faced by marriages resulting in domestic violence and divorce in Nigeria amongst the Alago people?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current premarital counselling offered by the ERCC to the Alago?

3. Which aspects of the Alago premarital counselling principles can the church inculcate in preparing intending couple for marriage amongst the contemporary Alago people?

A research question refers to the question that the study tries to address. It is concerned with the phenomenon under investigation. Blanche, Kelly and Durheim argue that sources of a research question include: extant literature on the problem, an exploratory investigation on what to study, with particular reference to where there is insufficient research or an undocumented social life on the subject as well as personal speculation and experience (2010:540). I have formulated the above sub-questions as well as questions for the individual interviews and focus group discussions based on the above argument.

1.3.2 Research objectives

As a response to the above key research question and the sub-questions, the objectives of this study are:

1. To investigate the major sources of the challenges faced by marriages resulting in domestic violence and divorce in Nigeria amongst the Alago people.
2. To assess the strengths and weaknesses of the current premarital counselling offered by the ERCC to the Alago Christians.
3. To examine the aspects of premarital counselling from the Alago indigenous knowledge systems that can be used or transformed by the church to improve stability in Alago marriage in Nigeria
4. To develop a new model of premarital counselling that ERCC pastors will use to promote stable marriages among the Alago people.

1.4 Significance of the study

It is argued that the essence of most academic undertakings is to discover new things toward contributing to the existing body of knowledge and/or to add value on existing knowledge (Dahlberg and McCaig 2010:6; Reynolds 2013:14; Affiku 2015:4). Various aspects of marriage have been studied and documented over the years from both western and African perspectives. However, existing literature on marriage lacks ideas that harness the Alago indigenous knowledge systems in premarital counselling. Given the above considerations, I think that there is lack of knowledge about aspects of premarital counselling from the Alago indigenous knowledge systems that can be inculturated by the church to improve stability in Alago marriage in Nigeria. The entry point of this study in the academic space is that it is an attempt to bridge the gap by examining the interface between the ERCC model of premarital counselling and the Alago indigenous model of marriage preparation.

The study provides valuable information on the sources of the challenges faced by marriages that result in domestic violence and divorce in Nigeria amongst the Alago people. It also provides information on the relationship between culture and religion and how this has influenced the ERCC's approach to premarital counselling among the Alago people. The study is a step in deconstructing negative attitude toward indigenous African values in the church (Jakawa 2014:7). The findings of the study could assist the ERCC in terms of providing a synergistic premarital pastoral counselling (SPPC) tool that would benefit the Alago people. In view of the indispensable need for competent premarital counselling personnel in the ERCC currently, the findings could also enable the church's theological institutions to develop a curriculum of theological studies that prepares seminarians adequately for pastoral counselling and, particularly, premarital counselling ministries in the church. Though this study was conducted using a particular denomination and cultural context, it may provide useful insights on the common need for an effective premarital counselling model that would enhance marital stability among Christians in Nigeria and Africa at large.

1.5 Preliminary literature review, theories underpinning the study and methodology

This section gives a brief overview of literature, theoretical frameworks and methodology of the study. Details are found in chapters two, three and four of this study respectively.

1.5.1 Preliminary literature review

Collins argues that lack of premarital counselling is one of the major reasons for instability in Christian marriages (1982:46). Musa holds that when couples prepare well before they get married, they stand in a better position to succeed (2010:33; see also Smith 1990:22). Goerz points out that the effectiveness of a pre-marital counsellor will depend on the quality, stability, and success of their own marriage (2006:1). Hogeterp opines that the priority of intending couples should be on the question of how much thought and planning go into preparation for marriage (2011:11). Odukoya emphasizes that effective communication between husband and wife promotes marital stability (2008:7). Adewale believes that one of the causes of premarital sex is wrong information obtained from wrong sources about sex (2008:36; see also Essien 2013:57; McSweeney 2005:17), which implies that pastors are, therefore, the right people to provide the right information to young people about sex through biblical premarital counselling so that, as McSweeney recommends, sexual intercourse should be experienced not only as a physical union, but simultaneously as a deep spiritual union of two persons (2005:17). Kore posits that premarital counselling is an imperative duty that rests on ministers of Christ (2009:35; 2004:16; see also Essien 2010:86). Essien opines that one of the factors militating against a successful Christian home is the issue of wrong choice of marriage partner (2014:79), which results largely due to lack of proper guidance on the choice of a marriage partner (2014:79; Hagee 2007:1, 51; Hasting 1974; Mbiti 1981; Jakawa 2014:35-36; Haruna 2004; Okojie 1994). Mwangi citing Mbiti (1969:2) says until recently, marital instability and divorce were rare in Africa because African beliefs, ceremonies and rituals made divorce uncommon (1998:24-28). Hart argues that one of the reasons why premarital counselling fails to yield desired results is that “many couples enter premarital counselling because it is a requirement of their officiating church,” hence they view it as “one more thing” to be done before the wedding ceremony (2009:1). Hart therefore suggests a “grounded theory approach” to premarital counselling (2009:1).

Marriage has often been viewed from a patriarchal perspective, in which the man dominates the woman, but this has come under a gendered theological critique in recent years. Christ (2013) opines that “Patriarchy is a system that originated in history, which means that it is neither eternal nor inheritable.” From a sociological point of view, Christ cited the Masuo culture of the Himalayas as a classic example of a people who practice matriarchal marriage, whereby “...women choose their sexual partners freely...There are no illegitimate children because all children have mothers...The virgin-whore dichotomy – so well known in patriarchal cultures simply does not exist” (Christ 2013). Matriarchal marriage usually happens when a man leaves his family and stays with his wife by becoming a member of her family (Elwell 1986:691). It is argued that according to Judges 14:18–20 and 15:1, Jacob practiced matriarchal marriage either temporarily or permanently with Leah and Rachel and that Samson’s wife stayed with her family while he paid her visits from time to time (Elwell 1986:691). In the history of the church, though philosophical dualism which upheld the superiority of the mind and spirit over the body was identified as heresy and was theologically resisted, its influence led to a condemnation of sensual pleasure as sinful by most patristic and medieval writers (Ferguson & Wright 1986:638). Ferguson and Wright further elucidated that “Marriage, too, was at best ambivalent. They certainly regarded celibacy as preferable – and mandatory for clergy. Attitudes to women at this time reveal a similar approach” (Ferguson & Wright 1986:638). The Reformers, however, brought some balance as they upheld marriage as a gift of God and gave women their proper place as enshrined in the Scripture (Ferguson & Wright 1986:638).

The literature above has addressed ten issues that need to be considered in terms of promoting marital stability from a premarital counselling approach. However, a critical evaluation of the effectiveness of premarital education or counselling programs would show that though it has its prospects in terms of helping future marriages become stable, it is not without its cons as research has shown. Seldon (2013) argues that premarital counselling “can create bigger problems”. She further explained that premarital counselling makes intending couples worry about issues which they may never have contemplated. Other disadvantages of premarital counselling to couples, according to Seldon, are: the counselling may not be that good especially if a couple goes to a marriage counsellor who is not particularly skilled at conflict resolution; and

the couple may even decide to call off the wedding if the counsellor brings in major issues between the couple that turn into bitter arguments (Seldon 2013).

Suffice it to mention that while it is not the ideal for premarital counselling to create bigger problems and even lead to calling off the engagement due to arguments resulting from issues couples may never have thought about, it is worth noting that it can save a person from marrying someone who is not right for them; thus premarital counselling can also save a person from the heartbreak of divorce (see Seldon 2013: website), which is better than not going through premarital counselling at all. Another critical look at premarital programs reveals that they may not be impacting the persons who are in danger of marital problems and separation, as Carroll and Doherty (2003:105) rightly observed, unless practitioners work to develop specialized recruitment techniques that will increase the participation of these couples in preventive interventions (2003:105). I think that this argument holds water because one couple, for example, may be most at risk for marital instability and divorce on the issue of communication while another couple may be most at risk for marital instability on the issue of sex. Hence as Carroll and Doherty further expatiate, "Due to the lack of evidence for the long-term effectiveness of premarital education, it is reasonable to question the long-term effectiveness of programmatic interventions that offer all couples a standardized treatment, rather than tailoring specific interventions to specific couples" (2003:116). The researcher, therefore, shares the view that it would be impractical to suppose that premarital counselling programs alone can prevent marital troubles and to use that assumption as the normative evidence for adopting it as the only way through which marital problems can be effectively addressed (Carroll and Doherty 2003:116). This means that apart from findings obtained about premarital counselling, insights from other marital intervention programs such as post-marital counselling and marriage enrichment programs should be explored when making policy statements or decisions. And where there are public policies supporting premarital counselling programs in any given community, it sends a clear message to people that intentional preparation for marriage is worth the effort (Carroll and Doherty 2003: 116).

The limitation of literature is that they did not cover the need for the church to explore traditional cultural norms of the Alago people that could promote stable marriages among the Alago Christians. The research gap is the absence of literature that harnesses the Alago indigenous knowledge systems in premarital counselling.

This thesis, therefore, seeks to make a contribution to literature by unearthing the interface between Christian counselling and indigenous Alago premarital preparation. The inculturation of Alago and Christian premarital counselling is a quest for marriage stability amongst the contemporary Alago people who are caught in between the church and their Alago culture. This thesis seeks to explore the benefits of the interface between the two cultures. Details of the literature review about the concept of Christian marriage and premarital counselling are given in chapter two of this study.

1.5.2 Brief overview of theories underpinning the study

This study is conducted through the lenses of three theoretical frameworks, namely, the prevention theory developed by Philip Ignaz Semmelweis, the contextual theory propounded by Jerome Bruner, and the see-judge-act theory formulated by Joseph Cardijn. These three theories complement each other in terms of assisting the researcher in dealing with three major aspects of this study. The theory of prevention helps the researcher dig out relevant principles and practices that should be applied by couples as preventive mechanisms against instability in their intended marriages. The contextual theory helps in making this study relevant to the socio-economic, cultural, political and religious context of the Alago people. While the see-judge-act theory provides a framework upon which the problem that informs this research can be seen more clearly, findings are examined and actions taken on how to enhance stable marriages among the Alago people. I have detailed discussions on the above mentioned theoretical frameworks in chapter three of this study.

1.5.3 Brief overview of methodology

This study was carried out through a qualitative empirical research design by obtaining data from the perspective of the local population (Kvale, 1996: website) through oral interviews. The methods used to obtain data were in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with research participants. In-depth interview refers to a qualitative method of research which seeks to obtain data from respondents as individuals through oral communication, and the responses of the interviewee are recorded by the researcher (Kvale, 1996). Focus group discussion is a qualitative research method which seeks to obtain data from a small group of research participants of between six and twelve organized by the researcher so that members of the group are able to stimulate one another to air their views through discussion on certain research questions (Kani & Sidibe 2009:website). Library research also played a role in this study as one of the methods used to obtain data. The researcher reviewed literature that are relevant and related to the research questions, theories and methodology, such as books, journals, periodicals, and unpublished works like pamphlets and previous research projects and dissertations.

The research participants for the individual in-depth interviews were categorized into four groups: ERCC Ministers, elderly persons in Alago land, wedded Alago Christian couples, and Alago divorced persons. Focus group discussions were conducted among the ERCC ministers/elders group, indigenous Alago elders group and divorcees group. Analysis of data was conducted through the thematic analysis method using the inductive coding method. The methodological limitation of this study is in the position of the researcher who is an insider among the Alago ethnic group and a clergy of the ERCC. As an insider, there is the tendency of being biased and subjective rather than viewing issues at hand objectively. However, the researcher's awareness of this limitation enabled him to portray himself as an objective scholar who seeks to make a contribution to knowledge. In the light of the ethical principles governing this study, the privacy of the research participants was duly taken into cognizance as participation was voluntary and participants who volunteered to be interviewed were assured of anonymity through the use of pseudonyms in reporting their opinions. A detailed discussion on the methodology and methods of this study is given in chapter four.

1.6 Definition of key concepts

1.6.1 Marriage

Marriage can be viewed as the lifelong union that guarantees sexual relationship between a man and a woman whose consents are authorized by the cultural and religious beliefs of whatever community they belong. Legally, marriage is a bond between a mature man and woman who promise to live together as husband and wife either for life or until the relationship is terminated by law. (Marriage: legal definition of marriage. ND: website). Once marriage has taken place, the legal status of the parties involved changes, giving husband and wife new rights and obligations (Marriage: legal definition of marriage: ND). Taylor argues that marriage should be viewed from its cultural context owing to the fact that societies differ in their emphases on different aspects of marriage, hence “marriage cannot just be ‘fitted into’ or extracted from the cultural situation” (1992:171-172, see also Jakawa 2014:28).

There are arguments for the redefining of marriage within the space of equality and liberty “from the union of a man and a woman to the union of any two persons” (Stewart 2008:313). Some scholars also argue that the definition of marriage must include other forms of marital relationships such as trial marriage or polygamy other than the traditional view of marriage as a lifelong union between a man and woman (Feinberg 2012; Stewart 2008; Jakawa 2014:28). But this study upholds the view of marriage as a lifelong heterosexual relationship. Within the context of this study, marriage is defined as a social construct between a man and a woman that accords them legal, sexual, emotional and economic unity and creates an environment where children are born and raised by the couple (Nwogugu 2011; Jakawa 2014:29).

1.6.2 Divorce

According to Solis, Stag and Gasteazoro, divorce is “the legal separation of spouses, effected by the judgment or decree of a court, either totally dissolving the marriage relation or suspending its effects so far as concern the cohabitation of the parties” (1992:112). Kot and Shoemaker hold

that although marriage as an institution is expected to last over time, “the bonds holding it together are not always secure” (1999:162). Studies show reported advantages of parental divorce such as stronger siblings who are able to adapt to the difficulties of life, more intimate relationships between siblings and one of the parents, happier parents resulting from finding a more compatible spouse, and lessons learned from the previous relationship about mistakes that should not be repeated in a subsequent marriage relationship (Lambert 2007:58). However, this study is located in the context that views divorce as a very painful option in a relationship, leaving both parties, including children, emotionally traumatized, aside from other disadvantages which include negative feelings over refusal to forgive or to admit wrongdoing, visitation arrangements if children are involved, absence of role models for a successful relationship, friction in the entire family system, portrayal of negative views about marriage to siblings, stress and financial hardship occasioned by single parenting (2007:66).

1.6.3 Pastoral counselling

In this study, counselling is understood as help given to a person or group of persons toward enabling them to cope with the challenges of life. It also refers to moral, spiritual and material support given either by an individual or community to a person(s) with the view to helping them stand firm. According to Collins, counselling is an act of providing encouragement and guidance to persons who are confronted with losses, decision making or persons who are disappointed (2007:36). Collins further tables that being a helping relationship, counselling promotes personality growth and development, by enabling individuals to cope more effectively with the concerns of life (2007:36).

Pastoral counselling deals with counselling that is religiously based, founded on the biblical principles and shaped by theological views (Waruta and Kinoti 1994:5-6). Pastoral counselling is a special aspect of pastoral care that is concerned with helping people manage the problems of life. It is a ministry that is usually done by pastors who have received some form of special training in pastoral counselling. Pastors who are trained to be counsellors are able to use different methods that are in line with the teachings of the Bible to help individuals who need their services. The objective of pastoral counselling is to help people develop coping mechanisms for

dealing with the challenges of life so that they may attain personal and spiritual maturity (Collins 2007:36).

This study affirms that pastoral counselling is a special ministry offered by individuals whom the church may designate as pastors or ministers. The study examines the effectiveness of counselling ministries provided by the ERCC ministers among the Alago people with a view to equipping them with a more comprehensive premarital counselling tools that could help improve the stability of marriages, in order for Christian couples to grow into maturity and stand firm against the crises of the contemporary age.

1.6.4 Premarital counselling

The term ‘premarital’ is an English adjective referring to something occurring before marriage (Collins 2012). Hornby also views premarital as “happening before marriage” (2010:1153). ‘Premarital’ is used in this study as an adjective qualifying the noun ‘marriage’ to mean issues that the ERCC should be concerned with, prior to marriage, among the Alago people. Premarital counselling, therefore, refers to the aspect of pastoral counselling that seeks to help the intending couple cultivate the proper understanding of Christian marriage and the challenges thereof that they may be able to make informed decisions about their future life together and develop coping mechanisms for marital problems.

1.6.5 Indigenous

The word ‘indigenous’, according to Hornby means “belonging to a particular place rather than coming to it from somewhere” (2010:765). It also understood as “Native to a particular region or environment but occurring naturally in other places as well” (*Science Dictionary* 2002: website). This concept is also key to this study owing to the fact that the study seeks to examine the interface between the Christian and the Alago indigenous methods of marriage preparation, with the objective of generating insights from the two contexts for the formulation and development of a premarital counselling model that would enhance marital stability among the Alago Christians.

1.6.6 Interface

Interface in this study refers to the meeting point of interaction between two ideas. *Dictionary.com* describes ‘interface’ as “the facts, problems, considerations, theories, practices, etc., shared by two or more disciplines, procedures, or fields of study” (‘Interface’ ND: website). It is also viewed as a “common point or boundary between two things, subjects, etc” (Collins 2012). The use of the term ‘interface’ is relevant to this study because it helps us to connect the ideas that emanate from analysis of the Alago method of marriage preparation with the ERCC model of premarital counselling for synergy.

1.6.7 Examination

The term ‘examination’ is defined in this study as the assessment of services given in a particular context with the view to knowing their strengths and weaknesses toward achieving better results. Generally, the word ‘examination’ refers to “non-destructive inspection, investigation or testing of materials, products or services to determine their conformation to specifications or requirements usually without special laboratory equipment or procedure” (‘Examination’ ND: website). Hornby views examination as “the act of looking at or considering something carefully” (2010:505). In this study, I try to assess the strengths and weakness of premarital counselling from both the ERCC and the Alago indigenous contexts so that a comprehensive model of premarital counselling can be developed from the insights gained from such discussions to improve marriage stability among the Alago people.

1.6.7 Stability

The concept, ‘stability’ refers to “the quality, state, or degree of being stable: such as ... the strength to stand or endure” (‘Stability’ ND). Farlex describes stability as the quality of being stable irrespective of changing circumstances, deterioration, or displacement as well as “constancy of character or purpose; steadfastness” (Farlex 2016:website). Hornby sees stability as “the quality or state of being steady and not changing or being disturbed in any way” (2010:1447). The stability of marriage is understood as the condition of a marriage as intact or

divorced (Larson and Holman 1994:228). In this study, marriage stability means the state of calmness and resilience in marriage resulting from a couple's ability to cope with marital challenges. The quest for stability in Christian marriage among the Alago people is the overall objective of this study.

1.7 Scope and limitation of the study

This study falls within the scope of Practical Theology and specifically within the ministerial studies discipline, centering on the methods of premarital pastoral counselling of the ERCC in the context of domestic violence and rising cases of divorce among the Alago people of Nigeria. The study includes a brief historical overview of the social, political, religious, and economic life of the Alago which sheds light on the background to the research problem as well as the premarital counselling methods of the indigenous Alago people during the pre-colonial period. This study also digs into the historical development of the ERCC and how the advent of the church in Alago land has impacted both positively and negatively on the life of the Alago people. Hence this research is an inter-cultural study as well as interdisciplinary study in practical theology, anthropology and history of the church.

Though there are many Christian churches in Alago land in Nigeria, such as the ERCC, the Roman Catholic Church, the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), and the Assemblies of God Church (AGC), the study is limited to the ERCC methods of premarital counselling among the Alago people. The methods of premarital counselling done by other churches among the Alago are intentionally left out in this study due to limitations of time and space on the part of the researcher. The researcher is also conscious of the fact that there are other aspects of marriage counselling services which can contribute to marriage stability, such as post-marital counselling and marriage enrichment programs, but for reasons advanced earlier, those aspects of marriage counselling are deliberately left for further research.

1.8 Contribution of the study to knowledge

This thesis makes a significant contribution to knowledge in the sense that by using insights drawn from both the Alago and the ERCC methods of premarital counselling, the researcher has developed a new model of premarital counselling called the Synergistic Premarital Pastoral Counselling (SPPC) which the ERCC ministers can use in helping intending couples prepare adequately for marriage. This new model is more comprehensive in nature than the existing premarital counselling methods of the ERCC and it promises to be more effective in helping to curb the spate of domestic violence and divorce among the Alago people of Nigeria because it inculcates the positive values of the Alago *Epawoza* concept of marriage preparation.

1.9 Structure of the study

This study is structured as follows: Chapter one sets the scene for the whole dissertation by discussing the motivation for the study, research problems and objectives, preliminary literature review, overview of theoretical frameworks, and overview of methodology. Other issues discussed in chapter one include the significance of the study, definition of terms, scope and limitation of the study, contribution of the study to knowledge and structure of the thesis. Chapter two explores the views of scholars from the bodies of existing literature through critical interaction on key issues underpinning this study. Chapter three goes on to discuss the theoretical frameworks of the study. Chapter four presents the methodologies and methods by which this study was carried out. Chapter five gives the historical background of the Alago people, discusses marriage from the world view of Alago people, and brings to light the Alago indigenous model of marriage preparation, stating its strengths and weaknesses. Chapter six discusses the brief history of the establishment and growth of the ERCC as well as the ERCC model of premarital counselling, stating its advantages and disadvantages. Chapter seven is a critical examination of the interface between the Alago and the ERCC models of premarital counselling. Chapter eight proposes a comprehensive model of premarital counselling that the ERCC ministers can use toward improving marriage stability among the Alago people. Chapter nine is a summary of findings, conclusions and suggestions for further academic research on the subject of this thesis.

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter gives the overview of the dissertation as a whole by pointing to the motivation for the study, research problems and objectives, significance of the study, definition of terms and structure of the thesis. The findings in this chapter show that, usually, people prepare adequately before embarking on any venture they consider to be important in their lives if they are to succeed. However, little or inadequate attention seems to be given to preparation for marriage among the Alago Christians of the ERCC today. The chapter reveals that unlike the existing situation, the indigenous Alago people of the pre-colonial era had a functional method of preparing the young men and young women for marriage which was regarded as one of the indispensable factors for marriage stability. The current paradigm shift occasioned by the influence of Christianity, Islam, westernization and modernity seems to have contributed to the alarming rates of domestic violence and divorce among the Alago Christians today, hence the key research question of the study: What aspects of premarital counselling from the Alago indigenous knowledge systems can be adopted and/or transformed by the church to improve stability in Alago marriage in Nigeria in a context that is full of domestic violence and alarming rates of divorce? This chapter also points out the aim of this study which is the development of a comprehensive approach to premarital counselling that ERCC pastors will use to promote stable marriages among the Alago people.

Having set the scene for the whole study in this chapter, I shall now proceed to chapter two of the study where I have engaged with scholars academically by exploring literature on the subject area as well as identifying the research gap for this study.

CHAPTER TWO

Christian Marriage and Pastoral Practices in Relation to Premarital Counselling

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, preliminary discussions were made concerning the general background of the study. Issues discussed in the previous chapter include motivation for the study, central research questions, sub-questions as well as objectives of the research work. Consideration was also given to the significance of the study and definition of key terms.

In this chapter, I will explore the views of scholars from the bodies of existing literature by discussing key issues underpinning this study. Scholarly views on the Christian concept of marriage will be examined; views on marriage stability as well as pastoral care and counselling will also be presented in this chapter with both the western and African thinkers complementing and engaging each other. The objective of this chapter is to locate my research within the scope of existing literature. This chapter will help in identifying gaps in existing literature and also pointing at how this study will make an original contribution to this subject area. Key scholars for this thesis include: G. Collins(2007), J. S. Mbiti (1981),H. Taylor (1995),M. A. Oduyoye (2006), D. Kore(2004),W. O'Donovan(2000),and A. Hasting(1974).Others are M. R. A. Kanyoro (2006),H. Clinebell(1984), G. Akanni (2004),A. Essien (2010), V. Musa(2010), E. Oyigbenu (2005), and M. Omake (2014). Some of the literature is very old, such as Hasting (1974) and Mbiti (1981), but I have included them in the review because I consider them to be landmark studies that are relevant to this study.

2.2 The concept of Christian marriage

Christian marriage is viewed as part of God's creative plan for the world (Taylor 1994:178). Taylor asserts that like many other creatures of God, human beings are created male and female. He proposes that marriage was given to humankind before any break in the relationship with God (1994:178). Hence for Taylor, the family is one of the foundations of human existence (Gen. 1:26-27; 1994:178). Marriage was established by God. It was God who created the first man, Adam, and the first woman, Eve, and it was God who provided an occasion where they

were introduced to each other. It was God that offered them premarital counselling service, officiated the first wedding, and brought the man and the woman together as husband and wife. Given the above consideration, one would argue that it is God who knows how best couples should relate together, hence they must involve him in their marriage preparation for the purpose of stability in their home (Mack 2013:75).

Berglund argues that marriage, as a relationship between a man and a woman, has two basic understandings. The first is the biblical concept which is given to humanity by God himself and the second is the fertility-oriented concept which is worldwide and common to all fallen humanity (1975:1-2).⁴ According to Berglund, the fertility-oriented concept of marriage is a distorted view of marriage because “the woman is essentially a receiver of male seed, her main purpose in life is motherhood. She does not primarily exist for her own sake or in her own right. Her essential duty and purpose in life is to bear children” (1975:3). In the fertility-oriented view of marriage, the relationship of the husband to his wife is that of the ‘giver of seed’, hence deep personal relationship of complete mutual concern and confidence in one another may be completely absent (Berglund, 1975:4). The implication of the fertility-oriented view of marriage, according to Berglund, includes the following: children borne out of the fertility-oriented concept of marriage belong to the man; a husband is also not bound to a single wife since the goal of the relationship is bearing children (1975:4-8). Also, a man is not morally guilty of doing any wrong to the wife if he commits adultery (the adultery is only considered a wrongdoing against the husband of the wife or father of the daughter); no woman can divorce her husband in a manner that a man can divorce his wife/wives (1975:4-8). This view of marriage is obviously discriminatory against women (1975:8). Baldock also agrees with Berglund that the fertility-oriented concept of marriage is a distorted view of marriage by asserting that “The Bible *never* names procreation as a condition of marriage. Sex is more than baby-making; it’s ‘marriage glue.’ Marriage bonds are deepened and strengthened through the intimate and exclusive sexual relationship” (Baldock 2015). Simpson challenges conservative Christians who view procreation as the purpose of marriage and are therefore opposed to gay marriage by questioning the

⁴Though this article is old, it is relevant to this study as a primary source of information.

rationality of the Manhattan Declaration which, according to him, was signed by Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant clergy and laity alike. The declaration points out that based on Christian belief, marriage permits a man and a woman to engage in sexual relationship for the purpose of bearing children. Therefore, having children is essential for the fulfillment of the purpose of marriage. Such a view of marriage naturally raises the question as to the validity of marriages in which couples are not able to have their biological children. But the declaration lays claim to the fact that the purpose of having sex in marriage is to procreate, otherwise even sex within marriage is not legitimate (Simpson 2013).

I subscribe to Simpson's position that "Love is ... the unitive factor in marriage, and not the structure of sexual compatibility nor the capacity to produce offspring" (Simpson 2013). Pressing further on the argument against procreation as the primary purpose of marriage, Baldock (2015) states that "sex between a man and a woman is not the only way to create a family. Adoption, surrogacy, artificial insemination, step-parenting, grand-parenting, and legal guardianship are just some of the ways our society provides for children to be nurtured by people who love them and will take responsibility for them".

I can see the arguments in the above exposition that God instituted marriage primarily for the purpose of companionship and mutual help between the husband and the wife. I agree with Berglund's position that within the biblical context, child-bearing comes into the marriage relationship as the blessing of continued creativity and fruitfulness: "And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28; Berglund 1975:14). This means that child-bearing should not be seen as the primary purpose of Christian marriage but as a blessing that God gives to married couples as he so desires. Given this understanding, it is possible to have a Christian marriage of infertile couples.

According to Gen. 1:27 and 2:18-25, the biblical concept of marriage given to humanity by God clearly gives the male and female equal status in marital relationships (Berglund 1975:13). Carrington corroborates that marriage is "an equal democratic partnership of mutual obedience to

God and loving cooperation with one another for life” (1961:99). Cunningham also agrees with Berglund and Carrington when he says that the man and the woman were partners together in a holy union ordained by God. No other creature on earth has this kind of partnership and communion (Cunningham 1999). Also commenting on equal partnership in Christian marriage, Perry (2013) says: “There is not a president or a vice president in a family. The couple works together eternally for the good of the family. ... They are on equal footing. They plan and organize the affairs of the family jointly and unanimously as they move forward”. Hudson (2013) also agrees that God requires both spouses to stay away from anything, whether in their thoughts or deeds, that are capable of damaging the equal partnership that exists in marriage.

From the African context, child-bearing is considered as the primary purpose of marriage. Mbiti notes that African society values child-bearing so much such that it is regarded as the most important purpose and meaning of marriage (1981:42). Consequently, many men in Africa, as well as other parts of the world, take on other wives if their first does not bear children even when they know, as Christians, that child-bearing is not the only purpose of marriage (1981:42). This practice is also common among some Alago Christian communities in Nigeria. Burke concurs that in a traditional African set up, the ability of the wife to bear children remains the condition for which the marriage may not be dissolved. Therefore, in realistic terms, the arrival of a child in a marriage relationship authenticates the union (Burke, 2010: website). Like Berglund, Mbiti argues that Christian marriage is also defined in terms of its creative meaning and purpose, hence children are the crown of marriage, but cautioned that while it may be easy biologically to bear children, it is a serious responsibility which requires planning (1981:42). Cunningham believes that Christian marriage should not be defined in terms of a particular cultural orientation or church’s teaching, but according to the standard of marriage revealed in the Bible regardless of a church’s teaching and practices. According to Cunningham, the following meanings can be drawn from Gen. 1:27–28: That “male and female are created in the image of God”. They were to procreate, meaning that marriage should “provide a secure and stable environment for children to develop in”. The two were to have dominion. And the union was specifically between a male and a female (Cunningham, 1999: website). However, let me clarify that to take the Bible as a document that is culturally neutral as Cunningham has argued can be misleading because the

entire Bible was written from several cultural perspectives; providing a context for each biblical text.

Cunningham (1999) further argues that love is not the foundation of Christian marriage, rather it is commitment, arguing that a married couple sometimes loses the feeling of love yet that does not mean that love is not important. For Cunningham, love is important and works only if there is commitment – which is the external energy source. Commitment fuels love; this commitment involves a lot of hard work and is the only secret behind keeping the fire of love burning so that it does not go out (1999). Cunningham presses further that “Regardless of the good times or the bad times, commitment will keep you stable, hopeful and working to make things right” (1999). He further argues that the fuel for commitment is the fact that it is a commitment to God through the help of the Holy Spirit (1999). Talking about commitment to God in marriage, I think this suggests that when the husband and the wife are both committed to God it makes it easier for them to submit to each other in their marital relationship. Cornes clarifies the need for the husband and the wife to be committed to God while expressing his view about what the Apostle Paul meant in his instructions to wives and husbands in Eph. 5:21-33. According to Cornes, Paul started with the need for the wives and husbands to be filled with the Holy Spirit; this helps the wives to reproduce their submission to Christ by submitting to their husbands, and the husbands to reproduce the love of Christ by loving their wives unconditionally (1993:69-75). Also commenting on the significance of love in Christian marriage, Harley maintains that for a couple to enjoy sustainable romantic love that will keep their marriage stable, they need to cultivate the knowledge of what he calls the “Love Bank” (2005:25). According to Harley, “There is a love bank inside each one of us. Our emotions use it to keep track of the way people treat us. Every person we’ve ever known has an account in our Love Bank, and their balances are determined by how we feel when we are with them” (2005:25). Harley points out that “if someone makes us feel good love units are deposited into their account. But if we feel bad around this person, love units are withdrawn. The better we feel the more love units are deposited. The worse we feel the more are withdrawn” (Harley, 2005:25-26). In my view, love and commitment need to complement each other in a Christian marriage relationship because without love in a marriage there cannot be commitment, and without commitment or deliberate

positive actions by each of the spouses towards the other, their love for each other can best be described as a mere lip service. I hold that Christian love is more than a feeling; it must be evidenced through commitment.

Another element needed in Christian marriage is fidelity. Fidelity enables the husband and the wife to reciprocate their love and commitment to each other. Anderson & Guernsey argue that fidelity is “the human source of stability and permanence in marriage. The positive expression of will to partnership, fidelity can reawaken a love that barely exists or has even died” (1985:89). In their argument, Anderson & Guernsey further stressed that fidelity in marriage is more than commitment based on love because when love is not reciprocated, fidelity could be undermined. According to Anderson & Guernsey, fidelity “is the surrender of one’s own cause to the cause of the other. Coexistence then becomes a partnership in which the particularity of the other becomes an irrevocable source of one’s own destiny” (1985:89). I believe that infidelity in marriage is an act of selfishness and self-centeredness condemned in the Bible. For God’s word says, “The wife does not exercise authority over her own body, but her husband does; likewise, also, the husband does not exercise authority over his own body, but his wife does” (1 Corinthians 7:4). And in Hebrews 13:4 the writer says, “Let marriage be honorable among all, and the marriage bed be without defilement”. When personal gratification replaces fidelity in marriage, then the relationship falls short of the Christian standard for marriage.

Though marriage is important for human beings to fulfill their responsibilities toward God, especially in terms of using their sexuality the way God intends and in rearing of children (Gen. 1:28; Taylor, 1994:178), it must be noted that this injunction does not mean that everyone must marry and have children, because some people will best carry out their responsibilities toward God by being single (1 Cor. 7:1, 2, 5-8; Taylor, 1994:178). Dollar corroborates Taylor’s view on the importance of singlehood by asserting that “According to God, it’s okay to be *single* but not good to be alone (Gen. 2:18; Dollar, 2010:19). To be single means “to be separate, unique and whole” (Dollar, 2010:20). And to be *alone* means “isolated or secluded” (Dollar, 2010:22). The idea that every adult must get married so as to be regarded as a responsible person in the society, in my opinion, is a cultural mentality which is more common in African societies and should not

be taken as a biblical injunction. Davis (2011) rightly elaborates that due to the importance attached to marriage in Africa, a person is only treated as a complete adult when they are married; besides that, it is only when the wife gives birth to a child that the marriage is fully recognized in some societies. Therefore, any man or woman who refuses to get married and have children was considered an abnormal person and they themselves felt they were in the wrong in some.

Christian marriage means that a man and a woman become united in mind, spirit and body, which is the foundation of the relationship between husband and wife; it is upon this foundation that a new family is built (Gen. 2:24; Taylor, 1994:178). Akanni views that “It becomes a hypocritical game when two estranged persons (Whose spirits and minds are miles apart) are trying to join their bodies together in sexual communion...” (2004: 214). I think that unity or oneness in Christian marriage can only be true in a monogamous marriage. Taylor shares this view by stating that Christian marriage is ‘monogamous’, meaning a one-to-one relationship between husband and wife, for life, as shown in many passages of the Bible that the marriage relationship should be between one man and one woman, excluding all others, e.g. ‘the two shall become one’ (Eph. 5:31; Matt. 5:27, 48; John 4:16-18; Rom. 12:1, 2; 1 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:33; Taylor, 1994:180). A counter argument about polygamy was made by Sullivan (ND: website) who says:

This subject of polygamy applies to Christ and the gospel, in that Christ came to fulfill the law and the prophets (Matt.5:17). Christ is a polygamist in the sense that the church is likened to five wise betrothed virgins (Matt. 25:1-13, Matt. 24:34). Christ is one with the "members" (plural) of His body, the church, and one Spirit with them all (1 Corinthians 6:15-17).

I do not share in the view that because Christ is said to be one with the members of his body, the church, he is by implication a polygamist as asserted by Sullivan. The Apostle Paul compares the relationship of husband and wife to that of Christ and the church in Ephesians 5:25 -33 where he referred back to Genesis 2:24. Once again, God’s standard for marriage is defined as one man and one woman. Paul finished this analogy by stating, “let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband” (Ephesians 5:33)

(Paterson 2011). Corroborating this view on the unity of the husband and the wife, Hastings says, “The Bible hints that the unity of the husband and wife is somehow stronger than that of a man and his kindred. Perhaps the greatest challenge of the Bible to an African society lies just here...and yet for many Christians of every age the husband-wife relationship has in many ways continued to take second place to that of the man and his lineage group” (1973:63-64). In view of the above discussion on unity in Christian marriage, I think that Christians in Africa who are married or are intending to get married have to wrestle with the challenge of helping their kindred understand the dynamics of unity in Christian marriage because Africans may tend to view the biblical injunction that says, ‘the two shall become one flesh’ as an attack on their communal lifestyle.

2.2.1 The geographical meaning of Christian marriage

Mbiti asserts that Christian marriage has a geographical meaning. According to Mbiti, marriage enables persons in their entire being, past, present and future, as a complete universe, to enter into a relationship that unites them with another person similar to their own in its entirety (1981:40). Mbiti’s view on the geographical meaning of marriage makes sense to me because to the indigenous Alago people, marriage was the only institution that permits a woman and a man from two different clans to live together under one roof (Oyigbenu 2005:61), whereby the importation of one’s totality as an individual into another person is guaranteed through sexual intercourse so that children may be raised within the new geographical entity. Oduyoye argues that in Africa, the geographical meaning of marriage has a special significance for the woman because it is a ritual that ensures the relocation of the woman from the spiritual control of her father to that of her husband (2006: 13; see also Kanyoro 2006: 89). Mbiti further argues that the geographical relationship in marriage must be entered into by both partners neither by coercion nor suppression, but rather with a determination and purposeful choice (1981:40). “Because marriage involves the unity of two persons at a geographical level, it takes a couple a whole life time to jointly explore, understand, exploit, utilize, exchange and develop its potentialities” (1981:40). Hagee’s definition of marriage as “the art of two incompatible people learning to live compatibly” (2007:51) affirms Mbiti’s position on the geographical meaning of marriage which requires time for its full realization (Mbiti, 1981:41). Marriage from a Christian perspective

provides an opportunity for the couple to explore their sexual gifts which cannot be fathomed to the utmost outside the domain of marriage (Mbiti 1981:41). In my view, it is because of the geographical understanding of Christian marriage that tribal or racial differences are no longer considered as barriers to marriage, provided the husband and the wife are both Christians and are both willing to appreciate and synergize their geographical differences to strengthen their marital relationships.

2.2.2 Social meaning of Christian marriage

Christian marriage also has a social meaning and purpose, as rightly put by Mbiti: “Each of the two partners in marriage is a social being, and by getting married you are establishing a social relationship. Social hunger drives you together, so that you provide each other with companionship” (1981:43; see also Bahemuka 2006: 119-120). In view of this social dimension of Christian marriage, it should be seen not just as an affair of two individuals alone, but as an institution that brings together families, relatives and friends from each side of the partnership (Mbiti, 1981:44). I concur with Mbiti on his take on the social meaning of marriage; in fact, marriage constitutes the foundation of society. The Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology rightly puts it thus: “Marriage is the most basic and significant social relationship to humankind. This relationship must be nurtured and maintained for the welfare of all. Without marriage, society will fail” (‘Marriage’: ND). According to Mbiti, “the social dimension of marriage enriches it, gives it a variety, sets you within your marital boundaries, and makes you socially recognizable and acceptable as a married person” (1981:44). This social aspect of Christian marriage also means that social barriers are broken where they exist. This applies particularly in situations where the couple who are united in marriage come from different tribal, racial and class barriers (Mbiti 1981:45). According to Mbiti, the crossing of social barriers in marriage can either be a blessing in terms of fostering reconciliation or a social problem if differences are not understood and appreciated (Mbiti 1981:45).

2.2.3 The psychological meaning of Christian marriage

Christian marriage has a psychological meaning and purpose (Mbiti 1981:45). In the marital union, the two partners share the feeling that they belong to each other. Mbiti puts it thus: “You

say in effect, ‘I am yours and you are mine! You are mine and I am yours! You die to each other and for each other, so that in the other you rise as two-in-one and one-in-two’ (1981:45). Because of this psychological dimension of Christian marriage, the failures of one become the failures of the other, just as the happiness and successes of one becomes the happiness and successes of both (Mbiti 1981:46). Also, because of this psychological feeling in marriage among devoted couples, “the death of one partner virtually wrecks the life of the surviving one, who sometimes dies shortly afterwards or finds it unthinkable to marry someone else” (Mbiti 1981:46). I think that when married couples understand marriage from its psychological perspective it helps them to be sensitive to the feelings of each other in their relationships so that the behavior of one does not throw the other into a state of psychological trauma.

2.2.4 The spiritual meaning of Christian marriage

Some Christian scholars like Mbiti and Verryn argue that marriage has a spiritual meaning; therefore it should be viewed as a sacrament (Mbiti 1981:47; Verryn 2001:29). Mbiti believes that “marriage is a sacrament with a physical dimension which symbolizes and conveys spiritual grace and blessings” (1981:47). Mbiti argues that the Bible opens with the physical aspect of marriage in Genesis chapter two (the marriage between Adam and Eve), but closes with the spiritual dimension of marriage in Revelation chapter 21:1-4 (the marriage between God himself and his redeemed creation) (1981:47). Hence for Mbiti, the physical marriage is a pointer to the spiritual marriage which ought to be the aspiration of Christian couples (1981:47). Verryn asserts that “One of the natural sacraments is marriage. This means that marriage is experienced primarily as communication of salvation to those who are married, and not merely as an institution for procreation” (see Verryn 2001:29). In my opinion, the argument that marriage is one of the sacraments and therefore should be seen as a means of communicating salvation is meaningful to Christians who belong to the Roman Catholic faith, as contained in an article titled, “*Marriage as a Sacrament*,” where it is stated that “When the Catholic Church teaches that marriage between two baptized persons is a sacrament, it is saying that the couple’s relationship expresses in a unique way the unbreakable bond of love between Christ and his people” (‘Marriage as a Sacrament’ ND: website). But most protestant churches like the Lutherans, Reformed and Presbyterians as well as the Evangelicals believe in two

sacraments, namely, Baptism and Holy Communion. The basis for maintaining such a position is that human actions are not capable of uplifting or lowering their standing before God. Also, participating in the rite of marriage, which is an institution established by God, does not automatically confer grace on an individual as Baptism and the Holy Communion do (Drescher 2014: website).

In the light of the foregoing discussion, it can be deduced that Christians, especially in the ERCC, irrespective of their denominational affiliations, believe that marriage is God's idea, therefore it is sacred (see *The Constitution of the ERCC* 2014:15). The notion that marriage is a sacrament which communicates salvation to those who are married is still debatable in the theological space. I argue that the mere fact that one is married does not mean that he or she is in a good relationship with Christ as the sacramental meaning of marriage seems to suggest. Salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ the Son of the living God (Ephesians 2:8).

2.2.5 Dating in Christian marriage

It is proper for a Christian marriage to be preceded by dating because as Brunstad Christian church (2015) puts it, human beings naturally are not sensible to God's values and because of that they can err in what they think is the will of God. But through dating they are able to find out whether or not the person they are relating with is the right partner for marriage. However, there is a need to understand the difference between dating and courtship. Dating often refers to a situation whereby a man and a woman choose to spend time together without the commitment to marry each other. While courtship takes place when the woman and the man are willing to make commitment for marriage ('How is courtship different than dating?' 2014: website). Dating, for me, should serve as an introductory phase for courtship rather than just viewing it as merely finding a partner with whom a person feels happy to spend time with. The distinguishing mark of Christian dating is that it must be guided by the teaching of the Word of God devoid of romantic or sexual escapade (Dollar 2010:31). Croft (2012: website) was right in defining biblical dating as "a method of introduction and carrying out of a pre-marital relationship between a single man and a single woman". Dollar observed that worldly dating can best be described as "putting the cart before the horse. It cares nothing about character. Instead it settles for superficial traits (such

as outward physical beauty) and blinds itself to obvious inward flaws” (2010:31). He further noted that in the world, couples who barely know each other’s name end up sleeping together or having sex on the first date (Dollar 2010:31; see also Gary Collins 2007:529). Dollar elaborates that “The world says if you love me, then you will sleep with me. Sex is often viewed as the only real way to show someone how much you care about them despite the fact that you just met. Becoming intimate with someone you hardly know is foolishness. This kind of dating leads to intimacy but not necessarily to commitment” (2010:31). Dating before marriage is beneficial in the sense that apart from the fact that it helps one to find out if the person he or she is relating with is the right person to marry, it also helps in personality development and how to get along socially (‘Youth World’ ND: website). However, dating can be dangerous if it is used as a period for sexual exploration. The reality about dating in the Nigerian context today is that it is often perceived as a period for sexual adventures among young people even as internet dating is currently gaining momentum (Ubabuko 2016:website). According to Ubabuko, six of the amazing Nigerian dating apps identified include Badoo, Tinder, Fiendite, Zoosk, NAIJing and Face book. For instance, by using the Badoo apps (2016), one is able to find people who live and work near them based on age, location and gender and can decide to date a person of their choice by rating their photos. According to Youth World, “The danger in dating is that you will do something that will seriously damage your chances for future happiness and a successful marriage.”⁵ I think that sexual intercourse during dating often damages one’s chances for a successful marriage in future. The Bible warns Christians against fornication. Youth World explains further “Sexual intercourse between a man and a woman who are not married is called fornication. The Bible says, “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification [purity], that you should abstain from fornication” (1 Thessalonians 4:3). That should settle the matter for every child of God” (‘Youth World’ ND: website).

Mbiti admits that people do have sex outside marriage, but such sexual intercourse fails miserably to fathom the depth and riches of human relationship which are possible only within

⁵ Some of the dangers of dating according to Youth World that Christians need to watch against carefully so that they do not damage their chances for future happiness and successful marriage include the following: Dating can lead to broken hearts; dating often leads to physical intimacy; dating can produce animosity; dating can bring a lot of “emotional baggage” into a marriage; dating can create an artificial relationship.

the union of marriage (1981:41). Though Mbiti has made a valid argument, his concept of sex outside marriage needs to be expanded in today's world where there are divergent views about what constitute sex outside marriage given the current spate of cybersex. Mbiti rightly argues that sex should not only be understood as a physical relationship but also as a psychological relationship because it is a fulfillment of one's whole self in the other partner and vice versa (1981:41), but he did not take into account sexual behaviors outside marriage that do not require a fulfillment of one's whole self in the other partner such as pornography and masturbation. Mbiti was right in stating that at old age when a couple's sexual organs are less active, they find that the deep relationship they have cultivated over the years satisfies them more meaningfully than having sex (1981:41). In today's world, Christians, including men, women and even pastors, are struggling with pornography and masturbation especially with the advent of the internet (Welman 2010: website). Some argue that watching pornography and masturbating are safe sex behaviors provided one does not feel guilty about them, blaming religious doctrines for creating shame and guilt where they do not exist (Briggs 2014:website). Others argue that even if the physical act is not involved, pornography and masturbation should be viewed not only as the sin of lust which Jesus Christ condemned, but also as an epidemic that is destroying the world's population at an alarming rate as it could affect one's sexual satisfaction in marriage negatively (Wellman 2010; Ashdown et al 2011:42; Santilla et al 2008). I agree with the latter view because such sexual behaviors that do not involve physical contact with the other person as pornography and masturbation are self-centered and can lead to addiction.

Mbiti observes that girls tend often to become victims of unprepared marriage because their so-called boy friends are simply more interested in satisfying their hot sexual urges than being interested in establishing a proper marriage relationship (1981:42). Mbiti advised that if a young man wants a girl for the sake of her sex organs, and not the whole of her as a person, the girl should be wise enough to advise the young man to go and find prostitutes (1981:42). Mbiti has made a good argument here, except that he was not gender sensitive in his discourse as his emphasis was on girls who must not give in to sexual urges during dating. I think it should be vice versa because sometimes it is the girl that may be under some pressure to marry a young man and chances are that she may seduce the young man to have sex with her and to become

pregnant for him. In that case it is the young man that becomes a victim of unprepared marriage. Bruner affirms that “the erotic sexual impulse, basically created as good, has become, through sin, the greatest danger for the individual as well as for society. Thus, he views marriage as the only optimum containment for this otherwise unbridled impulse” (see Anderson & Guernsey 1985:86). It is therefore pertinent and much rewarding for Christians who date to abstain from sex until they get married because sex is worth waiting for.

Mbiti reports that during engagements, Africans emphasize the need to link together the two families involved, and this is done mainly through exchange of visits and exchange of gifts (1981:63). For Mbiti, the exchange of gifts by the family of the intended bride and groom should not be referred to as bride-price and dowry because using such terms by those who are not Africans, especially the early missionaries and colonial masters, means that it is an act of purchase (1981:63). According to Mbiti, “It is absolute nonsense to call the exchange bride-price or dowry” (1981:63) because this exchange of gifts is not a one way traffic thing – the girl and her parent are also expected to do the same even though their contribution may be less (1981:63). But Mbiti fails to suggest a better word that should be used instead of bride-price or dowry. In Alago language, the exchange of gifts during engagement is called *odu ko onyape*, which literally put means bridal requirement (see Oyigbenu 2005:113). Mbiti believes that the exchange of gifts during engagement has great value and meaning socially, emotionally, symbolically, morally and economically, but observed that it can be abused like any other practice (1981:64). Akanni (2004) opines that the exchange of gifts before marriage, also referred to as bride-price, is biblical; “There was a bride price paid to have Rebecca married to Isaac (Gen 24:50-53), Jacob served his father in law for Leah and Rachel, David paid with 200 philistine foreskins though the father demanded for 100; and Jesus paid with his blood to have the church for himself as his bride”.

The period of engagement may vary depending on one’s culture. Arguing from the African context as to how far a marriage engagement should last, Mbiti is of the view that a period between one and two years is both reasonable and practical (1981:67). Commenting on the implication of either a short or long period of engagement, Mbiti says that if the engagement

period is too short the couple may not be able to make all the necessary plans for their family life and may enter into marriage as strangers to themselves. And if the period of engagement is too long the relationship might weaken or get rusty (1981:67). From oral tradition, before the advent of Christianity, the choice of marriage partner among the Alago people of Nigeria was done at the birth of a baby girl, as it was the responsibility of parents to choose a wife based on the reputation of her family for their son, and this marks the beginning of the engagement. When the girl starts *gboyi* (menstruating) her parent would inform the parent of the boy that their daughter was becoming mature for marriage so that concluding preparations for the marriage could be effected. But today, due to the influence of Christianity, Islam and modernity, dating the girl child is phasing out, hence the engagement lasts between two to three years depending on the readiness of the couple and their families. Mbiti suggests that factors such as age, financial situation, educational plans and other circumstances should be considered in terms of how long an engagement should take before the couple gets married (1981:67).

2.3 Same sex marriage

A same sex marriage, which is also known as gay marriage, according to Morris (ND), “is the union of two individuals of the same sex in a marital relationship, with the full legal rights and responsibilities allotted to this contract in a given jurisdiction”. Morris (ND) further explains as of 2015, twenty-one countries of the world have abolished the age-long view of marriage as a relationship between a man and a woman. In Morris’ view a lot of poor innocent people had to watch their loved ones making public commitment to a same-sex marital relationship. Hence there is currently a paradigm shift from the religious view of marriage to viewing marriage as a social construct.⁶

Although same sex marriage is not recognized by all Christians, it is an accepted type of Christian marriage in some contexts. For example the argument that procreation is not a

⁶ The twenty-one countries in which same sex marriages are legalized include “Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Denmark (including Greenland), Finland, France, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, the UK (performed in England, Scotland, and Wales), the United States, and Uruguay. Although recognized nationwide in Mexico, it is only performed in four states...” (see Morris http://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Same-sex_marriage Accessed 31st May, 2016).

condition for Christian marriage is used by some Christians to justify that gay couple can have a family if they chose to. Statistics have revealed that “As of 2013, as many as six million children and adults in America had a gay or transgender parent. An estimated 39% of individuals who are part of same-sex couples have children at home with them. About one-third of lesbians and one-fifth of gay men have children” (Baldock 2015). Baldock (2015: website) argues that the New Testament understanding of God’s family is not restricted to persons who are related by blood. For Baldock, the reason for the high value attached to marriage in the Old Testament was because it was necessary at that time for the human race to multiply. Also, the Israelites as a small ethnic group needed to preserve their lineage so that the birth of Jesus Christ would take place as it was prophesied. But in the New Testament, the church, which is the new family of God, no longer grows by bearing children, rather it grows by the faith of those who decide to follow Jesus Christ. Using Mark 3:31-35, Baldock further contends that even when some people told Jesus that his mother and brothers were outside looking for him, Jesus replied that whoever does the will of God is his mother and brothers.

I think it is right to argue that the New Testament idea of God’s family is grown not primarily by procreation but by faith in Christ. However, we cannot rule out completely that procreation is one of the factors for church growth because children of believers in Christ often turn out to declare their personal faith in Jesus. More so, it will not be right to apply Baldock’s understanding church growth to marriage because it has a place for procreation in the human sense.

Christian marriage ought to be heterosexual in nature whereby sexual relationship takes place between persons of the opposite sex. Harley uses the terms ‘Traditional Marriage’ in referring to the Christian type of marriage, as opposed to same-sex marriage that seeks for a redefinition of marriage (2005:8). Harley further explains that sympathizers of same-sex marriage argue that the age-long view of marriage is discriminatory against gays and lesbians; they claim it is an infringement on their civil rights. To deny them the right to same-sex marriage according to their sexual orientation is akin to the past discrimination of African-Americans who were once reduced to being back-sitters in buses because of the color of their skin (2005:8-9).

I think that the assertion by Anderson & Guernsey is worth noting in reaction to the arguments in favor of same-sex marriage. To them, what constitutes an ideal sexual relationship among humans is when it is done between a man and a woman. They maintain that to be human is not only to be male *or* female, but to be male *and* female (1985:91). By this assertion, Anderson & Guernsey were not advocating that we have to be both male and female (intersex), but that male and female ought to be paired for an ideal sexual relationship, as opposed to same-sex marriage. Guernsey further explains that not only does God determine us to be either male or female, but that we are to be male with respect to the female, and female with respect to the male (1985:91). According to Guernsey, this reminds us of Paul's teaching that "in the Lord the woman is not independent of the man or man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman" (1985:91). Stanton and Maier throw their weight behind the argument against same-sex marriage by affirming that same-sex marriage will forever change the meaning of marriage and family for everyone (2005:21). According to Stanton and Maier, "Marriage is and always has been about bringing men and women in permanent, exclusive domestic and sexual relationships. No human society – not one – has ever embraced homosexual marriage. It is not a part of the tradition of any human culture" (2005:22).⁷ A prominent political scientist and social thinker, James Wilson sheds light on what all societies need marriage to do: It is to ensure that the family, which is more crucial to the existence of a society than marriage, is properly secured so that the society can be a place where women are not left alone to care for children, but a place where men feel obligated to support their children and mothers of their children; a society where men need women as much as women need men (2005:50).

Stanton and Maier further stress that there are extremely rare examples of same-sex marriage in human history which have never been normalized as part of society. "Some powerful kings and rulers have taken mates of the same sex. The most prominent example is the Roman emperor Nero, who along with marrying another man also murdered people routinely and appointed a horse to the Senate" (2005:50). Another example is that of women marriage in Dahomey, West

⁷ Stanton and Maier note that some people argue that there have been examples of homosexual marriage in some societies, but they insist that such claims were not true. "It was early in 2001 that the first country on earth legally recognized marriage between same-sex couples" (Stanton and Maier 2005:48).

Africa in the early twentieth century where a closer examination reveals that “a barren woman would formally marry a young girl and hand her over to her husband with a view to bearing children”(Sullivan 1997:32-34). Further, Stanton and Maier say that the other example of same-sex marriage is in a culture found in Native American aboriginal tribes (2005:51). In the past, the relationship between two men was permitted in situations whereby one of the men played the role of a woman with a wealthier male, usually in a context where the wealthier male already has a heterosexual and polygamous marriage with biological children. The men who related as half woman-male only related to their “husband” as a work-spouse who works together with the women in the house, they did not have any emotional attachment to their husband (Stanton and Maier 2005:51).

Therefore, these rare cases of same sex marriages were instances of relationships where a service was provided and were rarely emotional or sexual (Stanton and Maier 2005:52). Cunningham affirms that “Though gays and homosexuals do have certain rights as do every other human being, they do not have marital rights in the realm of Christianity” (1999). Cunningham rightly noted that “Christian marriage is not the only type of marriage. Those in the world have their own definition of marriage as homosexual or gay marriage” (1999). He admits that “these same sex couples have similar rights as do opposite sex marriage in some non-Christian environments” (1999). It is my submission that Christian marriage is heterosexual in nature, but this understanding cannot be imposed on Christians who think that same-sex marriage is also a type of Christian marriage.

2.4 Divorce

Meyer defines divorce as “a legal action between married people to terminate their marriage relationship. It can be referred to as dissolution of marriage and is basically, the legal action that ends the marriage before the death of either spouse” (Meyer 2016). According to Merriam Webster’s Learner’s Dictionary, divorce is simply defined as “the action or an instance of legally dissolving a marriage” (‘Divorce’, ND: website). It is important to note that one of the things that God categorically says he hates in the Bible was divorce: “I hate divorce, says the Lord God of

Israel...” (Malachi 2:16). Perhaps the reasons why God made such emphatic statement against divorce can be seen in the preceding verses where we read:

You cover the Lord’s altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. But you say, ‘Why does he not?’ Because the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God is seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth (Malachi 2:13-15).

I think that from the scripture quoted above, God hates divorce because since marriage was his initiative he attaches high regard to it by serving as an invisible witness between the husband and the wife; and because he seeks for godly children from marriage. Despite God’s position about divorce, it still persists not only among non-Christians, but even among committed Christians. Harley argues that divorce often occurs when a couple continues to empty each other’s love till the balance eventually reaches “negative 1,000 – the hate threshold” (2005:25-26). Divorce can occur when one or more of the basic elements that sustain Christian marriage, as presented by Harley, are lacking. The first ingredient is extraordinary care: “In their wedding vows a couple promises to ‘love, comfort, honor, and keep’ each other in any life circumstances” (2005:15). Harley notes that if at the time of their wedding one of the spouses refuses to make that promise, few people will be willing to go through the wedding ceremony (2005:15). Second is sexual exclusivity: “When a couple marry they promise to ‘forsake all others’ and be ‘faithful’ to each other-sexually” (Harley 2005:15). Harley argues that “anyone who knew at the time of their wedding that their spouse would eventually have an affair would refuse to marry that person” (2005:15). Third is permanence: During the wedding, a couple promise to remain together ‘as long as we both shall live.’ Harley observes that the promise of the man and the woman to stick together for the rest of their lives is very crucial because it stabilizes the family, which is an important requirement for raising children successfully (2005:16). According to Harley, “If a couple were told on the day of their wedding that they would divorce when their children were young and needed them the most, they would stop the ceremony” (2005:16). Commenting on the permanent nature of Christian marriage, Thurian explains that Christian marriage has two

characteristics: It is permanent and indissoluble (1959:31). According to Thurian, “marriage is constituted by the union of two persons, in God and by God, made public by a ceremony in the church and attested by the words of Christ: ‘They are no more twain (two) but one flesh. What God has joined together, let not man put asunder’” (1959:31). Murray also shares the view that Christian marriage is for life, except if adultery and desertion occur (1970:248). Murray argues that incompatibility should not be used as grounds for divorce as such reason has no legitimate status before God (1970:248). Murray further states that religion is a significant factor for compatibility: “Christians should marry ‘only in the Lord’.” (1970:249). He maintained that “believers cannot disobey God marrying unbelievers and expect their marriage to go well. There is no factor which is really essential for compatibility. Race, age, social status, everything else is secondary....” (1970:249). In my view, even when adultery, desertion or domestic violence threatens the survival of a Christian marriage, efforts need to be made towards forgiveness and reconciliation first before considering divorce.

According to Harley, an essential ingredient of a Christian marriage is monogamy (one man and one woman) (2005:17) and I see that violation of this principle can lead to divorce. Harley maintains that limiting marriage to one man and one woman is the best way to raise happy and successful children (2005:17). It may be interesting to note that the first two essential ingredients of a Christian marriage – extraordinary care and sexual exclusivity – as suggested by Harley, have greater benefits for the married couple, and the last two essential ingredients – permanence and monogamy – have greater benefits with regards to the raising of children who come into the life of the married couple as blessings of the marital union, as well as continuation of the human race. Cunningham stresses that God intends that the union of the man and the woman should fulfill their need for companionship, and that this is clearly revealed in the fact that the woman was created from the rib or from Adam’s side, to be by the man, and not beneath him, behind him or in front of him (Gen. 2:18) (1999). In his interpretation of Matt. 19:4-6, Cunningham argues that Jesus reiterated the issue of the man and the woman becoming one flesh. Jesus declared that no one should put aside what God has put together. This scripture, according to Cunningham, “does not imply that God has ordained all marriages, or that he has put all marriages together, rather Jesus’ statement only applies to those that God has put together”

(1999). Cornes differs from Cunningham on this understanding. For Cornes, “whenever a man and a woman marry, whatever the circumstances that have brought them together, it is God who is joining (literally yoking them to one another)” (1993:66). Cornes elaborates on his argument further that even in the case of a man marrying a woman because her parents pushed her to him on account of pregnancy, it is God who has joined together because “it is not them, the clergyman or the judge or the registrar who joins a couple together. It is not even the couple themselves (although they must give their free consent to the marriage)” (1993:82). In my view, though it is difficult to judge whether or not a marriage has been put together by God, we need not ignore the place of human responsibility in terms of choosing a marriage partner. Additionally, some circumstances that have brought a man and a woman together in marriage may clearly be an act of disobedience to the will of God, yet God can still work out his good out of human failures. Dollar (2010) gives a rather balanced argument in terms of God’s part and human responsibility in bringing a man and a woman together in marriage. According to Dollar, God plays his part by simply making a presentation of a suitable partner for marriage, but the choice is ours (2010:23-24). Dollar says, “Eve was presented to Adam; God had to bring her, or introduce her, to him. Adam liked what he saw and accepted her as a companion and friend. Eve was first a companion, then later a wife” (2010:23-24). Dollar argues that God will not make that choice for a man because that would violate a man’s freedom of choice. If God had made a particular woman just for a man then He would be taking away humanity’s free will and taking on the responsibility of that relationship (2010:24). Dollar insists that if Adam had not chosen Eve, God would have made another (2010:24). I agree with Dollar that God will not make the choice for a person in terms of who to marry because humanity has the free will to choose whether good or bad. But to say that God would have made another woman for Adam if Adam had not chosen to marry Eve, as Dollar argues, goes too far from the context of the narrative in Genesis 2:18-25. Dollar did not tell us what God would have done with Eve if Adam had not chosen her or if she had not chosen Adam. I think that in that context, Adam and Eve were at a creative point where everything God made was good (see Genesis 1:31). If Adam had not decided to marry Eve, that would have contradicted the perfect will of God at that point. I believe that Eve was perfectly created by God to fit Adam and not another man. After all, Eve was made out of the rib that was taken from Adam. I, therefore, think that though there may be

marriages that were joined together according to God's will and others that were joined together against the will of God, and though some divorce cases may be based on good reasons and others based on wrong reasons, divorce causes psychological trauma and breaks hearts, hence God says, "I hate divorce."

2.5 The role of premarital counselling for marriage stability

My argument in this research is that premarital counseling plays a significant role towards marriage stability. Got Questions.org describes premarital counseling as "an excellent way to clear up misconceptions about marriage, set goals, and distinguish between God's standards and those of the world" ('Premarital counselling' ND: website). The description by Got Questions.org is related to the description by the Mayo Clinic (ND: website) which says premarital counseling is "a type of therapy that helps couples prepare for marriage... giving... a better chance for stable and satisfying marriage". The aforementioned descriptions of premarital counselling show that it is a prerequisite for a stable marriage.

2.5.1 Premarital counselling as a prerequisite for Christian marriage

Musa, writing on the significance of pre-marital counseling to the stability of Christian marriage, says, "the better one prepares in any endeavor in life, it follows that there will be better and higher chances to succeed meritoriously" (2010:33). Musa further clarifies that, "you will find that more often than not, the area we are least seriously prepared for is this life time relationship that is for marriage that is Christian" (2010:33). Collins argues that lack of premarital counselling is one of the major reasons for instability in Christian marriage (1982:46). According to him, "There are numerous reasons for the present instability in marriages, but undoubtedly one source of the problem concerns the lack of care with which many marriages are put together"(1982:46). Collins further submits that "premarital counselling primarily is preventive. It is less concerned about healing existing wounds than about building a union which will survive future attacks" (1982:46). I think that Collins' argument pictures the nature and role of premarital counselling: his understanding of this key term is in line with one of the theoretical frameworks of this research, the theory of prevention. Details about prevention as a theoretical framework of this dissertation are discussed in chapter three. Taylor affirms that "Many

marriages fail because people get married without considering what this new relationship will mean for their lives” (1994:189). Taylor further recalls that “...traditional customs often included a long time of preparation, both for initiation at the coming of puberty and for marriage. But today this preparation is often neglected, and no teaching is given to guide young people in their lives” (1994:189). This lack of teaching on Christian marriage, particularly among African Christians, dates back to the missionary era as earlier reports suggest. Some reports have it that some of the missionaries in Africa admitted that teaching on Christian marriage was virtually absent. This situation was further compounded by the fact that there was minimal social contact between the missionaries and the locals, which made it difficult for the early Christian converts to see any model of what Christian marriage ought to be in the life of the white missionaries (Phillips (1953:380-381).

Perhaps the handicap of the missionaries in terms of providing opportunities for premarital counselling in many African countries was not deliberate but was because there was a more urgent need for teaching about salvation and providing humanitarian services than the need to help the new converts clear up misconceptions about marriage. This reason may be particularly true about the Evangelical Reformed Church of Christ (ERCC) within which this research work is carried out. According to Palma, the fast spread of Islam in the northern part of Nigeria was a major concern of the missionaries who founded ERCC. Palmer says Dr Karl Kumm’s vision was to evangelize the north of Nigeria because he “saw Islam advancing south into Africa” (1996:52). And I think when the indigenous Christians took over the leadership of the church, they equally gave little attention to premarital counselling or teaching about Christian marriage. Phillips further recognizes that when the church ignores teaching on Christian marriage and relies on using legal machinery alone, no meaningful success can be achieved: “It is impossible to deal with illegitimacy, marital instability, and other results of disintegration by means of legal machinery alone” (1953:381).

Hogeterp calls for the need for Christians to reprioritize their thinking when it comes to preparation for marriage, asserting that “often much thought and necessary planning will go into agreeing on the bride price, the wedding ceremony, and the wedding day itself. We must ask,

however, how much thought and planning go into preparation for marriage?” (2011:11). Smith opines that one of the problems that lead to marriage failure today is “too little preparation for marriage” (1990:22). Smith believes that “serious problems can sometimes be avoided if the couple has wise guidance before marriage” (1990:22). Essien affirms that it helps when young people avoid the dangers of marrying in disobedience to God and marrying out of ignorance (2014:79). I think that if premarital counseling is given to the young people in good time it will help them cultivate the right mindset about marriage before entering into any committed relationship that will lead to marriage.

2.5.2 Biblical position for premarital counselling

The Bible is not silent on the issue of premarital counselling. In Ephesians 5:22-33, Paul instructs Christians about the basics of an ideal Christian marriage, spelling out the role of husbands and wives in a Christian family (Collins 2007:525). I can see that King Solomon earlier spoke about the importance of seeking for godly counsel concerning one’s future plans. In Proverbs 15:22, Solomon says, “Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.” It appears that the elderly members of the church who are experienced in terms of the challenges involved in marriage can advise or instruct the younger ones on how they should behave in a marriage relationship early enough in their lives before entering into marriage, as found in chapter 2 of Apostle Paul’s pastoral letter to Titus (Isaac2009).I agree with Isaac’s argument, especially when he says that since marriage is the union of a man and a woman, it is the two of them that must address issues that concern their relationship before they get married and that is the point at which premarital counselling starts. In the light of 2 Timothy 3:16, it comes out clearly that Christians must apply the teaching of God’s word as they set out for the noble task of getting married as God has designed (Isaac 2009).

2.5.3 Key issues that should be addressed in premarital counselling

Communication is one of the key issues that premarital counseling must address. Odukoya emphasizes the importance of communication in marital stability. She says, “...for any relationship to be successful, be it with family, friends, neighbors, colleagues etc. information is vital and this is particularly important when it comes to understanding the person you want to

spend the rest of your life with” (2008:7). I think that communication is not just about saying something but it is also about the proper use of information. Rainey (ND) puts it thus:

Good, open communication is the top need in marriage. Nothing is as easy as talking; nothing is as difficult as *communicating*. Using words correctly and skillfully is an important part of communication, but even more important is that both husband and wife have a willingness to communicate in ways that result in deeper honesty and openness.

Learning the appropriate way of using information helps a great deal in marital relationships. Flood (ND) says that learning about communication could be tough but helpful. According to Flood, the following principles of communication can enhance marriage stability: First, conflict does not worsen by the person who initiates a conversation, but by the first person who responds. Second, physical touch deescalates conflict because it is difficult to offend one's partner while touching them lovingly. Third, if right timing is carefully chosen, conversation is more likely to be productive rather than destructive. And fourth, when God is invited into a conversation through prayer, the communication is often successful. It appears to me that we are more familiar with verbal communication than non-verbal communication. In particular, “the principle of physical touch” also needs to be emphasized during premarital counselling because it helps in deepening the marital relationship.

Sex is another important area that needs to be dealt with in premarital counseling. Adewale attributes cases of premarital sex among Christian youths to lack of sex education by parents and the church (2008:36). According to Adewale, “since parents have refused to educate their children on the subject and the church is not forthcoming with anything meaningful, the youth have resorted to any information they can get from anywhere either wrong or right.” There is a close link between the argument on premarital counselling and virginity in that one is dependent on the other. Essien believes that there is value attached to virginity in terms of promoting healthy marital relationships which many young people are unaware of (2013:57). Essien defines virginity as “that state of sexual abstinence until marriage...A virgin is, therefore someone whose first sexual activity is with his/her married partner; not the person he/she intends to marry. There is no place for casual sexual relationship in the family of God” (2013:57). According to

Essien, when a woman marries a man as a virgin, a blood covenant is entered into between them, and since a woman sheds blood for every child she delivers, it follows that “the blood of the woman is a covenant of marriage – between the man and the woman, between the couple and their offspring” (2013:62). I believe that premarital counseling should encourage intending couples to abstain from sexual intercourse before marriage because it will eventually pay off for them. But Essien’s argument about the significance of the blood that the woman sheds as a virgin when she marries a man does not take into account some related issues that are critical. Take for example the re-marriage of widows who by their previous marriage cannot shed blood, or consider women who break their virginity during sporting activities and then could not shed blood in their first sexual encounter. How about those women who are raped and because of that they are not able to shed blood? I think that such are exceptions that we need to make clear during premarital counselling to guard against undue generalization. In my opinion, discussions about sex with the intending couple must also relate to how they should relate to each other sexually after marriage, especially where there will be need for adjustment due to individual differences between the husband and the wife in terms of sexual urges, to minimize conflict in the marital relationship.

Handling of finances in marriage is one critical area that premarital counsellors must also pay attention to. According to Marriage Success Training, “Money is one of the most significant areas of potential conflict in marriage and is consistently among the top four reasons for divorce. Financial issues occur between couples across the economic spectrum from wealth to poverty. Having a lot of money is not a guarantee of happiness or ease of dealing with money” (‘Marriage Success training’ ND: website). According to Premarital Financial Information (ND), “sessions with a financial counsellor can cover topics such as financial goals, debt, and setting a joint budget among other topics commonly resulting in financial stress and tension”.⁸ I believe that honest discussions on finances by couples before getting married can develop a sense of trust and transparency between them.

⁸Other topics “relating to finances that couples should discuss before getting married to ensure a successful marriage” include: banking, child bearing, employment, clothing, food, debt, housing, contracts, transportation, recreation, vacation and future security.

Other important subjects that will be relevant in terms of preparing young people for Christian marriage as suggested by Taylor include: The understanding of marriage as a permanent relationship between two people which thus affects their relationship with their families; the understanding of marriage as an exclusive relationship between two people and thus one which also affects their relationships with their friends (1994:189); the understanding of marriage as a physical relationship and thus affects their attitudes to themselves and each other; the understanding of marriage as a creative relationship which will perhaps involve them in entirely new relationships, with their children, but which may also involve them in the problem of childlessness (1994:189); the understanding of marriage as a financial relationship which will involve them in a new relationship of interdependence and sharing; and the understanding of marriage as a legal relationship which will involve them in new responsibilities (1994:190). Taylor further states that details of premarital counselling may also include discussing the details of a wedding service which will depend on a particular situation. Apart from the subject areas discussed above, it is perhaps important for the premarital counselor to seek to understand the cultural background of an intending couple that may come from different cultural affiliations, so as to be able to address any cultural practice(s) that might threaten the unity and stability of their future marriage.

2.5.4 Premarital counselling as a responsibility of ministers/elders

Kore places the preservation of the sanctity of virginity on the shoulders of ministers who have to perform pre-marital counselling. According to Kore, premarital counseling is an imperative duty that rests on ministers of Christ. He puts his thoughts thus: “Christians generally and especially ministers of Christ must engage in premarital counselling in order to counteract the cultural elements that lead people to premarital sex in society” (2009:35). Goerz argues that “Your effectiveness as a pre-marital counsellor will depend on the quality, stability, and success of your own marriage” (2006:1). It is important to stress that “the premarital counsellor is sound in the knowledge of God’s word be above reproach in their family relationships (1 Timothy 3:4-5; Titus 1:7) (‘Why is Premarital Counseling Important?’ ND: website). Essien encourages the need for young people to value the important role ministers play in preparing them for marriage:

“Your spiritual leader will be in a position to tell you not only what the Scripture says about marriage but also the stand of the Church...Your pastor is not only your spiritual leader; he (sic) should also be your confidant and adviser” (2010:86). I think that the ministers alone may not perform premarital counselling in all its various ramifications, rather, parents, then community; other qualified Christians in the church as well as relevant professionals must also be engaged. Collins laments over the indifferent attitude many Christians have towards counselling in saying that “despite the effectiveness of premarital programs, estimates suggest that only 30 percent of couples use these services, and of those who do, most get their premarital counselling from clergy in religious settings” (2007:524). Collins further laments that the church tends to leave premarital counselling to the pastor, while the relatives and other members of the church are satisfied with remaining as “smiling spectators” (2007:524). Collins’ usage of “the church” sounds too general as he did not specify which church he was particularly referring to. I think Collins’ argument may be true in some churches, like in my church, the Evangelical Reformed Church of Christ (ERCC), where premarital counselling is often viewed as the pastor’s duty, although they could engage some church elders if so desired. But this may not be true in some churches where persons other than the ministers are involved in the task of preparing young people for marriage. Collins observes that the same dedicated church members who would organize prayer meetings before selecting a pastor or launching any program for community outreach are less likely to think about praying for couples who are beginning a Christian marriage that they hope will last for a life time (2007:524). Given the fact that the intending couple may be required to go through some medical screening to ascertain their health status before they get married, I think that in that case it will be wise for the minister to engage the services of relevant professionals while they still oversee the entire counselling process.

The objectives for premarital counselling or guidance include: To give an understanding of what Christian marriage entails, to promote the understanding of contemporary challenges confronting marriages, and to enhance an understanding of how the couple can evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each other towards their intended marriage (Kore 2004:61). Collins corroborates that the purposes of premarital counseling include seeking to help individuals, couples, and groups of couples to prepare for and build happy, fulfilling, Christ-honoring, and successful

marriages. Premarital counselling also seeks to achieve the following goals: education of the couple regarding marriage; helping the couple to assess their preparedness for marriage; and discussing issues that can cause troubles in marriage (2007:533-536). I think that participants in premarital counselling need to have the understanding of these premarital counselling objectives embedded in their minds by the counsellors at the very beginning of the counseling session. This will help them participate in the counselling program with a relaxed mind; it will also assist them to cast away prejudices about premarital counselling if there are any.

In contrast to the wrong reasons why some people get married, Hagee summed up God's reasons for marriage in three points, namely, to become one flesh, for committed love, and for mutual service (2007:1-2). Therefore, Ministers and elders in the church and in the community at large owe it, as a responsibility towards intending couples, to educate them about things to avoid and things that God expects in every marriage.

2.5.5 The importance of premarital counselling

Collins believes that premarital guidance is important for the following reasons: It helps couple not to rush into marriage without spending time to discuss about their future together; it helps couples know where they can go to seek help if the need arises in future; and it enables couples to develop coping mechanisms for dealing with marital challenges as well as communication skills which can lower the risk for divorce in their intended marriage (2007:525-526). Mama's Health.com (ND) views the importance of premarital counselling in terms of the strategic period within which it provides help to the couple, especially because it encourages marriage stability even before marriage takes place and prepares the couple ahead of time on how they can deal with problems and disagreements in the proposed marriage. But there are also arguments that premarital counselling has its bad side. Booth (2015) argues that premarital counseling sometimes depletes your financial resources especially when you have to pay for services rendered to you, although she recognizes that some churches provide premarital counseling free of charge. According to Booth, "A lot of your success depends on finding the 'right' counsellor...Just because someone is a good counsellor doesn't mean he or she has experience and success working with couples". Booth further argues that a person could realize they are

totally wrong for each other. Though this could be scary for some couples, says Booth (2015), she admits that it may be an advantage because “However difficult this is, it's much easier than an issue presenting itself after saying ‘I do’”. I do believe that though premarital counselling may cost time and money, it is worth the effort. Though it may present some scary revelations about the intending couple to each other, it is better to be confronted with a reality than to pretend as if it does not exist, only to regret it later after the marriage might have already been joined. If there are good reasons to break the engagement, I think it is better than a divorce.

Despite the importance of premarital counselling, some people resist it. Collins suggests that it is important for premarital counsellors to know some of the reasons why some people resist premarital counselling and what must be done to overcome these resistances (2007:532). According to Collins, research has shown that intending couples are more likely to participate if they generally have an optimistic feelings regarding counselling, and it was suggested to them by a person they hold in high esteem (2007:532). Collins adds that clients will be more open to premarital counselling if it addresses issues that interests them, such as communication skills and mechanisms for dealing with marital challenges. The personality and integrity of the counselor-leader are important to some couples. Couples would not want to participate in counselling if they know that they will have to share their past, which to them may reduce the level of trust they are having in the current relationship (2007:532).

Given the importance of premarital counselling to the success of marriage, Clinebell holds that premarital counselling should be administered to couples who are intending to get married early enough, “before the ‘rush and crush’ period, hopefully at least six months in advance of the wedding. Preparation crammed into the hectic few days preceding the ceremony is largely wasted, wiped out by anticipatory anxiety and fatigue” (1975:49). Considering the fact that in some areas most marriages are not performed in the church but follow traditional patterns, Taylor suggests that such situations should not prevent help from being given to those who are to be married. And this will mean that the pastor must be able to know and work with local customs regarding marriage and the preparation for it (1994:190). The pastor will also have to ask themselves when the best time is and what the most appropriate ways are to provide help in a

given situation (1994:190). One of the theoretical frameworks underpinning this study is the contextual theory which seeks to help us apply premarital counselling principles to the people in the light of their context.

Ministers also share in the benefits of premarital counselling. Egan believes that premarital counseling is not only important to intending couples, but that it is, in fact, important to pastors too who serve as professional helpers because it enables them to reduce stress in the course of discharging their overall responsibilities (1982:302). According to Egan, it is better for them to spend considerable time in helping people not to get into trouble in the first place (1982:302). Egan explains that educating intending couples about effective communication in relationship and problem-solving skills can increase the chances that they will be able to handle the natural challenges that marriage can present without seeking professional intervention (1982:302). Egan gives the following illustration to elaborate his point: One day, a man was walking beside a river and saw someone drowning. The man jumped into the river and pulled the drowning victim out, and began artificial respiration. While the victim was reviving, another individual in the river shouted for help. The savior jumped into the water again, saved the second victim and began artificial respiration on the victim. This process continued until the rescuer heard from the river the anguish of yet another victim. This time, the rescuer got up and began to walk away. By that time a small crowd had already been attracted to the scene. The people around were wondering where the rescuer was heading to when his attention was still needed urgently. But the rescuer replied, "You save that one and whoever else floating down the river. I'm going upstream to find out who's pushing all these in and see if I can do something to stop it..." (1982:301). Egan laments that helpers often spend most of their time and energy "downstream" ministering to people who are already in trouble, which is quite a difficult task when they should have spent more time trying to prevent people from getting into problems, which can save them more time and energy (1982:301). I can see in the above illustration how it underscores the usefulness of exploring preventive measures such as premarital counselling in dealing with problems even before their manifestation.

2.6 Factors responsible for instability in Christian marriage

There are several factors which often lead to instability in Christian marriage and eventually divorce unless concerted efforts are made ahead of time to address them. In this segment, I have tried to group the factors responsible for instability in Christian marriage under Sex related factors, Economic/Money Related factors, Social factors, Ecclesiastical factors, External Interference/factors, Poor communication, Psychological factors, Cultural factors, Biological factors, Hygienic factors, and Spiritual factors.

2.6.1 Sex related factors

There are arguments that premarital sexual activities could impact negatively on the quality and stability of marriage. For example, Ogunsola (2012) argues that “The growing trend in the premarital behavioral pattern of today exposes teenagers to living in the world of great sexual exploration and indulgence. This could negatively impact future marital quality and marital stability”. Taylor thinks that the current change in attitude toward sex, with constant reference to sex in radio and TV programs, newspaper stories, advertisements, and easy methods of contraception given to the public, increases the chances for people to indulge in sexual activities (1994:185). Taylor further elaborates that as a result of this open display of sex, many young people assume that sexual adventures before marriage and promiscuity are an essential part of growing up. This gives them unrealistic ‘romantic’ ideas of the sexual relationship (1994:185). In his view, Collins holds that loosening sexual standards can lead to immorality (2007:529). He explains that due to the increasing approval and acceptance of premarital sex even among Christians, “dating for many has become a time for exploring each other’s bodies and genitals, more than each other’s interests, beliefs, values, goals, minds, feelings, and expectations. Love is reduced to sex...” (Collins 2007:529). Collins laments that because many people disregard God’s principles for living a satisfying life, they end up living as slaves to their biological instinct (2007:529). Mbiti considers reasons that are often given for premarital sexual intercourse among young people: sexual urge, curiosity about sex, a person may do it to prove to himself or girlfriend that he is not impotent, a girl may agree to it to prove to her boyfriend that she is sexually healthy, some boys or men want to make sure that the future wife is capable of bearing children before they marry her, a girl may agree to have sex with her boyfriend because he threatens to leave her if she does not consent. Mbiti, however, said all the reasons advanced are

both unreasonable and unbiblical (1981:72). Taffi told a story about her husband to illustrate that every time a man has sexual intercourse with another person, he leaves part of himself behind and takes a part of that person with him. She said when Creflo, her husband was a young man in his adolescence, his father, took him outside for a practical lesson about sex. He said, to his son, “I want you to understand something about sleeping around.” While the father was still speaking, he used his finger to dig a line of quite a few tiny holes in the ground. Then he took a stick that was lying nearby and put the end of it in the first hole. “Something happens when you have sex with multiple women, as a man, you’re basically taking your stick and putting it in one hole after another” the father said. While the father was still speaking, he began moving the stick he was holding from one hole to the other. Creflo realized that as his father removed the stick from each hole, little particles of sand and dirt clung to the end. Though the particles of sand and dirt did not destroy the stick, they were enough to leave some marks that could be noticed on the stick. When the father noticed that his son’s eyes were gazing at the end of the stick, he said to him, “Every time you sleep with someone you leave a part of yourself behind and take a part of that person with you. Basically son, you sleep with everyone they’ve ever slept with, and vice-versa.” On their way back home, the father made one last comment, “Son, keep your stick out of other people’s holes and you’ll be fine” (Dollar 2010:32).

Explaining further, Dollar observes that regardless of how many condoms, cervical caps, diaphragms and IUDs are used, one still places him or herself at a high risk for contracting sexually transmitted diseases, which can potentially damage one’s reproductive organs or result in contracting HIV (2010:33). Keeping oneself sexually pure during dating can be rewarding to Christian couples as it makes their honeymoon sweeter and establishes a trust between them that nothing can shake when they eventually get married (Dollar 2010:34). A critical view on the issue of abstaining from sex till marriage reveals that it may not mean the same thing to different people. Lowen (ND) observes that “Abstinence means different things to different people, and some forms of ‘abstinence’ can still spread sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Teens that abstain from vaginal intercourse but engage in oral sex, mutual masturbation or anal sex can still be infected by STDs. Any skin-to-skin contact including genital-to-genital, hand-to-genital or mouth-to-genital can spread disease”.Lowen’s observation is critical in helping us define what

we really mean when we speak about sexual abstinence. I think what God expects of his children is not partial sexual abstinence till marriage; in fact God expects complete sexual purity that comes right from the heart (Matthew 5:27-28). Fatbird (ND), however, argues to the contrary, that sexual abstinence until marriage can have the following disadvantages: “First, waiting until marriage means that you'll have a poor idea, at best, of your sexual compatibility, and that kind of compatibility is pretty important for the long term health of your relationship”. Second, “putting sex on a pedestal the way you are can be problematic, again in the long term. If sex is supposed to be a mind-blowing, super-intimate experience every time, you're putting a ton of pressure on each other to perform, and creating a lot of tension if it isn't always mind blowing and deeply intimate”. Third, “what you ultimately settle for in a long term partner will have a lot less to do with sex than it will his (sic) character, your compatibility and how well you communicate”. Despite the disadvantages of sexual abstinence till marriage, in my view, as tabled by Fatbird, Christians need to uphold a high standard of sexual morality because ignoring this will amount to disobeying a clear biblical injunction to “Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually, sins against his own body” (1 Cor. 6:18). Besides violating the command of God, failure to abstain from sex till marriage places one under the risk of premarital pregnancy and of contracting sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

In line with the question of wrong attitudes toward sex, it has been argued that both “those who regard sex as being acceptable outside of marriage, as well as those who think of sex as dirty and wrong within marriage, are equally guilty of maintaining attitudes which are destined to cause serious trouble to any family relationship” (‘The Bible and 8 Causes of Divorce’, ND: website). Mack corroborates that misunderstanding about sexual relationship in marriage can lead to instability in marriage, and he warns against two opposite extremes in terms of sexual relationship in marriage. “On the one hand, some people see sex relations as the fulcrum of the entire relationship, the most important thing in life.... How things are going in their sexual relationship becomes the measuring stick by which everything is evaluated” (2013:217). On the other hand, there are individuals who consider sexual relations unpleasant and unnecessary: “Sex may be necessary if you want to have children, but beyond that it has no purpose, they believe”

(2013:217). I think that married couples need to strike a balance in terms of their attitude towards sex to avoid the two opposite extremes identified by Mack. Wellman (ND) recognizes pornography as one of the sexual problems affecting the stability of marriages. He asserts that “Pornography not only is committing adultery in the heart (Matt 5:28), it changes the brain’s chemistry in an almost incontrovertible way”. I think that when a person is addicted to pornography, their marriage partner may gradually become less attractive, leading to gap in communication and eventually divorce.

2.6.2 Economic/money related factors

Taylor posits that the economic independence of young people today influences marriage stability (1994:185). As young people take on jobs, it reduces their dependence on the family or clan group, leading them to a ‘nuclear’ family system which deprives them from enjoying the financial and moral support of the extended family system which has been a stabilizing influence in the past (1994:185). Tau (1975) refers to these economic related factors as aspects of what he calls “Hostile pressures in the environment of the married couple” (Verryn 2001:210). These environmental factors, according to Tau, include extreme poverty or wealth, inadequate housing, and unsatisfactory work conditions among others (2001:210-214). Covetousness has also been identified as a negative attitude that wrecks some marriages, especially when married couples are not content with the economic condition they find themselves in the society, giving in to unhealthy desires for what others have. When married couples do not take biblical warnings against covetousness seriously, they end up inflicting sorrows on their matrimonial life. The demand for a high bride price before a wedding – a common phenomenon among many African cultures – often leads to problems before and after marriage as it grossly depletes the financial resources that a married couple needs to rely upon for their sustenance. Financial pressures are heavy on the African man who wants to have a church wedding because he must pay for the *lobola* (Zulu) or *odu ko onyape* (Alago) (the traditional bride price) and also pay for the white wedding; the African man therefore struggles with two cultures on his shoulder. While the *lobola*

is negotiable, the white wedding, which involves buying things like the ring, suit and wedding gown is nonnegotiable.⁹

2.6.3 Social factors

Instability in Christian marriage also results from the massive migration of people from rural areas to cities with often inadequate housing (Carrington 1961:92). Though Carrington was writing over 50 years ago from a western context and there have been so many extraordinary social change, learning and scholarship on marital issues since that time, I find his views useful in this study because they are in agreement with some the factors that are responsible for instability in marriages among the Alago people as findings from research participants have shown in chapter five of this study. In Carrington's view, the migration of people from rural areas to cities makes it difficult for couples to have large family as it were, largely doing away with a situation whereby older siblings care for younger ones; leaving all the cares of family responsibilities on the parents and in most cases the mother (1961:92). As if that is not enough, the husband's work is generally away from home, making it generally difficult for the wife to be involved in her husband's occupation, and the children spend most of the hours they are awake in schools (1961:93). According to Carrington, this makes the woman much lonelier than she was in the job before marriage (1961:93). Married couples are also faced with the contemporary challenges of 'get it quick syndrome', the pressure to compete favorably with colleagues, and strong negative influences their children are open to when they are away from home (1961:93). He further elaborates that children no longer have the opportunity to interact with their parents (1961:93). Due to better transportation systems, children often make their friends and select their marriage partners from a far distance, which does not give them the opportunity to know much about each other's family background before marriage, and this could later result in instability in their children's marriage (1961:93). Worse still, if these partners happen to be immature, unstable and did not receive any premarital education, any of the modern challenges earlier mentioned can strain their marital relationship beyond their capacity to stand and can lead to far reaching disaster (1961:93).

⁹ This idea was shared in a discussion on the economic implication of the *lobola* (bride price) on African marriages on South African FM (28TH August, 2015; 8.45pm). The discussion was done both from the secular and religious contexts.

The women's liberation movement is another factor that is responsible for some of the cases of marital instability being witnessed in our days (Taylor 1994:185). The movement for the emancipation of women as well as Christian teaching and the spread of school education for girls, have brought great changes in the status of women, resulting in both blessings and problems (1994:185). Moyo admits that the way African women sing and dance in some churches during worship services today is an expression of their liberation from oppression. She advocates that churches in Africa should encourage singing and dancing as a way of allowing the women get involved in the continues struggle for their total liberation from oppression (2002:390). Oduyoye is of the view that marriage should not be seen as a state in which the woman loses her status as a human being with a personal will (2007: 4). Taylor argues that the liberation of women has its problem in the sense that it seems to upset people's ideas of the respective roles of men and women and has resulted in many problems in marriage and family relationships (1994:185). Carrington on his part affirms that the social and financial emancipation of women being currently witnessed in our societies is one of the factors leading to instability in some marriages (1961:92). He further explained that since more women are now employed and can earn a living, they become socially and financially independent; consequently marriage has altered from a male subjugated bond to an equal cooperation between two autonomous people (1961:92). Mack corroborates this view by arguing that conflicts often occur in marital relationship because of lack of clear delineation of responsibilities. He remarks that "Sometimes when everything is everybody's responsibility, everything becomes nobody's responsibility" (2013:187). Collins upholds that the problem of changing roles can lead to confusion in marriage. He explained that in the past the roles of husband and wife were defined clearly and were accepted widely by the community. This is still true in many places today, but things are changing (2007:527). There can be uncertainty and disagreements in the marital relationship when each of the couple enters into the marriage without having a clear understanding of what role to play in keeping the relationship intact (2007:527). With premarital counselling, couples have an opportunity to discuss these roles together and decide on areas of responsibility. Mack suggests that much of these conflicts can be avoided if couples clearly know what each partner is expected to do in the relationship. The husband under God's authority

is the head and manager of the home (Eph. 5:22-27; 1 Tim. 3:4-5; Mack 2013:187). But he may choose to let his wife (his suitable helper, Gen. 2:18;Prov. 31:10-31) take the leadership responsibility in some areas in which he feels she has more gifts, abilities, insights, and experience than him (Mack 2013:187). The delineation of responsibilities in this case does not mean that one person has exclusive responsibilities over certain areas. Rather, it means that when a deference of opinion arises, one person has authority to make the choice (2013:187).

Other social factors may include failure in the adjustment of the married couples to each other especially where there is intolerance; and the parental area where there are too many children or too few children or disagreement over their education (Verryn 2001:210-214). I think that conflicts arising from such social factors result from absence of basic understanding of what marriage truly means. Such issues as intolerance, too many children or too few children and disagreement over their education are some of the issues that could be addressed before marriage during premarital counselling programs. In a social relationship like marriage, in my opinion, disagreements are inevitable because two people are not exactly the same and do not think exactly the same. But the important thing is for the husband and the wife to have the ability to resolve their differences amicably. Also, marrying a person who has a child from a previous relationship can be a signal for trouble in the future ('StepDadding' 2012: website), just as a wide educational gap between a married couple can make mutual understanding about how issues should be perceived difficult, thereby leading to conflict in the marriage. Again, I think that these are critical areas the youth or the unmarried adult need to be educated about long before they start contemplating getting married.

2.6.4 Ecclesiastical factors

According to Taylor, the church is witnessing a decline in the number of 'church' marriages (1994:184-185). Taylor argues that many Christian couples are starting out their new life together without any formal affirmation of their faith in Christ or solemn commitment to him and to one another; hence there is no strong religious basis for their union (1994:184-185). Taylor clarifies that although 'church' marriage does not necessarily lead to Christian marriage, it does help many couples recognize their need of God's help in their marriage (1994:184-185). There is also

a lack of clear Christian teaching and preparation for marriage –the Hastings report on Christian marriage in Africa revealed general inadequate teaching on Christian marriage, given the fact that the ownership of most missionary schools has now been taken over by government. This makes it difficult for the church to influence the life of learners with Christian doctrines as it were (1994:186).¹⁰ Taylor laments that today religious instruction in general has decreased. This has had its effects on those growing up and preparing for marriage (1994:186). This is particularly true with regard to the Christian understanding of marriage. In place after place this complaint was made very strong: there are next to no schools, confirmation classes, or sermons. Immediately prior to a church wedding, one or two instructions are normally given to those engaged (1994:186). According to Taylor, such instructions are both behind schedule and grossly inadequate and then for couples who did not wed in church, they were totally excluded from benefiting from any instruction on Christian marriage (1994:186). The lack of instruction is compared to the large amount of instruction given in traditional society. According to the report, there was a weakness in the pastoral ministry given by the church in many African societies. This was not the case in many indigenous African societies during the pre-colonial era. The indigenous African people used to have specific methods of providing sex and family education to the young people. But nowadays such systems have largely disappeared and where they still exist, the Christian faithful no longer take part, as they are often perceived to be unholy gatherings which are not suitable for them (1994:186). Additionally, the report observes that where instructions were given, they were usually not enough and irrelevant for the contemporary generation. Young people today, especially the boys, are helpless due to the lack of instruction that is relevant to their relationship needs even if they happen to go through secondary schools that are owned by the church (1994:187).

The lack of adequate pastoral care has also been identified as a factor responsible for marital instability (1994:187). In many countries, the number of pastoral workers available is so few that they cannot meet the pastoral needs of their members. Additionally, the pastors often lack proper training for the work and need further instructions themselves before they can instruct others (1994:187). Collins argues that there are contemporary influences that can contribute to unstable

¹⁰ The report referred to by Taylor is found in A. Hastings, 1973. *Christian Marriage in Africa*. London: S.P.C.K.

marriages, which intending couples may be ignorant about unless the church clarifies them through effective premarital counseling services (2007:526). He identifies that unrealistic expectations can lead to disillusionment in marriage, but with premarital counseling, couples can discuss and realistically modify their assumptions about what lays ahead (2007:526). Incompatible expectations between the couple can be detected and hopefully resolved (Collins 2007:526). According to Collins, there are alternative forms of marriage that can lead to uncertainty: “For many years family was thought to consist of a male husband who was the primary provider, legally married to one female, his wife, who in turn bore and was the primary care-giver for one or more children that were fathered by the husband” (2007:528). Today other alternatives abound such as trial marriage, gay marriage, single-parent family, blended family etc. These can leave some couples confused and uncertain. But the couple can be helped if guidance is introduced to them either as a group or as individuals long before they have chosen a prospective life partner (2007:528-529; see also Harley 2005:9; Anderson & Guernsey 1985:91; Stanton and Maier 2005:21). There is also the problem of previous experience that can lead to overconfidence. This means that a person who is getting married for the second or third time may tend to think that they already know what marriage is, and this may negatively impact on the new relationship they are entering into (Collins 2007:530). Atwood (2012) is of the view that “divorce rate is higher for second marriages overall than it is for first marriages, and there’s a reason for that: Most second marriages are a reaction to the first marriage and divorce”. Heller however disagrees with Atwood’s (2012) claim, when he holds that, “While data for second marriages is currently very limited, the early indication is that the frequently stated 60 percent divorce rate is also a gross exaggeration and that divorce rates for second marriages may not be any higher than for first marriages”. Whatever the argument is, it is important to note that marriage is likely to be more successful if the couple are flexible in their approach to each other, are able to leave old habits behind them, and are willing to make negotiations and adjustments where necessary in their marriage (‘Ten tips for a successful second marriages’ ND: website). Collins further explains that not all couples who need premarital counselling are young or inexperienced. Many prospective brides and grooms have been married previously. “Some have had unhappy past experiences and now hope for something better. Others have lost a much-loved mate and are hoping that the new marriage will restore some of the lost happiness” (2007:530).

These factors may cause some couples to assume that they already know what it takes to be married, others may even resist premarital counselling especially when the counsellor is much younger than the engaged couple. However, many such couples may recognize the need for premarital counselling (2007:530). “Even as the counselor shows respect for the value of past experiences, he or she can challenge unrealistic attitudes or expectations, help the couple see potential problems that even experienced people might miss, and give guidance to resolve issues that might be unresolved in the previous marriages” (2007:530). There are circumstances that can signal high risk for marriage (2007:530). Some of the red-flag dangers to a marriage may include “a pregnant bride; one or both participants on the rebound from a previous marriage or engagement; serious involvement with alcohol or other drugs; a history of abuse or other violence; serious mental, or physical handicaps; wide gap in education or age differences; knowing each other for a very short time” (2007:530). Couples may not see these as obstacles to a happy marriage or some may assume that they are issues that can be easily overcome. But the counselor should help the couple exercise caution and take their time to discuss these issues thoroughly before they proceed with the marriage (2007:530-531). Dollar corroborated that it is unfortunate that the society today depicts the dating period as a time to become romantically or sexually attached. As a result of this misunderstanding, serious character flaws and other important issues such as spiritual, emotional and intellectual compatibility, drug or alcohol addictions, anger management problems etc., are often overlooked (2010:29). He warns that there is no point in pushing the dating process or overlooking important red flags simply because one is lonely, under pressure from relatives or reaching a certain age, because dating is simply one’s opportunity to gather information on a person’s character, which is “the willingness to do right when you have the opportunity to do wrong” (2010:30).

Also commenting on ecclesiastical factors affecting the stability of Christian marriage particularly in Africa, Hastings is of the view that the problem about Christian marriage in Africa “was not simply, or chiefly, a problem for individuals. The deeper issue was really that of the ecclesiastical absolutization of marriage norms which had developed in the course of the centuries in the western church and were now being applied in such a very different social and cultural context” (1973:5). According to Hastings, these requirements concerned three major

things: Absolute monogamy, absolute indissolubility, and the celebration of marriage by Christians in a form recognized by the church (1973:5). Hastings argued that “Monogamy was characteristic of the marriage of Christians from the apostolic times; indissolubility is clearly called for by Jesus’ strong condemnation of divorce; the ecclesiastical approbation of a marriage is already suggested by Ignatius of Antioch in the early second century” (1973:5-6).¹¹ Hastings gives us a historical hint into the relationship between customary marriage and church marriage. Throughout the first century of the Christian era there was no special way for a Christians to marry. The customary forms of marriage among the Jews, Greeks, Romans, and every other people provided the marriage forms for Christians as well (1961:93). Doubtless, the blessing of a bishop or presbyter either during the ceremony or afterwards was greatly valued, but it was certainly not thought to be a necessary or, probably even a regular part of the procedure (Hastings 1973:65). Wedding was a family, civil or secular matter and it was accepted by the church as such, though obviously having at the same time the genuine spiritual and ethical connotation (Hastings 1973:65). It was during the fourth century that the priestly blessings of marriage started becoming more regular and the marriage liturgy was slowly developed. For several centuries this liturgy was not formalized as such, but was rather a body of post-wedding blessings (Hastings 1973:65). “It is only toward the year 1000 that a liturgy developed which could really be said to include the wedding itself; and such a liturgy was still normally performed at the church door not in the church until the very end of the Middle ages, as if to suggest that this was not quite the right place for it” (Hastings 1973:65-66). Therefore, ‘church wedding’ as it is commonly referred to today, was, at least until the eleventh century, seen as an optional extra over and above customary marriage; it is one that good Christians would want to have as it is an opportunity whereby the blessings of God can be invoked upon the union and instructions given to the couple on their duties in the new relationship (1973:66). This brief historical background on customary marriage and church marriage helps us to see the need for the church to take

¹¹St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote: "Let no one do anything of concern to the Church without the bishop. Let that be considered a valid Eucharist which is celebrated by the bishop or by one whom he ordains [i.e., a presbyter]. Wherever the bishop appears, let the people be there; just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church." (Letter to the Smyrneans 8:2 - 110 A.D.)

<http://www.todayscatholicworld.com/aug07tcw.htm> (Accessed 26th October, 2015)

advantage of important value systems of a particular culture, in the quest to improve marriages among people who are caught in between their traditional norms and Christian teaching colored with western culture. Given the brief historical background of church wedding above, I think that the church wedding is important for Christians. However, it will be unfair to view it as an absolute necessity for meeting the requirement for acceptance into the church, though this is subject to the policies and practices of churches that we have across the globe. Lack of proper understanding of this has contributed a great deal to some of the problems being faced in some Christian marriages today.

2.6.5 External interference/factors

External interference from friends, relations and in-laws has had negative effects on the stability of many marriages. Bimpong (2013) advocates that premarital counselling should involve in-laws as, according to him, some in-laws, particularly mothers-in-law are contributing to marital instability. Bimpong (2013) further explains that the arrogance and excesses of some mothers-in-law are contributing immensely to the breakdown of many marriages, which is why some men see their mothers-in-law as enemies of progress. Hence the need for mothers-in-law to keep a safe distance from their children's matrimonial home and avoid the loggerheads that often lead to divorce (see also Tau, 2001:210-214). Bimpong (2013) states that the relationship that ought to exist between in-laws and their married children should be "something not so close that parents will get neither burned, nor so that parents will freeze" (2013). It has also been argued that external interference in a marriage can be regulated if couples establish their own home away from parents or move so far away that contact with in-laws is regulated ('The Bible and 8 causes of divorce' ND: website).

2.6.6 Poor communication

Ineffective communication in a marriage relationship can lead to disastrous results (Mack 2013:117). Poor communication occurs in marriage when couples do not state their views clearly on issues which may lead to continued misunderstanding and disagreements. When couples hide their true feelings from each other in the way they communicate, it hinders emotional and physical intimacy, which will gradually lead to the temptation for one or both of the couple to

seek for someone outside the marriage to satisfy their need for emotional ventilation (Mack 2013:117-118; see also Odukoya 2008:7).

Mack admits that a Christian home is not a home devoid of troubles and conflicts because whenever two people are in a close relationship, differences of opinion are unavoidable (2013:171). Mack cited John Trapp's commentary on Matthew 18:15 to affirm his point: "it is as unlikely that you could strike two pieces of flint together and not have sparks as it is that you could put two sinners together and not have conflicts" (2013:171). Mack insists that sometimes disagreements are not necessarily bad, rather if disagreements are not too many in a relationship they become opportunities for the stimulation of growth and development in marriage relationships, especially if they eventually lead to meaningful resolution through effective communication (2013:171). Moore (2012) corroborated that "Conflict exists in all relationships, and when communication is difficult or impossible, conflict often goes unresolved. Negative communication patterns, such as inconsistencies with tone or body language and different communication styles, can even lead to conflict escalation in some cases". Moore adds that couples can learn to adopt healthy communication styles towards resolving their disagreements, such as using "I" statements, focusing on the problem rather than the person, attentive listening and giving feedback as well as avoiding interrupting and blaming (2015: website). Given the disastrous effects of poor communication on marital relationships, intending couple can do well to avoid them by subjecting themselves to premarital counselling whereby they can learn effective communication skills.

2.6.7 Psychological factors

Individual inadequacy in the husband or wife may lead to problems in a marriage. Verryn (2001) argues that these inadequacies in married couples find expression especially where one or both of the couple lacks the capacity to build their own relationship deliberately; there is emotional ill-health; or a situation of gross selfishness where the husband or wife uses the marriage as a means of exploiting the other partner for purely individual purposes. Psychological factors that can lead to instability in marriage also include immaturity, which has been identified as one of the leading causes of broken homes ('The Bible and 8 causes of divorce' ND: website). Collins affirms that

personal immaturity can lead to insensitivity (2007:526). He asserts that people who are immature tend to exhibit self-centeredness, sometimes by manipulating, exploiting or competing with their mates, all in an attempt to satisfy their own needs (2007:526). “Premarital counselling should seek to uncover and discuss the self-centered tendencies that can put pressure on the marriage. The couple can be taught how to resolve differences and helped to develop the communication skills, sensitivity, and willingness to accept and meet each other’s needs” (2007:527; see also Rhyme 1964:70). It is believed that: “Married life is for adults, not for children....There is an age when we are not sure about anything. A toy may be ever so much fun one day, and discarded the next. Much of this same uncertainty goes with the person through adolescence with regard to marriage” (‘The Bible and 8 causes of divorce’ ND: website).Arugu affirms that early marriage can be chaotic to the marriage relationship because the couple are not yet mature enough to handle the difficulties of life and this account for high divorce rate among the youth (2014:379). Arugu talks about the negative implication of marrying too young, but did not tell us at what age a marriage should be considered too early. Responding to the question as to what age is the right age for getting married, the National Marriage Resource Center (ND) in an article, “*Too Young to Get Married? See what Experts Say...*” tables that according to statistics, 60% of all young people who get married between the age of 20–25 end up in divorce and that based on research, couples who are better educated have lower rate of divorce. The *Women’sHealth* (ND) argues that though one’s level of physical and emotional maturity should be a factor to be resonated with, waiting till after one’s college education or a university degree is a reasonable time to get married, because at that level, a person’s chances of looking at issues with an objective mind would have increased thereby positively affecting their capacity for tolerance.

Therefore, while it is difficult to fix a particular age as the right age to get married, I think that marriage should be between two adults and that attaining a reasonable level of education should be a key factor in determining whether one is ready for marriage or not.

2.6.8 Cultural factors

The difference between the traditional ideas of the country, or modern secular ideologies, and Christian teaching about marriages is a trend that leads to confusion and conflict amongst marriages (Taylor 1994:185). For example, Oforchukwu reports that among the Igbo people of Nigeria, any marriage that is not blessed with children is yet to be considered to have achieved its purpose (2010:64). Oforchukwu further affirms that the indigenous *Igbo* people recognize marriage as achieving its major purpose only in when the wife bears children for her husband. Unfortunately, the woman is often blamed for her barrenness. And since infertility in marriage is viewed as a threat to a man's ambition for immortalizing himself, the wife is often despised, taunted and rejected by some members of the community (2010:64;see also Mbiti 1981:26). Therefore, Christians who cannot distinguish between biblical understanding of marriage and cultural ideas of marriage have the potential for conflict in their marital relationships. Other cultural factors responsible for marital instability as identified by Adegoke include marriage support by family and relatives, which often allows room for extended family member to dictate what the couple must do in their marriage; age at marriage e.g. underaged marriage; couple's role obligation and couple's ethnic/cultural background (2010:1).

2.6.9 Biological factors

The problem of infertility and barrenness has accounted for so many cases of marital crises and divorce over the years. Leonard (ND) observed that "Somehow, fertility issues are seen as a 'woman's problem'. Yet it takes two to make a baby, and problems in the man are just as likely to be the cause of fertility difficulties as those in women. Male factors now account for 30pc of fertility problems - the same as female factors". The common belief in our society is that having children brings happiness; however, Sofia Gameiro noted that there is a large body of research that shows having children is 'quite stressful'. She added that "Many parents are worse off caring for children because it's tiring and you have to think about financial issues. When you have children you are worse off in many respects. But we live in a society where we are taught that having children will make us happy" (Hodgekiss2014: website).

At times, giving birth to only female children or male children can be a recipe for trouble in a marriage unless couples are provided with coping mechanisms before they get married, as

Winder (2005) rightly affirms: Gender disappointment is one of the many apparently ‘controversial’ parenting topics, which is often treated similarly to Post Natal Depression. It’s rarely talked about, is discussed in a ‘cone of silence’ (if at all) and those who have feelings of gender disappointment are usually desperate to find people whom they can trust, to talk about the strong, real emotions they experience. Disappointment over the gender of a child may be due to two reasons as alluded to by Winder: the couple have several children of the same gender already, and there is pressure from family to fulfill the need for a specific gender (2005:1). Some couples have ended up having too many children and they cannot cope economically; some fathers have even gone ahead to marry a second or third wife just to balance the gender of their children. I think the tendency to quickly blame the woman for problems such as infertility and gender disappointment in marriage is due largely to ignorance and perhaps cultural prejudices. Premarital counselling helps in clarifying these issues before a marriage takes place.

Changes in physical appearance of the couple, particularly as a result of gaining more weight after the wedding, may result in problems in the relationship if the couple were not prepared to face such a reality before the marriage. Research has shown that “82% of couples gain weight after their marriage. In fact a 2012 study showed that women gain an average of 24 pounds in the first 5 years after marriage while their male counterparts gain on average 30 pounds in the same time” (‘Weight loss/gaining weight after marriage’ ND: website). Gaining weight appears to be more common in women, statistics show, due to reasons such as pregnancy, less exercise, eating more, sleeping patterns, and self-esteem (‘Real reasons why women add weight after wedding’ 2015). Understanding these facts before marriage is key to the stability of the marital relationship.

2.6.10 Hygienic factors

Hygiene is “the practice of keeping yourself and your living and working areas clean in order to prevent illnesses and diseases” (Hornby 2010:738). Poor hygienic practices in the home can lead to spending the family finances on preventable diseases; it also leads to anger, quarrels, separation and other unpleasant consequences in the Christian home. A husband may avoid

intimate communication or sex with his wife due to lack of personal hygiene and vice versa. Lack of hygiene can cause apprehension in marriage, especially "... when one spouse has tried to lovingly express their reservations about their beloved's lack of hygiene -- only to be harshly rebuked or punished by passive aggressive behavior" ('Intimacy in marriage' 2012: website). Body odor and bad breath can be offensive in the marital relationship. Research has shown that body odor results from a variety of factors beyond poor hygienic practices. Body odor may be as a result of one or a combination of the following factors: genetics; foods such as garlic, onions, curry, and other strong spices; tobacco; caffeine, from coffee, tea, soda, and chocolate; dietary imbalance in magnesium and/or zinc; diabetes, specifically low blood sugar; menopause; kidney or liver disease; stress; certain synthetic or "non-breathable" fabrics ('What can I do about my strong body odor?' Columbia University, 2006).

According to the American Dental Association, bad breath results from bacteria that thrive on particles of food that can stick to one's teeth. As the bacteria digests this food, their byproduct results in odor. Food can also get stuck in one's teeth and rot over time, producing a foul odor (Chris, 2015: website). Ignorance about these factors and how to cope with them can lead to problems in the marriage. Glass corroborates that some of the apparent reasons why a spouse can avoid their partners sexually include absence of physical attractiveness, inadequate personal hygiene, change in body weight and refusal to dress in a way that one's spouse prefers. Therefore, when such a situation continues unchecked for a long time, one of the couple may resort to finding alternative intimate relationships outside the marriage bond (Glass 2015: website). Intending couples need to be taught some simple hygienic practices that can help them keep their intimacy strong thereby maintaining a safe distance from others outside the marriage relationship.

2.6.11 Spiritual factors

The spiritual understanding of a married couple has a great influence on the stability of their marriage. If one of the couple is not a believer it will always be very difficult for them to agree on many issues because, as Delzell argues, spiritual harmony does not exist between a Christian and a non-Christian. The reason is because the Holy Spirit lives in the Christian while the non-

Christian does not have the presence of the Holy Spirit in them. Delzell further explains that “If you are a believer and you are already married to someone who is an unbeliever, God's Word tells you to stay married to your spouse (see 1 Cor. 7:12, 13). If on the other hand, you are a single Christian who is considering getting married to an unbeliever, don't do it. God's Word says, "Do not be unequally yoked" (2Cor.6:14)” (Delzell 2013: website).

Unforgiveness is a spiritual problem that makes reconciliation difficult whenever conflicts arise in a marriage. A person with an unforgiving spirit keeps tracks of the wrongs a spouse has committed in the past so as to use it to justify his or her bad behavior. This is not the way God forgives us. When God forgives our sins he does not use it against us in future. That is how couples must forgive each other (Matthew 6:14-15). Bitterness is one of the subtle causes of instability in marriage and eventual divorce. It is related to an unforgiving spirit in the sense that it begins with a remark, an act, or a gaze that may be considered offensive. Bitterness works in destroying marriage relationships when, for instance, a husband makes a comment about his wife's weight gain because he is concerned about how that may impact negatively on her health and that comment hurts her emotionally. Instead of the wife opening up to her husband as to how much his comment hurt her, she chooses to hide her feelings grudgingly, thinking that her husband does not appreciate her for who she is. When such painful and unexpressed feelings keep piling up, they can explode one day over slight provocation (‘Causes of divorce’ ND).

The partner who is at the receiving end of bitterness may respond in anger, and this sore relationship may lead to transfer of aggression toward the children and other members of the family or friends who become easy targets of such emotional outbursts. Also, addiction to things like alcohol, drugs, gambling, pornography and even work is also a spiritual problem or a form of idolatry that can cause tremendous damage to a marriage relationship as it makes the partner who is on the receiving end feel as if he or she is divorced already, even when both are still living under the same roof (‘Causes of divorce’ ND: website).

2.7 Pastoral care and counselling as a basis for premarital counselling

Brister says the “practice of Christian pastoral care and wise counsel proceeds with awareness of God’s love for all creation, abiding hopefulness, and faith in God’s eternal care” (1992:3). Explaining further, Brister argues that “Pastoral theology is that branch of ‘practical theology’ that studies human development in spiritual, moral and behavioral perspectives, reflects upon the church’s function in light of the Christian faith, enhances pastoral care giving tasks, and in the process, contributes to the larger body of Christian knowledge” (1992:8). From a historical perspective, Clebsch and Jaekle point out that there are four primary areas in which the church has fulfilled the pastoral ministry, namely, healing, sustaining, guiding and reconciling (1964:33-66). Similarly, Harold Taylor cited Chrysostom’s *‘On the Priesthood’* where he holds that the pastoral function can be described in four essential ways: sacramental function (by administering the rites of baptism and holy communion); administrative function (by maintaining the purity of the church through the discipline of erring members and taking care of church assets); evangelistic function (by instructing people in the word of God and opposing false teaching); pastoral function (by associating with people of all walks of life and ‘preside at all the great moments of human life’) (1994:2). Taylor laments that though the pastoral function has continued throughout the history of the church, most writers have paid little attention to it and have rather concentrated more on doctrinal controversies and church governance (1994:20). Apart from Chrysostom mentioned earlier, St Augustine of Hippo was one of the great bishops of the church and “was responsible for the wellbeing of the church in a very large area... he had to supervise the work of many priests and leaders of congregations” (Taylor 1994:21). Augustine taught that the pastor must be able to help the following kinds of people in these ways: Those who cause disturbances should be rebuked; those who are low in spirit should be encouraged; those who are weak should be supported; those who object to the truth should be disproved; those who are lazy in the service of God are to be encouraged to work hard; those who like to argue unnecessarily are to be handled with patience; those who are arrogant should be taught how to serve in humility; the downtrodden are to be liberated; those who do good are to be commended and encouraged to do better; those who are evil are to be cared for; all people irrespective of their differences are to be loved (Taylor 1994:21).

There was, however a decline in pastoral care during the middle ages (AD 500 – 1500), because the priests became more self-centered, leaving the care of the poor, the sick the travelers, the hungry and the orphans in the hands of monks. But with the dawn of the reformation, new understanding of the ministry developed (Taylor 1994:23). With Martin Luther’s teaching that all Christians are ministers, the ordained ministers who were called pastors played a leading role in galvanizing the entire congregation to participate in ministering to the needs of God’s people (1994:23). Baxter, who was a Puritan Minister of the Reformed church, wrote one of the classical books on the work of a pastor in 1956 titled, “*The Reformed Pastor*”, in which he stressed that the work of the pastor goes beyond preaching and conducting the sacraments. He submits that although preaching was important, a word of counsel given by a pastor to persons who are in need may benefit them more than lots of sermons. He pushed strongly that pastors must strive for excellence in the area of providing counselling as much as they do in the area of preaching (1994:24).

John Wesley, founder of the Methodist Church who lived in the 18th century, also urged pastors and church leaders “... to visit regularly each person; to pay special attention to the needs of children; to encourage the head of each family to accept the responsibility of training children in the faith; to organize meetings for fellowship... and to continue studying and reading so as to increase their understanding of how to help others” (1994:24). Brister noted that like Jesus Christ during his earthly ministry, there are temptations that are unique to pastors as they seek to carry out their tasks. These temptations include desires for relevance, popularity and power (1992:11). Foster (1985) sees these pastoral temptations in terms of money, sexuality and power. To overcome these temptations, Foster challenged pastors to live a disciplined life through a threefold vow of simplicity, fidelity and service. It is important for church leaders who take care of God’s flock to do it with great caution otherwise they themselves “be disqualified for the prize” (1 Cor. 9:27) (Brister 1992:11). Writing about the nature of Christian pastoral work, Gottfried Osei–Mensah also believes that pastoral ministry must be service oriented. Osei–Mensah noted that “In both the Old and New Testament those who are qualified for appointment as leaders among the people of God are always appointed to serve. Whether appointed as prophets, priests or kings, they are not to lord it over God’s people, but to serve” (1990:9).

Messer affirms that one of the identifying marks of a servant leader is that he or she understands ministry as basically not a status but a service to humanity (1989:106). Osei-Mensah described the garments prescribed for Aaron in his office as a high priest among God's people as symbolic of the service that was required of him:

Aaron wore the names of the children of Israel engraved on precious stones, six names on one shoulder and six names on the other shoulder. In addition, arranged in the breast plate put over his robes were individual precious stones bearing the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Thus he always wore the names of Israel upon his heart whenever he came before the Lord as a symbol of his continual intercession for them (Ex. 28:12-29) (1990:9).

In the New Testament we see how Jesus Christ sets forth this model of servant leadership for those who would minister in his name. Jesus demonstrated this when he personally washed the feet of his disciples to demonstrate love and humble service (Jn. 13:1-17) (Osei-Mensah 1990:10; Bawa 2011:164-165). I think that any minister who finds it difficult to key into Jesus' model of ministry by imbibing the culture of humble service to the people they are leading is not yet worthy for the calling. Lartey argued that the task of caring for pastoral needs is to be done from the perspective of contextual theology. According to Lartey, "Careful attention to historical, socio-economic, cultural and political circumstances is crucial for theological discernment" (2006:42). Lartey further suggests that pastoral care and counselling should be interpreted through three types of processes: globalization, internalization and indigenization (2006:43). He explains that "*globalization* happens when, in whole or in part, the life-style, world views, values, theology, anthropology, paradigms and forms of practice develop in North America and Western Europe and are exported or imported into different cultures and contexts" (2006:43). Lartey argues that globalization in pastoral care and counselling has followed similar social and economic patterns. Likewise, for centuries, forms of Christian faith have been transported from these same western centers into different parts of the world in what can be termed "theological globalization" (2006:44). *Internalization* refers to a process in which "an attempt is made at dialogical engagement, where western understandings interact with non-western ones in a quest for pastoral practices that fit more closely with the cultural and social norms and mores of specific context" (2006:45-46). "*Indigenization* occurs when models and practices indigenous to

non-western contexts are re-evaluated, re-adopted and utilized in pastoral practice” (2006:46). Lartey’s assertion makes sense to me because the kind of pastoral care and counselling that the African church like the ERCC needs is not the globalized type; rather it is the kind that seeks an engagement with the cultural norms of the Africans for synergy. This study is an attempt to apply the dynamics of internalization and indigenization in pastoral counselling in such a way that it will make meaning to the Alago Christians. Contextual analysis entails an unearthing of the curative rites and rituals of local peoples (2006:47). When compared to practices in non-western contexts, the forms of pastoral counselling which have been developed in United States are, by and large, individualistic, rationalistic, emotional-expressive, with a focus on the promotion, development and fulfillment of the self (ego) above all else (Halmos, 1965; Lambourne, 1974; Holifield, 1983; Wilson, 1988) (Lartey 2006:50). In the African context of pastoral theology, Lartey posits that “the focus of healing and counselling is upon the relationship existing between persons and among groups whose intrinsic worth is to be found in the network of spiritual, familial, and intergenerational bonds within which they are embedded” (2006:63). Doehring affirms that “when caregivers relate the care seeker’s story to the ‘metanarratives’... of the culture, their care becomes contextual. Metanarratives are culture’s underlying values and myths...” (2006:167). I think that the need for pastoral care and counselling to be done with reference to the context of the people is very fundamental to this research as it seeks to promote stability in marriages among the Alago people of Nigeria through the instrument of premarital counselling.

Clinebell is of the view that “pastoral care is a response to the need that everyone has for warmth, nurture, support and caring” (1984:46). Clinebell argues that people who have need for care and counselling in the church often see the pastor as the one who has the skills to help them with their needs. “Frequently the pastor is the only person they allow to enter their hells...If the pastor lacks the required skills; such persons receive a stone when they ask for bread” (1984:47). According to Clinebell, the Bible provides the basis for pastoral care and counselling as it portrays all human beings as “little less than God” (Ps. 8:5). The creation narrative asserts that all human beings are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27) (1984:52). The apostle John describes the purpose of the coming of Jesus as being so that people could have life in all its fullness (Jn.

10:10). Therefore, God created human beings for wholeness, but the awareness of humanity's finitude, limitations and brokenness calls for a nurturing interaction with other people and God (1984:52).

It is, therefore, important to stress that those ministers of God who, by the nature of their calling are leaders and caregivers, should see premarital counselling as an indispensable platform for the fulfillment of their ministry among the people of God and must take the lead in portraying the same to other stakeholders in the church.

2.8 Conclusion

In this chapter it was pointed out that marriage was instituted by God as a relationship between a man and a woman who are both equal before God for mutual companionship and for a creative purpose. Although there are other types of marriage in the world such as same-sex marriage and polygamy, this study argues that marriage is a heterosexual, monogamous, and lifelong relationship.

The study further indicates that premarital counselling plays a significant role in helping intending couple cultivate the right mindset about marriage and to develop coping mechanisms ahead of time against potential marital challenges so that Christian marriage may reflect the standards God has designed for it right from creation.

This chapter has also discussed factors that can create instability in marriages, categorized under sexual, economic, social, ecclesiastical, external, communication, psychological, cultural, biological, hygienic, and spiritual factors. These factors are issues that premarital counselling seeks to address in order that intending couples may be forearmed as they enter into married life. It has therefore been argued in this study that the earlier premarital counselling is given to intending couples, the better the results.

In this chapter, it has been established that it is the duty of pastors to provide care and counselling to their members, especially those that are planning to get married. Literature has shown that often the task of effective pastoral care and counselling is neglected by pastors in favor of preaching, forgetting the fact that a word of counsel given to a person may achieve what many sermons fail to do. The pastor's position among the people of God by reason of their calling and training gives people confidence that they are the most appropriate persons to approach and confide in for help when they have need for guidance and direction. It has also been demonstrated in this chapter that to effectively meet the pastoral needs of the people, attention must be paid to their historical, socio-economic, cultural and political contexts in relation to the Christian teaching.

However, as earlier mentioned in chapter one, the literature above did not cover the need for the church to examine the traditional cultural norms of the Alago people that either promote or inhibit stable marriages among the Alago Christians. The research gap is the absence of literature that harnesses the Alago indigenous knowledge systems in premarital counselling. This thesis seeks to make a contribution to the literature by unearthing the interface between Christian counselling and indigenous Alago premarital preparation. This thesis seeks to explore the benefits of an interface between Alago and Christian premarital counselling towards the development of a comprehensive premarital counselling model that would assist the ERCC in promoting marriage stability amongst the contemporary Alago people who are caught in between the church and their Alago culture.

In chapter three I shall be discussing three theoretical frameworks that this study is built upon, namely, the theory of prevention, the contextual theory and the see-judge-act theory.

CHAPTER THREE

Interface between the Christian and the Alago Indigenous Epawoza Concepts of Marriage Preparation: Theoretical Frameworks and Research Methodologies

3.1 Introduction

In chapter two of this study, scholarly views on the Christian concept of marriage were discussed. This study argues that although there are other types of marriage in the world such as same sex marriage and polygamy, the Evangelical Reformed Church of Christ (ERCC) believes that Christian marriage is heterosexual, monogamous, and a lifelong relationship. Views on premarital counselling were also examined in chapter two in which case scholars have argued that premarital counselling plays a significant role in helping intending couples cultivate the right mindset about marriage and to develop coping mechanisms ahead of time against potential marital challenges. In the preceding chapter, I have brought to light factors that contribute to instability in marriages, categorized under sexual, economic, social, ecclesiastical, external, communication, psychological, cultural, biological, hygienic, and spiritual factors. I have also argued that it is the duty of pastors to provide counselling to their members, especially those that are planning to get married. Literature has shown that often the task of effective pastoral counseling is ignored by pastors in favor of preaching, not realizing that a word of counsel given to a person may accomplish what many sermons fail to do. Though dominant western understanding of counselling discourages giving advice as a form of counselling, it is still a vital aspect of counselling within the African perspective and particularly in the Nigerian context owing to the fact that people who are in need of counselling often do not know what they are expected to do to overcome their predicaments, hence they have confidence that a word of advice from a counsellor who is perceived as an elder with a lot of life experience, is reliable.

In this chapter, three theories will be discussed as frameworks for this study, namely, the theory of Prevention by Ignaz Semmelweis, the Contextual theory as postulated by Jerome Bruner, and the See-Judge-Act theory from Joseph Cardijn. These three theories can be likened to a three-legged-stool upon which this study rests. The correlation of the three theories is in the sense that

prevention theory serves as the main theoretical framing of the study because premarital counselling is, by nature, a preventative counselling approach to marital problems. It seeks to help couples make informed decisions about their future together and how they can cultivate coping mechanisms for dealing with marital issues. In view of the fact that marital problems vary, depending on the context one views them, the contextual framework comes to play by helping the researcher relate the skills needed for coping with marital challenges within the socio-cultural context of the Alago people. Then the see-judge-act theory calls for a careful view and analysis of the various factors resulting in failed marriages among the Alago towards recommending appropriate strategies that would help address the underlying problem of the study. In connection to the theoretical frameworks of this study, the current chapter discusses the methodologies and methods by which this study is carried out. Emphasis will be on the research design, which is the qualitative empirical research approach, the use of the library, individual in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions as methods of data collection. We shall also be considering thematic analysis as the data analysis method for this study. Methodological limitations as well as confidentiality and ethical issues will also be discussed in this chapter. This chapter also discusses the meaning of the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* concept of marriage preparation and its model of marriage preparation; stating its strengths and weaknesses.

3.2 Theoretical Frameworks

3.2.1 The theory of prevention

The theory of prevention, otherwise referred to as Semmelweis' theory in the medical discipline, was said to have been propounded by Philip Ignaz Semmelweis, a Hungarian doctor who lived between 1818 and 1865 (Gericke 2005: website). Semmelweis theorized that "... there were cadaverous particles, little pieces of corpse that students were getting on their hands from the cadavers they dissected. And when they delivered the babies, these particles would get inside the women who would develop the disease and die" (NPR Science Desk, 2015: website). Semmelweis theorized that if his medical staff could start cleaning their hands and instruments not just with soap but with chlorine solution, infections could be prevented. The application of

this theory later reduced the rate of childbed fever as well as deaths drastically at the Maternity Clinic of the General Hospital in Vienna, Austria in 1846 (Gericke 2005).

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, International Student's Edition defines "prevention" as "the act of stopping something bad from happening" (Hornby 2010:1160). An English idiom says, "Prevention is better than cure" (2010:1160). A saying in the United States has it that "an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure" (2010:1160), which means that "it is better to stop something bad from happening rather than try to deal with the problem after it has happened" (2010:1160). According to Davidson (ND) "Prevention is any activity or process (or series of activities or processes) which avoids, deters, averts or reverses the development of an event or process which leads to an undesirable outcome".

The researcher views premarital counselling as preventive counselling which seeks to help intending couples avoid getting into avoidable problems in their intended marriages. By seeking to prevent couples from experiencing domestic violence and divorce in their intended marriages, the premarital counsellor helps them cultivate the right mindset on issues such as communication and to learn conflict resolution skills (Bodenmann 1997; Douglas et al. 2001; Parish 1992; Silliman and Schumm 1999; Stahmann and Salts 1993), finances (Douglas et al. 2001; Parish 1992; Silliman and Schumm 1999), parenting (Douglas et al. 2001; Russell and Lyster 1992; Williams and Riley 1999), and extended family relationships (Parish 1992; see Murray 2004:3).

It has been suggested that in order to set up greater preventive measures against instability and violence, attention needs to be given to the interplay between individual, relationship, community, and societal factors that influence violence (CDC Website, ND). It is argued that this method is more likely to maintain prevention efforts for a long period than using one method alone. At the individual level, the focus is to identify personal reasons behind the increasing chances that an individual can become a victim or architect of violence. At this level prevention approaches are usually planned towards enhancing behaviors and life principles that can prevent violence (CDC, ND: website). At the relationship level, the people one associates with, such as

friends, a spouse or family members, can influence their way of doing things. Hence at the relationship level, prevention strategies may include effective parenting, mentoring or programs that encourage healthy relationship in the family. The third level of this interplay is the community, which includes schools, places of work, and the immediate locality where persons usually frequent. The focus of prevention efforts at this stage is to recognize elements in such environments that contribute to the likelihood of becoming a promoter or sufferer of violence. The strategies of prevention at this stage focus on improving the socio-physical environment of the people, especially through poverty alleviation programs, and low-cost housing for the populace. And the fourth level, societal, looks at the larger society towards identifying underlying causes of violence amongst the people, such as customs or personal rights that encourage violence, and how to mitigate them. In order to improve the stability of the larger society, attention is usually given to the improvement of health, economic, educational and social institutions and policies of the people (CDC, ND: Website). The theory of prevention is an important framework in this study as it helps the researcher dig out relevant principles and practices that ought to be applied by couples as preventive mechanisms against instability in their intended marriages.

In this study, prevention theory focuses on the promotion of healthy and stable marriages which, to me, is closely related to Davidson's (ND) first stage of prevention, called "Pre-primary prevention" referred to in his "Theory of four Stages of Prevention". The other three stages of prevention, according to Davidson (ND) are Primary Prevention, Secondary Prevention, and Tertiary Prevention. Davidson, who argues from the medical perspective concerning Pre-primary prevention, states that a person's ability to be in harmony with their environment is, to a large extent, determined by the health condition, physically, socially and spiritually. When one's health is achieved either through deliberately planned programs or by the sustainability of certain values in a given community, people are able to adapt successfully to their environment. In line with Davidson's argument, I think that the adoption of prevention strategies in dealing with marital problems can help intending couple to be mentally, physically, socially and spiritually prepared to be in harmony with the environment of marriage; a harmony that ensures marital stability, a successful family and a peaceful society.

3.2.2 The contextual theory

The second theoretical framework for this study is the contextual theory. From an educational point of view, contextual learning theory is a branch of constructivist theory of teaching and learning propounded by Jerome Bruner in 1960 (Bruner 1960). Bruner argues that as far as instruction is concerned, the instructor should try to encourage students to discover principles by themselves. The instructor should engage in an active dialogue, i.e. Socratic learning (Bruner 1960). Also from a missiological dimension, Powlison writes that “Contextualization is a missiological concept that helpfully describes both the pathogens that have impaired our impact as psychologists and counsellors and also commends a cure for them (Powlison, 2011; Hesselgrave, 2000:200; Bosch, 1991:83). In connection to this study, I view contextual theory as a framework that seeks to make premarital counselling meaningful to the couples in their own socio-economic, cultural, political and religious context. This also means that the researcher seeks to translate the mechanisms for stability in marriage into the cultural context of the Alago people so that intending couples may be able to appreciate it within the ambit of their culture.

It is important to elaborate on what I mean by context in this study. Chris Sugden presents a comprehensive understanding of context as given by Vinay Samuel thus:

Context is the environment of discourse or action. It is a time space where understanding takes place, action is engaged and results emerge. Contextualization implies that we examine the context and awareness of how the context itself shapes the way we think through our beliefs, priorities, affirmations, and the way we construct our action. It is the emergence of new identities in history, to appropriate something new in the historical context. Thus communication requires context not just content (Sugden 2000:3).

Luzbetak maintains that the direct objective of contextualization is “the integration of the text with the context” (1988:83). In the light of Sugden’s argument and Luzbetak’s view, I am of the opinion that the communication of skills for marital stability with intending couples is a task that requires the integration of content and context for a desired action to emerge. This argument is also in line with the thoughts of Apostle Paul who declared that “I became all things to all men in

order that I might win some” (1 Corinthians 9:22). Paul’s statement in the foregoing scripture shows that he expresses belief in the importance of integrating the content of the gospel message with the context in which he found his audience for the purpose of soul winning. It also shows that Paul had an insight into what is today called “cultural anthropology”. Cheesman views cultural anthropology as “The study of man in his social and belief systems and how they affect his life. It is a holistic view of humanity, the study of man as he partakes of the integrated systems of learned patterns of behavior, ideas, and products characteristic of his society” (2003:83).

In my view, ministers who provide premarital counselling need to cultivate the knowledge of cultural anthropology, which is the mother of contextual theory, so that like Apostle Paul, they may be able to communicate with the people where they are found, and that is the goal of the contextual theory in this study. This framework is relevant to this study because it provides a basis upon which the researcher can develop a premarital counselling approach from the worldview of the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* concept of marriage preparation, eroded over the years due to the western culture that enveloped the Christian gospel, for the achievement of this research objectives.

3.2.3 The see-judge-act theory

The See-Judge-Act theoretical framework is also useful in this study. According to John Freud (2011), the expression ‘See, Judge, Act’ was formulated by Joseph Cardijn (1882–1967), *but* was developed as a philosophical theory by Leon Olle-Laprune (1839-1898) of Paris. In his reaction to “the document that was to be promulgated as the Declaration on Religious Freedom,” Cardijn, a priest ministering to poor workers and founder of the “Young Christian Workers” says, Religious Freedom “... is not an end in itself. It is a necessary means for education in freedom in its fullest sense, which leads to interior freedom. This interior freedom, even if it exists in germ as a natural gift in every human creature, requires a long education which can be summarized in three words: see, judge and act” (‘Catholic Social teaching Series’, ND: website).

The interplay of the See, Judge, and Act process works thus: **See** – “seeing, hearing, and experiencing the lived reality of individuals and communities.” **Judge** – “The word ‘judge’ is used here in a positive sense – to analyze the situation and make an informed judgment about it.” This judgment is two-fold, namely, social analysis and theological reflection. **Act** – “Planning and carrying out actions aimed at transforming the social structures that contribute to suffering and injustice”(‘Catholic Social teaching series’ ND: website). Vinformation (ND) describes the See-Judge-Act process as: “A simple method which helps us to stop, stand back from a situation and reflect on it before we jump in and take action. This process helps us to develop critical judgment about situations, events and structures”.

Applying this theoretical framework to contextual Bible reading, West (2014) explains that the process begins with an analysis of reality (See), then it moves to dialogue with prophetic biblical resources (Judge), and then to action (Act) “to ensure that the ‘kin-dom’ of God comes on earth, as it is in heaven”. In relating this theory to this study, the researcher intends to point out the reality of unstable marriages among Christians and particularly among the Alago people (See), examine the interface between the Christian and the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* concept of marriage preparation for synergies (Judge), and develop a befitting approach to premarital counselling that ERCC pastors can adopt to promote stable marriages, especially among the Alago people (Act).

3.3 Research methodologies

3.3.1 Research design

At this juncture, it is important to state the action plan and direction by which the researcher set out to conduct this study. In this study, the researcher uses the interpretive research model to understand the meaning of the responses given by respondents (see Affiku 2015:5; Reynolds 2012:95; Durrheim 2006:38). The blueprint of a given study process can take the following format in a related manner: empirical method, purpose of the research context of the research, theoretical framework, and methods of data collection and data analysis (Kumar 2012:94; Durrheim 2006:37; Reynolds 2012:95; Affiku 2015:5). Suffice it to mention that the purpose of

choosing a design for this study is to enable us to have a glue that can hold this research project together ('Research Methods: Knowledge Based' ND: website).

This study was carried out through the qualitative empirical research approach. According to the Center for Innovation in Research and Teaching (ND), "Qualitative methods are chosen when the goal of the research problem is to examine, understand and describe a phenomenon". Hence this study examines the interface between the Christian and the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* concept of marriage preparation towards marriage stability.

3.3.1.1 Qualitative empirical research methods

Given the fact that the topic of this research is relatively unexplored among the indigenous Alago scholars and indeed the ERCC, the choice of the qualitative research method is appropriate for this study. This research design will grant the researcher direct access into the depth of the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* concept of marriage preparation and methods used by the ERCC in providing premarital counselling to intending couples. The benefit of adopting the qualitative research method for this research will also translate into using the rich information obtained as research findings to recommend a befitting premarital counselling model that the ERCC can adopt in preparing intending couples for marriage among the Alago people.

3.3.1.2 Research site and the procedure to gain access

The study was conducted within ERCC Keana Conference, located in Keana and Obi Local Government Areas of Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Usually, there is a direct connection between the problem necessitating the study and the geographical location of the research. (Affiku 2015:7). This study focuses on marriage preparation among the Alago indigenous people and the ERCC practice of premarital counselling; hence the participants that were chosen are persons who have an idea about Alago traditional ways of marriage preparation and the way ERCC does premarital counselling. Five major Alago clans were chosen for this study, namely, the *Obande* clan of Keana, the *Anawo* clan of Alosi, the *Ayize* clan of Agaza, the *Amohyi* clan of Obi and the *Ajiga* clan of Agwatashi. The settlements of these five Alago clans coincidentally fall within five local churches that are predominantly Alago in ERCC Keana Conference. This makes it easier for the

researcher to obtain fair and balanced views on both the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* concept of marriage preparation as well as the ERCC practice of premarital counselling among the Alago Christians.

It was necessary for the researcher to conduct both the individual in-depth interviews and the focus group discussions in English and Hausa languages respectively so as to enable the participants to fully express their ideas in the clearest possible way. Given the fact that some of the participants could only express themselves clearly in Hausa language, the research questions were translated from English into the Hausa language to facilitate access into the participants' views (see Appendix 12b, 13b, 14b, 15b, 16b, 17b, and 18b).

3.3.2 Research methodology

Research methodology and methods are both needed in carrying out a study of this nature. Under this section, attention will be given to procedures for data collection, methods of data collection and research participants respectively.

3.3.2.1 Methods of data collection

Three methods of data collection were used in this study, namely, library work in which the researcher dwelt on reviewing the existing literature, individual in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The last two methods were applied during the field research.

3.3.2.1.1 Library work

On the Library work, the researcher concentrated on materials that are relevant and related to the theories and methodology of the study (e.g. books, journals, periodicals and unpublished works like pamphlets and previous research projects and dissertations). The research gap identified from the materials reviewed in this study is the absence of literature that ties together the Alago indigenous knowledge systems in premarital counselling for marriage stability. The researcher used the libraries of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), Lutheran Theological Institute (LTI) Scottsville, Pietermaritzburg, and Theological College of Northern Nigeria (TCNN) Bukuru in Nigeria. Also, the Evangelical Reformed Church of Christ (ERCC) Theological

Seminary Fadan Ayu Library in Sanga Local Government, Kaduna State Nigeria, and the Nasarawa State Library, Nigeria were used. The use of the library assisted the researcher in exploring scholarly views from the bodies of existing literature on the Christian concept of marriage and premarital counselling as well as aspects of the Alago premarital counselling principles that the church can adopt or transform in marriage preparation amongst the contemporary Alago people.

3.3.2.1.2 Field research

The researcher has divided the field research into two parts: individual in-depth interviews and focus group discussions using an interview schedule. Individual in-depth interviews were appropriate for this study because they enabled the researcher to explore the interface between premarital counselling in ERCC and the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* concept of marriage preparation from the lived experiences of ERCC Ministers, elderly Alago, wedded Alago Christians and divorcees among the Alago Christians. According to Henning, "... participants can give their experiences best when asked to do so in their own words, in lengthy individual reflective interviews and in observing the context in which some of these experiences have been played out" (2013:37). The focus group discussion enabled the researcher to obtain rich information from the research participants. During the focus group discussions, the participants stimulated each other through their contributions so that vital information which the researcher did not get from the individual interviews were obtained. These pieces of information complemented those gathered from the individual interviews.

In the individual in-depth interviews, the researcher used structured questions. These questions were administered to four different categories of participants: the ERCC Ministers, the Alago elderly persons, the Wedded Alago Christian couples, and divorcees. And for the focus group discussions, the structured questions were administered to three different groups of participants: ERCC Ministers, the Alago elderly persons and divorcees in Alago land.

The time frame for the individual in-depth interview sessions was 30–35 minutes each while each of the focus group discussion lasted for 40–50minutes. With the consent of my research

participants, I recorded the individual in-depth interviews and focus group discussions using a digital voice recorder (see Appendix 3a & 3b). How the individual in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were used as methods for data gathering in this study are discussed below.

3.3.2.1.2.1 Individual in-depth interviews

The researcher conducted personal in-depth interviews with a total sampling of twenty (20) persons. This number provided a fair distribution of research participants across the five ERCC local church councils that are predominantly Alago in population in Keana Conference. Five (5) ERCC ministers, one from each of the five ERCC local church councils that are predominantly Alago in population in Keana Conference, who had spent at least 2–5 years of their ministry among the Alago people within the last ten years, were interviewed. Five (5) elderly persons (three male/two female) between the ages of 50–80 years, one from each of the five major Alago clans and who hail from five ERCC local church councils that are predominantly Alago in population in Keana Conference, were interviewed. The elderly Alago people were important sources of information for this study because they are persons who are more familiar with the indigenous practices of marriage preparation among the Alago people and the ERCC pattern of premarital counseling. Five (5) persons, no less than five years wedded in the ERCC that are Alago Christians, one from each of the five ERCC Local Churches that are predominantly Alago in population, were interviewed. The choice of this group of persons for interviews was also important because they provided the researcher with information on the kind of premarital counseling they received from their pastors. Lastly, five (5) divorcees, one from each of the five ERCC Local Church Councils in Keana Conference, were interviewed. This last group of persons provided the researcher with their understanding of premarital counselling in ERCC, the Alago traditional concept of *Epawoza* in terms of marriage preparation, as well as factors that led to their divorce.

The choice of five (5) persons for each category of participants as explained above gave the researcher a fair representation of interviewees from amongst the five ERCC local churches in Keana Conference that are predominantly Alago in population. The five ERCC ministers that were selected for interview are those presently serving in Keana, Alosi, Agaza, Obi and

Agwatashi. The selection of five wedded Alago Christians and five Alago divorcees came through nomination by their respective pastors who know them well. The five Alago elderly people were selected through nomination by their clan chiefs.

3.3.2.1.2.2 Focus group discussion

Though a focus group may have its weaknesses, particularly because of "... the possibility that the members may not express their honest and personal opinions about the topic at hand (and)... may be hesitant to express their thoughts, especially when their thoughts oppose the views of another participant" ('Advantages and Disadvantages of a Focus Group' ND: website), its strengths makes it a useful tool for data gathering in this study, especially considering the fact that it allows "the participants to agree or disagree with each other so that it provides an insight into how a group thinks about an issue, about the range of opinion and ideas, and the inconsistencies and variation that exists in a particular community in terms of beliefs and their experiences and practices" ('Research tools: Focus group discussion'. 2009: website). Thomas et al (ND) corroborates that "focus group interviews might provide quality controls because participants tend to provide checks and balances on one another that can serve to curb false or extreme views". Kelly argues that a focus group is normally a set of persons who have similar kinds of experience, but who are not of the same social group (2006:304). Commenting on the purpose of the focus group discussion, Hennink says that the objective of a focus group is to recognize a variety of thoughts on a particular research topic towards obtaining deeper knowledge about the topic from the research participants (2007:4). Mouton maintains that focus group discussions give room for people to discuss more constructively about a particular research topic (2001:292). This study is therefore enriched by the synergy of views given by the research participants and were harnessed by the researcher for meaningful recommendation on the topic under review (see Mouton 2001:292). I concur with Litoselliti's argument that a "larger group is difficult to manage, moderate, and analyze successfully" and recommend a smaller group which to her is "more appropriate if the aim is to explore complex, controversial, emotional topics or to encourage detailed accounts" (2003:3). Litoselliti further states that "small groups offer more opportunity for people to talk and are more practical to set up and manage, as they can easily take place in less formal settings, such as homes and restaurants" (2003:3; Affiku

2015: 11). Hence for the purpose of effective interactions, the focus group discussion in this study involved five participants for each group and lasted between 40–50 minutes.

I have divided the focus group discussion into three categories:

The ERCC ministers/church elders' focus group participants were personally contacted by the researcher after which an appointed time and venue were agreed upon.

With the divorcees focus group, the researcher contacted their leaders who in turn mobilized them and suggested the names of persons who were thought to be 'information-rich' and who were thought to have the potential of providing the information needed (see Kumar 2012:192; Kelly 2006:304; Affiku 2015:13). The divorcees were from the five ERCC local churches that were predominantly Alago in population

Access to the Alago indigenous elders' focus group was obtained through contact with their clan chiefs who later mobilized them for an appointment with the researcher.

The researcher met on two occasions with each group because the first meeting was basically an introductory session where the participants were told what they were expected to do, while the second meeting was the actual discussion. The participation of the ERCC ministers/church elders in a focus group discussion was to enable the researcher to obtain more comprehensive information on the kinds of premarital counselling ERCC provides among the Alago people. As ministers and church elders, they have a constitutional obligation to provide pastoral counseling to church members (see ERCC Constitution 2014:41-46; ERCC Service Handbook ND:56-60). The elderly Alago people group was an important source of information for this study because they are persons who are more familiar with the indigenous practices of marriage preparation among the Alago people and the ERCC practice of premarital counselling. The divorcee group provided the researcher with their understanding of premarital counseling in ERCC, the Alago traditional concept of *Epawoza* in terms of marriage preparation, as well as factors that led to their divorce. During the actual discussion, I asked the participants to sit in a circle to facilitate

effective eye-contact, easy communication, and interactive participation (see Affiku 2015:13&Litosseliti 2003:48).

3.3.2.2 Procedures for data collection

This section deals with the various ways through which materials were collected for this research project. Bala (ND) argues that there are varieties of approaches in terms of data collection which usually depends on “whether it is primary or secondary data or whether it is quantitative or qualitative data”. This study uses qualitative research; hence it is more concerned with primary data obtained from participants identified earlier in this chapter who provided the information needed to address my research questions.

Out of the thirty-five persons who participated in the individual in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, the researcher established contact with twenty-six of them (74.28%) through personal visits. Seven (20%) of the participants were approached through phone calls and two (5.71%) were reached through emails to ask for their permission to be interviewed on the subject of this study and to make appointments with them about the time and venue of the meeting where necessary. However, the actual interviews with all the research participants were carried out through direct personal interview. The advantage of using phone calls and emails in contacting some of the research participants was that it saved the researcher time and financial resources, but the disadvantage was that given the fact that the Alago people value courtesy a great deal, they would feel more honored to be approached about the need to grant the researcher access to conduct the interviews through personal visit than the use of phone call and email. Despite this disadvantage, the researcher’s use of phone call and email became necessary because it was difficult at some points for the researcher to reach some of the participants personally due to proximity. This was more so as there were not enough financial resources at the researcher’s disposal at the time of touring the villages for the purpose of the individual interviews and the focus group discussions.

I did not encounter difficulties in getting permission for the interviews because the exercise was carried out amongst persons who regarded me as one of their own, especially as they knew I am

an Alago and also a clergy of the ERCC. Another factor that made my acceptance easy by the research participants was that I had a letter of permission from the gatekeepers which was issued to me by the Church authority. The letter contained appropriate information concerning my coming and the purpose thereof (see Appendix 5b).

I did not give the interview questions to the research participants prior to the interviews, to avoid having them engage in consulting each other and thereby compromising their responses (see Affiku 2015:8). At some points, three of the participants could not present their views in clear terms, hence “probing and engaging approaches were used to elicit more information from them” (see Affiku 2015:8; Flick 2009). The researcher conducted the field research within the period of April 2016 and September 2016. This time frame enabled the researcher to engage in a thorough and rigorous investigation with the participants during the field research.

3.3.2.3 Research participants

There are four categories of research participants in this study: the ERCC ministers, the elderly Alago persons, the wedded Alago Christians and the divorcees. All the research participants were presented with an informed consent letter and form which they signed (see Appendices 2a & 2b). It is also instructive to note that the research participants in both the focus group discussions and the individual interviews were of different educational levels and from various age brackets, which is why their responses to the research questions also differ.

Given the fact that this study focuses on the interface between the Christian and the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* concept of marriage preparation, I engaged the following categories of persons in the individual interviews and focus group discussions to obtain a comprehensive data.

3.3.2.3.1 ERCC ministers

Five ERCC ministers who had spent at least 2–5 years of their ministry among the Alago people (within the last ten years) were interviewed. The five ministers selected for the interview were those who are presently serving among the Alago dominated congregations of the ERCC. In terms of their working experience, they ministered for at least five to ten years. In regard to their

educational background, one had a Bachelor's Degree in theology while the other four had a Diploma in theology. Their ages range between 45 and 70 years. Worthy of mention here is the fact that amongst the ERCC ministers, there was no female representation; this was because the ERCC does not ordain women as ministers.¹² However, in terms of leadership and decision making in the church, women are allowed to participate fully from the highest to the lowest hierarchy of the church. The researcher conducted a focus group discussion with five ERCC ministers and church elders. Four were male and one was a female. Their ages fall between 45 and 75 and they vary in educational qualifications.

3.3.2.3.2 Alago elderly persons (male/female)

Five elderly people (three male, two female) were interviewed. The educational qualifications of the five elderly people vary. They were persons between 50 years and above. This category of research participants were chosen from the five Alago clans; they gave their views concerning the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* concept of marriage preparation before and after the advent of Christianity in Alago land. In terms of educational qualification, one of these Alago elderly persons is a professor, two had a Diploma and two attended adult school. The researcher also conducted a focus group discussion with a total of five Alago indigenous elders. These elders were different from those interviewed. Their ages fall between 50 to 80 years, and they had acquired adult education. Three of them were female and two were male.

3.3.2.3.3 Wedded Alago Christian couples

The researcher interviewed five Alago Christians (three male and two female) who were wedded in the church no less than five years previously. The choice of this group of persons for interviews was crucial to this study because they provided the researcher with information on the kind of premarital counseling they received from their pastors before their wedding. In terms of their educational qualification, two had a National Certificate in Education (NCE), one had a Community Health Extension Worker (CHEW) Certificate, and one had a Junior Community Health Extension Worker (JCHEW). The other one had a Senior School Certificate Examination

¹²Extensive debate is currently going on in the ERCC as to whether or not women should be ordained as Reverends. Kujubon captions this debate thus: "Women Ordination in ERCC: To be or not to be" (2016:1-6).

(SSCE). They were persons within the ages of 30 and 45 years. This age bracket is important for this group because the responses obtained from wedded Alago Christian couples within this age range reflected the situation of things within the last ten years.

3.3.2.3.4 The divorcees

A total of five divorcees, two male and three female of the Alago extraction, who were members of ERCC one each from the five ERCC Local Church Councils in Keana Conference, were interviewed. They gave the researcher their understanding of premarital counseling in ERCC, the Alago traditional concept of *Epawoza* in terms of marriage preparation, as well as factors that led to their divorce. Their ages fall within 35 and 55 years. One of these persons had a National Certificate in Education (NCE), one had a Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) two had a Primary School Leaving Certificate, and one had adult education. The ages and educational qualification of the divorcees were not requirements for participation in the interview; rather they were a mere coincidence. The divorcee focus group discussion was conducted with a total of five persons whose ages range from 35 to 55 and who had varying academic background. They were also different from those interviewed. Three of them were female and two were male.

3.3.3 Data analysis: procedures and methods

3.3.3.1 Procedure for data analysis

In the preceding section, I explained the ways data was collected for this study. In this segment, I shall be concerned with the modalities by which data was analyzed. Since the researcher used a digital voice recorder to collect qualitative data for this study, the first attempt towards analyzing the data was to upload the interviews from the digital voice recorder to the computer and label each of them. Having done this, the researcher then listened to the conversations repeatedly and transcribed them verbatim into text (2007:57). The tapes were replayed again and again to enable the researcher to gain deeper understanding of the minds of the respondents (see Reynolds 2012:105; Affiku 2015:16). The researcher thought through the data gathered from the field, alongside related views from other literature (see Swinton and Mowat 2007:57; Affiku 2015: 16).

In connection to the individual in-depth interviews, I have used the following as codes for the names of the groups and categories of participants: ERCC ministers, Elderly Alago indigenous persons, Wedded Alago Christians and divorcees. As per focus group discussions, the respective groups were coded thus: the ERCC ministers/church elders group, the Alago indigenous elders group and the divorcee group.

3.3.3.2 Methods of data analysis

Primarily, the method used by the researcher in analyzing the qualitative data obtained for this study is thematic analysis. This applies to both the in-depth interviews and the focus group discussions. The researcher also employed theological analysis, to connect the data with available literature which address a particular research question on premarital counselling. Having read the transcribed document carefully, I used manual coding with the view to generate a logical and understandable analysis for readers who might not be familiar with the social context of the research participants (Reynolds 2012:106). In view of the fact that the topic of this study is relatively unexplored in the ERCC and among the Alago people, the use of inductive coding of data obtained was considered most appropriate (see Joffe and Yardley 2004:58). I embarked on a close reading of the transcribed text. I then tried to pinpoint sections in the text that have meaningful elements and tagged them for a new grouping to which the text unit is allocated (Thomas 2006). Though I used the inductive coding in analyzing the data, deductive coding cannot be said to be entirely absent since my knowledge and preconceptions have also influenced the identification of themes (see Joffe and Yardley 2004:58-59). The data was coded into the following themes: the respondents' personal understanding of the etymology and the meaning of the word *Epawoza* in terms of marriage preparation among the indigenous Alago people; changes in the Alago traditional ways of marriage preparation; the values of marriage preparation that needed to be retained; respondents' personal understanding of the meaning of premarital counselling; the ERCC pattern of premarital counselling; the Alago pattern of marriage preparation as noticed by the ERCC pastors; and finally the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* concept of marriage preparation that needed to be adopted or transformed by the ERCC.

3.3.4 Methodological limitations

The researcher's reputation as a member of the Alago ethnic group and also as clergy from the ERCC facilitated an easy link and rapport with the research participants who regarded him as one of their own and as an insider (see Affiku 2015:18). The advantage of an insider position is that it makes it easier for the researcher to gain access to communities where the research participants are located without much resistance since the researcher is no longer viewed as a stranger. This in turn promotes effective data collection, presentation and interpretation (see Affiku 2015:18). The advantage of insider research is, however, a disadvantage for one who is an outsider because such a person may need to first get himself acquainted with the culture of the people before making any meaningful progress with his research (see Affiku 2015:18; Flick 2002:58). The disadvantage of insider researcher is that there is the tendency to be biased by being too close to the research participants, as opposed to looking at research problems from an unbiased perspective (Affiku 2015:18; Reynolds 2012:106; Dahlberg and McCaig 2010:1-12).

To overcome this limitation, I took time to explain my role as a researcher to the participants in order to maintain a safe distance between us and to guard against being misconstrued as an agent of the church. I sought to underline my role as a researcher who seeks to obtain information through critical interaction with them so as to add value to knowledge (see Affiku 2015:18; Reynolds 2012:106; Dahlberg and McCaig 2010: 6; Chavez 2008:485).

3.3.5 Confidentiality and ethical considerations

According to the Panel on Research Ethics, "There is widespread agreement about the interests of participants in protection of privacy, and the corresponding duties of researchers to treat personal information in a confidential manner" ('Panel on Research Ethics'2015). Considering the ethical issues involved in this study, the researcher made appointments with the participants for both the individual in-depth interviews and the focus group discussion. The participants were asked to read and sign an informed consent letter which was provided for them before the commencement of the interviews (see Affiku 2015:19). Participation was voluntary. Also, participants were assured that they would not be identifiable as the researcher would maintain their anonymity through the use of pseudonyms. In view of this, I was able to ensure that enough

provisions were put in place to guarantee the privacy of participants and as well treat the data obtained in a confidential manner (2015:19). I used the following as the code names for the individual in-depth interviews: the ERCC ministers, elderly Alago persons, Wedded Alago Christians, and Divorcees. And for the focus group discussions, participants were coded according to the names of their respective groups as follows: the ERCC ministers/church elders' group, Indigenous Alago Elders' group and the Divorcees' group (see Appendices 1a & b and 2a & b).

3.4 The meaning of Alago indigenous *Epawoza* concept of marriage preparation and marriage itself

Under this segment, the writer attempts to discuss the understanding of the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* concept in relation to marriage and the moncept of marriage itself from the world view of Alago people.

3.4.1 The meaning of *Epawoza* in terms of marriage preparation among the Alago people

The researcher obtained views from the respondents as to what *Epawoza* means in terms of marriage. The table below presents respondent's perceptions of the meaning of *Epawoza*.

Table 3.4.1 Respondent's understanding of the meaning of *Epawoza* in relation to marriage

Meaning of <i>Epawoza</i>	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Stability in marriage is better than divorce	13	52%
Togetherness in marriage is beneficial	8	32%%
There is fulfillment when husband and wife live together as one	2	8%
Other	2	8%
Total	25	100%

From the table above, thirteen (13) respondents, representing 52% of the people interviewed, understood *Epawoza* in the context of marriage as 'stability in marriage is better than divorce'.

Eight respondents, representing 32% of the people interviewed, indicated that they understood *Epawoza* to mean ‘togetherness in marriage is beneficial’. Two (2) persons, representing 8% of the respondents, gave their understanding of *Epawoza* as ‘there is fulfillment when husband and wife live together as one’. Also, two (2) respondents, representing 8% of the interviewees, gave other views regarding the meaning of the concept of *Epawoza* in terms of marriage. The researcher argues that *Epawoza* is a compound word – *epa* (two) *oza* (a thing of value), which means that it is of more value for two partners living together than for them living apart or in isolation from each other. By this interpretation, it shows that the views of 13 respondents (52%) indicated the understanding of the Alago people that *Epawoza* in terms of marriage preparation involves all the communal efforts channeled towards achieving marriage stability so that once marriage is contracted, it does not end up in divorce. The Alago people have a popular traditional *Epawoza* song which they usually sing during marriage preparations and on wedding days to inspire marriage stability and communality amongst them. The song goes:

Epawoza ... epawoza loh ... (Two are better than one, indeed two are better than one)

Epawoza no gye lo? (Two are better than one, don’t you know?)

Epawoza loh (Indeed two are better than one)

Asepa go kpa aya shinyo neshi a wole, epawoza loh (When two people go to the stream they would fetch clean water and bring it home, indeed two are better than one).

Oshe oye kponu ya gwebe lole, epawoza loh (A single broom cannot sweep the floor, indeed two are better than one)

Abore wo fona, aboshe na byo owatu, epawoza loh (The right hand fetches food while the left hand holds the bowl, indeed two are better than one).¹³

One of the elderly Alago men interviewed elaborates that “*Epawoza* as a concept is advocating for love and unity between two people. It implies being your brother’s keeper. There is strength in being two rather than just being isolated as an individual. You need the comfort and protection of a fellow brother to be able to stand on your own. You alone don’t have the capacity to be” (Amokpa 3rd/7/2016: interview).

¹³ This song was composed by the Late Isaac Edoh of Ayize clan in Agaza in Obi L.G.A of Nasarawa State about 2003.

3.4.2 Alago marriage

The understanding of marriage from the perspective of the Alago people is similar with the way other Africans perceive it, as earlier discussed in chapter two. However the Alago as an ethnic group has their distinctive features which differentiate them from other African tribes. This segment seeks to present marriage within the Alago set up. This will include name of marriage, age for marriage, marriage engagement, bridal wealth, wedding and wedding reception.

3.4.2.1 Name of marriage

There seems to be no singular word for marriage among the Alago people. It all depends on whether the person referring to marriage is a male or a female. The men folk call marriage *Onyagbogbo* (acquiring a wife) while Alago women call it *Obagbogbo* (acquiring a husband) respectively. Each of these terms is a compound word: *Onya* (wife), *Oba* (husband) and *gbogbo* (the quality of possessing something) is a suffix attached to either *Onya* or *Oba*. Generally, *Onya-gbogbo* and *Oba-gbogbo* further implies that marriage among the Alago people is an act which enables both the husband and the wife to own each other exclusively.

3.4.2.2 Age for marriage

In the Alago traditional arrangement there was no specific age when both male and female were due to be married. However, from oral tradition, a male could be qualified for marriage when he was capable of holding a big hoe and could *re'ho*, meaning compete with his age grade in tilling a sizable piece of land actively. One's ability to *re'ho* qualified him as a hardworking man who could feed and protect his wife very well. As for the female, she could be engaged to a man at a tender age by the parent of a boy or a man himself. However, she must have attained menstruation age before she was considered ready for courtship.

3.4.2.3 Marriage engagement

From oral tradition, there was toasting of the girl, either done directly by the boy or indirectly through one of his friends. In any case, the consent of the girl was required before the courtship

would start properly. From time to time the man would visit the woman at her family house, mostly at night, and would send someone to call the girl for him or flash his torch light over the roof of the girl's house to signal his arrival. On sighting the flash of a torch light, the mother of the girl, who pretended as though she did not know what that sign meant would ask, "*anoho ni?*"("who is that?"). As soon as the girl heard this she would hasten to finish whatever task she was carrying out, to meet with her lover outside the family gate.

In some cases, marriage could be arranged for the adult children by the parents. In this situation, the parent would take into consideration such characteristics as morality, beauty and smartness of the girl (Omake 2014:19). Osana clarifies that it was the responsibility of the Alago parent to choose a marriage partner for their son. This was necessary because of the assumption that young men and women do not know much about the family background of their kinsmen nor the realities of life (Osana 27th/4/2016: interview). The elderly Alago man further explained that Alago parents would not allow their son or daughter to be married off to a person who has a history of witchcraft, laziness and theft. These three vices are strongly forbidden among the Alago communities (Osana 27th/4/2016: interview). Omake argues that a man could marry as many wives as possible in order to have many children who would work on his farm. A widow could marry one of the brothers of her deceased husband. However, this is no longer common due to modern civilization and the influence of Christianity (2014:19). In most Alago communities today parents do not choose wives for their sons; rather, once a boy identifies a girl whom he loves, he personally makes his intention known to her. Oyigbenu elaborates further how the Alago boys would protect one another's interests once a girl was identified as the wife of a kinsman: "... as a tradition, once a boy identified a girl with intent for marriage, no other boy or man accosted her any more. She was considered the wife of a kinsman; who must therefore not be violated. This is an unwritten law that is still respected in the entire community" (2005:62).

3.4.2.4 Bridal wealth/ none monetary rite of marriage

From oral tradition, bridal wealth was a non-monetary rite of marriage that was performed by the father of the boy. The boy was therefore expected to be an obedient child towards his parents and very hard working at the farm if he was to win his father's benevolence. There was an *okikpo* (an aged woman who interfaced between the intended husband and his in-laws). The *okikpo* would be sent with a token of gifts to the parents of the girl, to *togbogba koh Onyape*, meaning to payhomage over a proposed bride. In the course of time, the *okikpo* would be sent with *Otena* (a traditional costume to the proposed bride). After a space of time, the *Okipo* would take *Ote* (a traditional mat) made of a native plant called *Oshe kih kwekwele* to the boy's in-laws. The *ote* was beautifully designed with a pocket in which the bride to be could save her coins. The lady was expected to treat these items with special care so that she could take them to her matrimonial home when she finally gets married. Osarewa explains that the young man also took bundles of guinea corn to the girl's parents yearly, so they may feed his wife-to-be. This gesture showed that he was nurturing the love between the two families; it also meant that the lady had started feeding from the sweat of her husband-to-be (Osarewa1th/5/2016). Osana elaborates that "Every year the man would take four heavy bundles of corn to his fiancée's parents and this would continue for as long as the courtship lasted. Courtship in those days lasted for between 4 – 5 years, in some cases it lasted for up to 7 years, depending on whether or not the woman was mature for marriage"(Osana 27th/4/2016: interview).To reciprocate the love demonstrated by the young man, the parents of the lady might from time to time send her to go and sleep with her husband to be in the same mat, but under a strong warning that they must not have any carnal knowledge of each other until they were officially married, as violating this instruction would amount to shame on them and the members of their entire family. This tradition is called *Osharische*(Osana 27th/4/2016: interview).The young man would have to hold his pendulum tightly with *obente* (traditional pant) so as to be able to exercise control over his sexual urge whenever the girl visited him to pass a night with him. The essence of this was to accord the boy and the girl an opportunity to prove that they have the capacity to exercise self-control(Osana 27th/4/2016: interview).Once the lady was able to return home undefiled, her parents would now have the confidence to release her from time to time to visit her fiancé. But if the young man was reported to have attempted to have sex with the girl, he would be regarded by the community as

a wicked person who must be avoided and the engagement would be terminated(Osana 27th/4/2016: interview).

One of the respondents states that as part of the bridal requirements, sons-in-law were obligated to till farms both for the father-in-law and mother-in-law as tribute for raising up their daughters. Such farming engagements was generally called *Eho kih 'Shuru* (farming for the in-laws). The first farming phase was called *Eho koh Gbeyi* (farming for the father-in-law). The second phase of the farming was called *Eho kih efa* (farming for the mother-in-law). Usually during the farming for both the father-in-law and the mother-in-law, the son-in-law was required to go to the farm with a minimum of twelve capable young men. The third phase was the *Eho kah gwa* (farming that involved all men within the street who are capable of farming). This was done in honor of the father-in-law. Each of these farming phases was done three times before marriage. In the event that marriage was consummated when a son-in-law was yet to carry out any of the farming activities, an arrangement was made between the man and his in-laws through the *okikpo* as to when the debt would be paid. If the son-in-law breached the agreement, his wife might not conceive, as the gods of the land who were invisible witnesses when the agreement was reached might be punishing the husband for his failure to keep to the agreement. However, a soothsayer was usually consulted if conception was considered to have delayed after the marriage. Should the soothsayer attribute the delay in conception to a breach in the agreement, the son-in-law would be asked to *ki inyiagye* (perform libation) by pouring a reasonable quantity of *izeh* (local bear) on the ground in order to appease the *eka* (gods) and the *aleku* (ancestors). After these rituals were done, the son-in-law was either forgiven by his in-laws or would have to fulfill the farming requirements and the wife may now conceive (Esekweyi 26th/5/2016: Focus group). Bridal wealth among the indigenous Alago people was therefore not given in cash, but in kind and by direct labor.

3.4.2.5 The wedding/giving and receiving of the bride

From oral tradition, the rite of giving and receiving the bride among the indigenous Alago people was done after meeting every traditional requirement for marriage. Amirikpa explains that the

intending husband would send his *okikpo* to go and request for the formal release of his wife from her parents. At this point, the mother's consent was very crucial because she was expected to provide her daughter with cooking utensils and other domestic materials (2015:2). If the mother was not ready, she would request for an extension of time to enable her to make the necessary provisions for her daughter's marriage. Once the bride's mother was ready she and the *okikpo* would fix a date in consultation with the husband-to-be and his family, subsequently relations of both the bride and the groom would be notified about the wedding day through the distribution of cola nuts (2015:2). On the wedding day, relations and friends of the bride would gather in her family compound; the same thing happened at the groom's family compound. The *okikpo* and other women from the family of the husband-to-be would march to the bride's family compound with songs of joy to bring the *Onyape* (new wife or bride) to her matrimonial home (2015:2). Upon their arrival at the residence of the bride's parents, the *okikpo* would formally announce the purpose of their visit. The father of the bride would then welcome the team of in-laws to his compound, after which he would advise his daughter to be obedient to her husband, in-laws and other elders in her husband's family (2015:2). The father of the bride would also *tinarigu do Owuso kpo aleku* (pray to God and the ancestors) for peace in her new home and blessing of the womb. The mother would also wish her daughter well using similar words (2015:2). According to one of the respondents, the rite by which the bride was given and received was performed by *Osealeku* (the family priest). The *Osealeku* was an aged man who was usually a son to a daughter in the family who came to stay in his maternal family. Each Alago family household had its own *eka* (deity) before whom important rites like circumcision and marriage were performed. On the wedding day, the groom's family would take some gifts, including *izeh* (local beer), through the *okikpo* to the parents of the bride in appreciation for the anticipated release of *onyape* (the bride). The priest or custodian of the family shrine would pour *izeh* on the ground as libation to seek the blessings of *eka* and *aleku* (the family deity and ancestors) upon the couple. After making some incantations, the priest would take hold of the bride's hand and present her to the *okikpo* who would hold her in the presence of witnesses from both families (Osarewa 11th/5/2016: interview).

A respondent narrated that while the handover of the bride was being done, she would begin to weep because she would be missing her parents and siblings. The *okikpo* and her team would *togah* (a traditional whistle done by holding one's nose and screaming simultaneously), signifying that they were excited for having a new wife. On their way to the groom's house, the women would sing songs of joy till they arrive. Upon their arrival at the doorstep of the bride's matrimonial room, a brother of the bride who was believed to be undefiled would *ti inarigu koh funodah* (this refers to prayer offered at the doorstep of the matrimonial room for protection and blessing). When that was done, the bride enters her room (Ozegya 26th/5/2016: focus group). According to a respondent, from the wedding day the couple assumed new titles, as people would stop calling them by their name. As a show of honor, the bride was called *onyape* (new wife) while the groom was called *obuonyape* (husband of the new wife) till another wedding day in the community when the title would be transferred to the newest couple. The respondent further revealed that after the man and the woman were joined together as husband and wife, tradition required that the wife would return to her father's house and stay there for a couple of years. The wife would cook for her husband from her father's house and take the food to him every evening so she could spend the night with him. By so doing, she would get pregnant and bear children for her husband. The woman could bear up to three children for her husband while in her father's house before she finally moves to her husband's house permanently. The day she would go to stay with her husband permanently was also marked with celebration. "This tradition was important to us because we believed that the newly married woman was too inexperienced to take care of her home, hence she needed to stay with her mother some more after the wedding to be groomed properly to be able to cope with her new status as a wife" (Osana 27th/4/2016: interview). Today, though a newly married woman in Alago community is free to visit her parents after her wedding and even spend some time with them, she is not expected to visit her parents too soon. And when she visits them, she does not go there to stay for long or to learn the rudiments of a housewife from her mother, as it was the case in the past. Nowadays, it is a thing of shame for any newly married Alago woman to be found staying over in her father's house because her action would be subject to so many negative interpretations, such as, her husband cannot feed her or because she has some unresolved issues in her matrimonial home.

3.4.2.6 Virginitv testing

The next rite that follows after the giving and receiving of the bride was the *Okwinu* (virginitv testing). A respondent says that having handed the bride over to her husband, the two families and their well-wishers would march to the chief's palace for the ritual of *Kwinu*, which was done in broad day light. A team of inspectors would take the bride into a room and have her stretch out on a white garment specially provided for the virginitv test. One of the men would insert his finger into the lady's vulva (Egwa 26th/5/2016: focus group). Another respondent corroborates that the finger was inserted two to three times into the bride's vulva. If the white garment was stained with blood it would be brought out and shown to the crowd. On seeing this, the parent of the lady will *toga* (a shout of joy) and they will be dancing exclaiming *arihin vahnoh* (my palm nut produces oil). By this public display of the blood stained garment, the bride's family would feel very proud because it proved that their daughter was well disciplined, and the mother of the bride would exclaim, "*Apyo oyi hing oleh!*" meaning "my daughter was found at home!" (Atoshi 26th/5/2016: focus group). The respondent further revealed that upon finding out that the bride was a virgin, the groom's parents may decide to give extra money to her parents in addition to the official bride wealth already given, as a sign of deep appreciation. One of the elderly Alago men interviewed explained that if the white garment meant for the virginitv testing was not stained with blood, the virginitv inspector would exclaim "*owo onya loh!*", meaning, "she is not an ideal wife!" This implies that the bride had already been defiled by a man before her wedding day. As soon as that was made known to the public, her parents would burst into tears because their daughter would be regarded as an 'empty container'. Upon the discovery that the bride was not a virgin, one of the virginitv inspectors would ask the bride to mention the name of the man that had defiled her. If she refused to name the man, one of her fingers would be pressed with an iron to compel her to produce the man in question. If she mentioned the name of the man that defiled her, the team of virginitv inspectors would now say to the groom: "*Ase ni kwinu koh'onya ho ni yoma*", meaning "this is the man that broke your wife's virginitv". As soon as the bride named the man that had defiled her, members of the bride's family would march to the defiler's family compound and pour all manners of insults on him and his entire family. In shame, the parents of the defiler would say "*Oyi byun ga!*" which literally means "My child took

me there!” This was an expression of sorrow and shame over the despicable act of their son (Atoshi 26th/5/2016: focus group). From oral tradition, it was important for the Alago man to know the virginity status of his wife and to identify any man who had carnal knowledge of his wife because with that awareness, the two of them could avoid seeing each other face-to-face should any of the two lay sick or was bitten by a snake, otherwise the sick person could end up dead as a result of the wrath of the gods of the land. From the narrative of the respondents, it appears that the Alago traditional rite of *kwinu* (virginity testing) does not take into account other possible factors that could have caused the bride not to shed blood during the virginity testing such as women who might have broken their virginity during some hard labor or women who were raped. In my view, such are exceptions that the indigenous Alago needed to have taken into considerations to guard against unjustifiable generalization.

3.4.2.7 Wedding reception

As mentioned earlier in this work, the traditional Alago people were good at hospitality, and so marriage was considered an opportunity for them to demonstrate their hospitable spirit towards extended family members and other well-wishers who were present. According to Amirikpa, the wedding reception was held on the day of the arrival of the bride into her matrimonial home. The groom’s family would prepare the usual local dish called *Ona kih gishapa kpo bobo kah lakpa* (rice pap with beans soup), the soup was usually mixed with *ayibo* (dried fish) (2015:3). Amirikpa further argues that they would also provide local drinks called *izeh* in large quantities, to entertain invited guests as they celebrated with the two families over the latest marriage in the community (2015:3). Special portions of the food and drink were sent to *Ofono koh ogya* (the community shrine, for the elders), *Ose kah ’gwa* (the street head), *Ole kih ’shiru* (in-law’s house) and other relations of both the husband and the wife as an honorarium for their participation in preparing the couple for marriage (2015:3). In the evening of the same day, traditional singers and drummers who were usually invited would entertain the community through singing and dancing. Donations called *hei* were made to the new couple by relations, friends, and well-wishers to support them as they start a new *ole* (home) (2015:3).

3.4.3 The Alago indigenous *Epawoza* model of marriage preparation

Under this segment, the researcher presents the stages inherent in the Alago model of marriage preparation, which is embedded in their indigenous *Epawoza* concept. Generally speaking, the understanding of the *Epawoza* concept governs the entire process of the Alago marriage preparation. One of the respondents explained that there are other key events during which the Alago people exhibit *Epawoza* consciousness apart from marriage, which include birth, circumcision, and death. Therefore, marriage preparation among the Alago people is largely a communal affair which is aimed at marriage stability as opposed to divorce. To achieve this, the Alago have four major stages through which young people are prepared for marriage. These include communal child upbringing, investigation into family history, communal contribution towards bride wealth/dowry, and advice/warning to the intending couple.

3.4.3.1 *Oyi byobi* Communal participation in child upbringing

Among the Alago people, marriage preparations usually begin from childhood. Child upbringing is not an individual affair but a community responsibility. Commenting on the communal culture of the Alago people in raising children which dates back to the pre-colonial era, Omaku points out that “Togetherness and group work was very essential ... This community spirit is also shown in the belief that a child belongs to everyone” (2014:64). A respondent argues that the Alago have this saying, “*Oyi gyelo yi fu, o wa ko ase oye, a gyelo yo oyi ma wa, owa ko asehnye*”, meaning, “A child belongs to one person while they are in the womb, but as soon as the child is born they belong to everyone in the community”. The respondent further clarifies that the training of a child is a community affair. For example, if an elder sees a young man sitting idle at the village square while people are busy working on the farms, he would interrogate, “what is wrong with you that you are sitting here?” If the young man says “I am sick”, the elder would tell him to go and stay indoors until those who went to farm return home. But if the young man fails to give any satisfactory reason for staying at home during working hours, the elder would give him a thorough whipping, even if both of them are not from the same family. The Alago believe that if a child is good, the entire community is blessed, but if a child is bad, the

entire community suffers (Osana 27th/4/2016: interview). Another respondent corroborates that every responsible elder in the community keeps watch over the young boys and the young ladies to make sure that they are not defiled before they get married and to avoid having illegitimate children in the community (Amokpa 3rd/7/2016: interview). The idea of illegitimate children in the community refers to children who were born out of wedlock; such children hardly enjoyed inheritance rights within the family they were brought up in.

From oral tradition, an Alago child, whether male or female, was brought up in the hope that one day they would become good husbands and wives. A child was not raised to be single but to marry and replicate his kind through giving birth to other children; remaining single was believed to be an abnormal phenomenon. Before the advent of modernity, Christianity and Islam, the girl child was earmarked as the wife of so-and-so person at birth. A respondent explains that within the indigenous Alago community, fathers used to choose marriage partners for their male children at the birth of a baby girl. A father would get a piece of coin that has a hole in the center, tie a rope to it, and then fasten it around one of the wrists of the baby girl as a sign that she was booked to marry his son. As the girl grew up, people in the community would be teasing her by calling her the wife of this person or that person. With this consciousness in their minds, each time the boy and the girl met together, they would feel shy with a high sense of respect towards each other. When the girl matured as a woman, her parents would warn her never to allow any man to touch her body, nor to talk of romancing her. She would also be told never to stand with a man alone whenever it was dark (Omame 3rd/7/2017: interview).

Oral tradition has it that the girl child was taught to be obedient to her elders so that when she would finally get married, it would no longer be difficult for her to obey her husband who in most cases was older than the wife. She was taught never to raise her voice over and above that of a man nor have multiple boyfriends at a time, except the one. The girl was taught never to accept money or any gift from any man other than her betrothed. A respondent argued that Alago mothers usually teach their daughters to maintain chastity before marriage, because if the girl allows any man to have sexual intercourse with her just because he is dating her, she would be

giving the man an impression that other men were equally having sex with her freely; hence the man would quit the relationship and the girl would be the one cheated (Amokpa 3rd/7/2016: interview). To guard against such loose morals, an unmarried young woman was not allowed to be found outside her father's house after sunset. Even when she went to sell at the village square, she was expected to return home by sunset to help her mother prepare supper for the family. One of the respondents said that "The Alago tradition glorifies chastity which is represented in practice during their festivals. You see the maids dressing in white apparel which is a demonstration of purity, an undefiled personality in terms of the physical body and the mind" (Atoshi 26th/5/2016: Focus group). Another respondent affirms that mothers also teach their grown up daughters how to cook well by assigning them cooking responsibilities, while the mothers act as supervisors in the kitchen and also do the sharing of the food to members of the household (Amokpa 3rd/7/2016: interview).

From the researcher's experience, fathers train their sons to be very hard working on farms and to be skillful hunters so that when they get married, they may be able to provide food for their families as well as meat for the soup on regular basis. One of the respondents reveals that the boys were trained to be great wrestlers; this training was given to the boy child as part of preparations toward becoming a responsible husband in the future. He further explained how the boys participated in the wrestling engagement and its relevance to marriage. According to the respondent, the boys usually engaged their opponents from neighboring streets in a wrestling contest, which they often preferred to hold during the early hours of the night and particularly when it was moonlight. If a young man had a girlfriend, she would give him one of her wrappers which he would tie around his waist to fight, thus giving him a lot of encouragement. While the drums were beaten, the contestants would engage their opponent in the exercise. If one was able to defeat four of his opponents at a stretch, he would be regarded as a hero in the community and his girlfriend would be very proud of him. This exercise was intended to groom the young men to be able to protect their wives against any attack when they eventually got married (Egwa 26th/5/2016: focus group).

Circumcision was one of the preparations for marriage for the boys in Alago communities. Like most African tribes, the Alago view circumcision as a rite of passage to manhood. Circumcision was perceived among some Africans as “an integral part of a rite-of-passage to manhood, although originally it may have been a test of bravery and endurance. ‘Circumcision is also associated with factors such as masculinity, social cohesion with boys of the same age who become circumcised at the same time, self-identity and spirituality’” (‘Male circumcision: Context, criteria and culture (Part 1)’ 2007). From oral tradition, boys of about the same age in Alago land were separated from the normal society, and brought to stay in the bush far away from home for a short period of time. Though the purpose of their isolation was for circumcision, they would be told that they were going to see their ancestors who have died some years past. They usually carried along with them mats, gourds of palm wine, fowls (for meat), and cutlery, among other necessary items needed to perform the rite. While in the bush, the boys would all be circumcised on the same day without the use of any analgesics or pain killers, hence the process was usually very painful. The boys would be told that upon their return home, they must never tell anyone that they were circumcised. And should their mothers ask them about the condition in which they saw their ancestors, they must report that they saw the ancestors in such a distraught situation that they wept in their sympathy, so much so that they could not walk straight. When the period of their seclusion was over, the boys were reintegrated into the society, assuming a new social role as brave men in their society who were qualified to toast the girls during any social gathering. Oyigbenu anchors that “Social occasions such as festivals, naming ceremonies, market square all provided meeting places for would be lovers” (2005:61). A respondent however noted that today, with the influence of modernity, Christianity and Islam, circumcision no longer constitutes a significant preparation for marriage among the Alago people, as male children now undergo circumcision at a tender age (Amokpa 3rd/7/2016: interview). From the researcher’s experience, the majority of Alago parents, especially Christians, now circumcise their male children eight days after birth, primarily for hygienic purposes and for social relevance.

3.4.3.2 *Oka doda* Investigation into the character and family history of lovers

The character and family reputation of lovers were key areas into which investigations were conducted during the period of marriage preparation among the Alago people. Commenting on the relevance of investigation as part of preparation for marriage among the Alago people, Oyigbenu says: “When a boy made up his mind on a girl he notifies his parent. If the girl’s parents were not well known by the boy’s parents, they conducted an investigation to ascertain the family background and the credibility of the girl’s family. This was because no parents want their children to marry into a disreputable home” (2005:62). Oyigbenu paints a picture of a one-sided investigation as though the girl’s parents do not conduct any investigation before giving approval for their daughter to be engaged for marriage. It is important to note that parents of the boy and the girl both conduct this investigation before giving their consent to a marriage proposal, to avoid regrets. A respondent argues that “Before giving their approval for a marriage engagement between a boy and girl, parents of both the boy and the girl would first ask a series of questions about the family into which their daughter or son wants to marry. Some of the questions they would seek to find answers to about the family of the boy or girl include: Does the boy or girl greet her elders? Who are his or her parents? Are they hard working? Are there any accusations of witchcraft or theft in the family? Do men in the family beat their wives? Do women in the family respect their husbands?”(Egwa 26th/5/2016: focus group). Another respondent corroborates that “Our parents investigated the family reputation of our boyfriends. They would ask, “Are men in this family known for taking good care of their wives or they have a reputation of maltreating their wives?” (Adeka 26th/5/2016: focus group).One of the ERCC ministers interviewed observes that “... if a young man wants to date an Alago man’s daughter, the first area he would assess whether the young man would be a good husband or not is his attitude toward greeting elders. The Alago people value greetings a lot” (Hosea 15th/6/2016: interview). One of the respondent states that as a result of the investigation, parents would usually advise their children not to proceed with courtship if it was discovered that the man or the woman had questionable characters or came from a family that has a bad reputation. He further stressed that in those days, courtship lasted for three to four years to give enough time for satisfactory findings before getting married. “Our parents would never rush in taking decisions especially regarding marriage until thorough investigations were carried out” (Atoshi

26th/5/2016). A respondent corroborates that the boy usually had spies who provided him with information regarding the behavior of his fiancée and vice versa (Omame 3rd/7/2016: interview).

3.4.3.3 *Odu ko onyape* Communal contribution towards bridal wealth, dowry and wedding feast

As mentioned earlier in this study, marriage among the Alago people goes with bride wealth, dowry, as well as a wedding feast. These usually require both financial and material resources. The groom's family takes care of the bride wealth and the wedding feast while the bride's family takes responsibility for the dowry¹⁴. From the researcher's experience, these obligations are not left to the immediate family of the intending couple alone, but are shared amongst capable members within the extended family relations. Any member of the Alago community who exempts himself from the communal participation in providing both the financial and material resources needed for the success of the marriage would face necessary sanctions as such disposition was considered to be inimical to the collective interest and aspiration of the Alago people. According to one of the respondents, other well-wishers who are not closely related to the couple also volunteer in assisting the intending couple either in cash or in kind. For instance, some well-wishers in the community may assist the would-be couple with printing wedding invitation cards, donating a cow, provision of drinks, wedding cake and canopies (Osarewa 28th/4/2016: interview). A minister observes that during marriage feasts among the Alago people, "you hardly understand who is actually organizing it because the relations of the bride and groom are all seen doing one thing or the other to ensure that the wedding ceremony becomes a success. As a sign of solidarity you also see relations dressed in uniform attires on wedding days, the men dressing in separate uniform from the women" (Goge 3rd/7/2016: interview). DiMarzio affirms that no marriage takes place without other people supporting the couple. Relations and well-wishers usually support the intending couple on their wedding day and after the wedding (DiMarzio2016: website).

¹⁴Dowry here refers to items expected of the bride to bring to her matrimonial home on her wedding day. Customarily, the Alago dowry may include cooking utensils, plates, dishes, food stuff, cushion chairs, bed/mattresses, television sets, refrigerator etc. A bride who comes from a wealthy family may take all these along with her to her husband's house on her wedding day to win the admiration of her in-laws and the public. But for those who cannot afford all these, they can take whatever they can afford because unlike the bride wealth, there is no rule governing the dowry.

3.4.3.4 *Akpaha pyopi* Reminder/warnings given to intending couple prior to the wedding

Literally, *akpaha pyopi* means “pulling of the ear”. This is a figurative expression which refers to a stern warning given to a child by his or her parent. It is instructive to note that among the Alago people, an adult who is due for marriage is still regarded as a child, not in the sense that he or she cannot contribute anything meaningful to the society, but in the sense that he or she still needs to be counselled by the elders. Oral tradition has it that a few days before the wedding, Alago parents, together with some trusted elders, would remind the intending couple of those good values that they need to take into their marriage. These values include every good behavior they were taught from their childhood and the good characters they have seen in their parents. The couples were also given specific warnings against exhibiting any unwholesome attitude that could tear the marriage apart. Counselling at this stage was not entirely different from the ones provided to them right from their childhood except that at this juncture, it was regarded as last words of advice from parents to the would-be couple, which must be taken very seriously, especially by the bride-to-be since she would soon be under the authority and dictates of her husband, to avoid possible negative consequences. These warnings were, however, not given to the intending bride and groom in a joint session, but in their respective homes. According to one of the respondents, “in the past, the parents of the bride-to-be would warn her never to allow herself to be defiled sexually as they anticipated the traditional rite of *okwinu* which either wins them dignity or shame depending on its outcome. As the woman was about to be given in marriage, her mother and a few other trusted elderly women in the family would sit her down on a mat, usually at night after supper, to warn her strictly about certain things. For example, she would be told that by getting married to her husband, she was bound to him till death, meaning she must not allow any other man to have carnal knowledge of her apart from her husband. She would be warned against marital unfaithfulness which was determined after the death of her husband. In Alago tradition, when a husband dies before his wife, a ritual would be performed on her to prove that apart from her husband, no other man knew her nakedness while he was alive. During the mourning period of the deceased husband, an arrow (the kind used by hunters), which is believed to have the power to bless and to curse, would be brought forth by one of the elders of the community and presented to the widow. She would be asked to take hold of it. If the

widow refused to take hold of it, it meant that she was unfaithful to the deceased husband while he was alive. This would amount to shame on her and her relations. But if the widow took hold of the arrow she was sending a message that she kept herself chaste while her husband was alive. Holding the arrow, she would take an oath saying *'Ishi ni obuhign gbo rayi ni, owoni ashe gogo gye' ewewa hign, eno etah ifukoh eno ahapa ni'gn gyeloh tukunu loh, na geku!* Meaning 'While my husband was alive, if any other man knew my nakedness and I fail to name him, let me die within three days not seven days!' On seeing the widow taking hold of the arrow in her hand, all the mourners would rejoice even though it was a mourning period; praising her for being a faithful wife to her deceased husband". However, this custom no longer exists even among the indigenous Alago people due to the influence of western civilization, Christianity and Islam. A respondent noted that "My mother warned me against using charm to win my husband's love. She said that as a wife, charm was not the secret of success in marriage, but good behavior. If your husband loves you because you charmed him, it may only last for seven days, after which the love expires, but good character makes your husband's love towards you last long. She also warned me never to raise my voice above that of my husband, nor to disrespect my mother-in-law ...I have worked with the pieces of advice my parents gave me before I got married and I have seen bright light in my marriage" (Ozegya 26th/5/2016: focus group).

Among the Alago, minimal warnings are given to the man before he takes the bride as his wife as compared to the kind of warnings given to the bride-to-be. According to one of the respondents, "The Alago men are not usually bound to a wife sexually since a man was permitted to marry more than one wife, except that before the wedding, the husband-to-be was warned not to engage in sex with another man's wife, to avoid the danger that it may lead to his death, should the husband of the woman with whom he had sexual intercourse unknowingly coming to greet him on his sick bed" (Idasho 12th/4/2016: interview). Another respondent affirms that "My father warned me never to beat my wife because if other women in the community get to know that I beat my wife, it will be difficult for me to get a second wife" (Amokpa 3rd/7/2016: interview). This implies that while the warnings given to the woman prior to her wedding were geared toward helping her to please her husband, the warnings given to the man before taking his wife were aimed at helping him to protect his ego.

3.4.4 Strengths and weaknesses of the Alago model of marriage preparations

The merits and demerits of the Alago indigenous pattern of marriage preparation will be discussed in this section. This will enable us see clearly those positive values that are relevant to the development of a comprehensive premarital counselling model that the church can adopt towards promoting marriage stability. It will also bring to light the negative elements inherent in the Alago indigenous way of marriage preparation that are potential bottle-necks to the stability of marriage.

3.4.4.1 The strengths of the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* concept of marriage preparation

As mentioned above, the Alago indigenous marriage preparation has its advantages which I seek to present here because they would add value to the development of a comprehensive premarital counselling model that will feature in chapter eight of this thesis.

3.4.4.1.1 Early preparation for marriage through communal child upbringing

Eight respondents out of the ten elderly Alago men and women interviewed, both during the individual in-depth interviews and the focus group discussion, agreed that preparation for marriage among the Alago people begins from childhood and this should be sustained because it goes a long way in helping the youth to cope with marital challenges in the future. One of the respondents recalled his childhood experience: “My father started teaching me how to farm when I was about seven years old. He bought a small hoe for me which I used to learn how to farm. He would path-find the ridges while I was doing the *keho* (covering of the path-found ridges) with sand using my small hoe. Whenever he saw me standing idle on the farm, he would fetch some sand in his hands and throw it at me. Without uttering any word, I understood that he was asking me to bend down and continue working. That was how I started learning how to work very hard, and this training helps me a lot as a married man” (Osana 27th/4/2016: interview). Another respondent said “When we were growing up as girls, you dare not stand with a boy on the street talking, who you are! If you try that, your name would be circulated in the entire community that

you are a wayward girl and you will be severely punished by your parents for giving them a bad name in the community. I was so shy of the opposite sex and so afraid of my parents that even when I grew older and my husband started dating me, I refused to collect money from him because how will I even explain it to my mother? That my boyfriend gave me money? Hmm hmm...” (Egwa 26th/5/2016: focus group). The kind of discipline given to Alago children helped in preparing them to be disciplined in marriage. It is possible for childhood experiences to impact either positively or negatively on marriage relationships. Yerkovich (ND) concurs that children who are raised in troubled homes do not have the privilege of learning skills for healthy relationships; rather, they struggle with environmental stress around them. Consequently they have few good values to take into their future marriages.

3.4.4.1.2 Communal sharing of responsibilities during marriage preparation

Out of the ten people interviewed, seven suggested that the communal sharing of responsibility towards bridal wealth, dowry and the marriage feast be encouraged. It has been stated earlier that marriage among the Alago people requires both financial and material resources to be able to meet the necessary preparations, and this can be a huge burden if left to the intending couple or their immediate family members alone. It is in view of this realization that every capable member within the extended family shares in donating one thing or the other towards the bridal wealth, dowry and marriage feast. The Alago people believe that any embarrassment of the couple due to lack of adequate preparation was an embarrassment of the entire extended family; therefore the communal spirit helps them to avoid any insults from invited guests during their weddings. Usually, elders of the family of both the bride and the groom-to-be would meet separately and share such responsibilities toward relations according to their abilities. A time frame would also be given within which all are expected to send in their contributions.¹⁵ A respondent who benefited from the communal support given during the preparation for his marriage has this to say, “I remember when I was preparing for my wedding, I was amazed by the kind of support I received from my uncles and aunties. One of them contributed a big cow

¹⁵Some families keep a record of names of family members who give their contribution at every wedding. This record helps them know who is sticking to the *Epawoza* (communal) spirit and who is not. Those that are complying would be encouraged to continue while those that are defaulting would be reprimanded

that worth over N 100,000 (One hundred thousand naira). Another uncle gave me two bags of foreign rice. One of my aunties contributed three Jerri cans of palm oil, just to mention but few. Their gesture made me realize that I have people who care for me” (Agya 12th/7/2016: interview). Another respondent remarked that “During my wedding I came to believe in one of the Alago sayings that says ‘If you ask an Alago man for money to buy cloth you may not get it, but if you tell him you want to marry a wife you will definitely get money from him.’ One of my uncles gave me a big he-goat, my elder brother sent N 50,000 (Fifty thousand naira) into my bank account to assist me in the area of transportation, and other relations supported me in one way or the other” (Alakayi 13th/7/2016: interview).

Apart from communal participation in supporting the intending couple financially and materially, the Alago people also demonstrate this communalism through their physical presence during the entire stages of marriage preparation; serving as witnesses; helping in cooking and in keeping the environment clean. A minister affirms that “The Alago people are good at preparing their young ones for marriage as a community. Those of them who are Christians demonstrate this especially on the eve of a wedding by accompanying the bride on foot through the streets with singing and dancing to the pastor’s house. But they need to do so earlier enough so that it doesn’t have to last far into the night” (James 3rd/7/2016: interview).

3.4.4.1.3 Time given for investigation before a clean bill of consent is given to a marriage proposal

All the ten elderly Alago people interviewed agree that before parents give their consent to a marriage proposal, they conduct investigations into the character of the boy or the girl as well as investigations into their respective family histories. The respondents urge that these values should be encouraged. As earlier noted in this chapter, courtship among the indigenous Alago people lasts for between three to four years or even more than that. One of the reasons the Alago people do not believe in rushing to consummate a marriage proposal is to enable them to have enough time for background checks so that they will have a fair assurance that the proposed

marriage will be stable when it is actualized. In the course of the investigation, if it is found that, for instance, the boy and the girl are blood relatives or the man already had a wife and children elsewhere or the woman already had a child from a previous relationship, the marriage engagement may be terminated. One of the respondents said “My parents refused to give their consent to one of the boys who accosted me when I was yet unmarried because their investigations revealed that women who marry into the boy’s family never live long with their husbands before they become widows” (Esekweyi 26th/5/2016: focus group). Another respondent said “I know of a marriage engagement that was terminated because after investigations it was found that the proposed wife had lost her womb to an abortion which she earlier went through” (Osarewa 11th/5/2016: interview). The Alago traditional investigation before giving approval to a marriage proposal is in line with one of the theoretical frameworks of this thesis; the theory of prevention. Conducting such investigations serves as an important means of avoiding risks, which is one of the aspects that premarital counselling seeks to address. Today among the Alago people, investigations before a wedding are not only restricted to the character of the would-be couple or their family background but also their medical histories.

3.4.4.2 Weaknesses of the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* concept of marriage preparation

This segment seeks to pinpoint those aspects of the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* concept of marriage preparation that are potential hindrances to marriage stability.

3.4.4.2.1 Subjecting women to humiliation and public embarrassment during marriage preparation

As noted above, one of the aspects of marriage preparation among the Alago people is the traditional rite of *kwinu* (virginity testing). From oral tradition, the Alago rite of *kwinu* was usually viewed as a useful method for preserving women’s chastity and that of men and for the promotion of societal morality. However, despite the good intentions associated with the practice, it lacked biblical support. Like in other patriarchal societies, the practice of *kwinu* among the Alago people allowed the men to assert their authority over women’s bodies and sexuality (‘Virginity testing bursaries: discriminatory and unlawful’ ND: website). This tradition

subjects the woman to humiliation and public embarrassment. This is more disturbing considering the fact that the virginity inspectors were not women but men. By this tradition, the dignity of the woman was diminished as she was under obligation to expose her nakedness to men other than her husband. Although the traditional *kwinu* had helped in compelling women to preserve their virginity in the past, it can be described as an uncivilized means of promoting sexual purity. The traditional rite *kwinu* is discriminatory against the woman since men were not subjected to such checks; it also had the potential of exposing the woman to infections due to the manner in which the test was carried out. “However and for whatever reason virginity testing is practiced, it constitutes a clear violation of women’s and girls’ right to privacy and bodily integrity” (‘Virginity tests: stop violence against women’ ND: website).

3.4.4.2.2 Minimal or absence of joint session in preparing intending couple for marriage

Marriage preparation among the Alago people does not provide enough opportunity for the man and the woman to be counselled in a joint session. As mentioned earlier in this study, the boys were prepared for marriage separately from the girls and vice versa. Though one-on-one counselling with the intending couple has its benefits, especially in terms of helping individuals address personal challenges, it should be done in addition to joint sessions because “Couples who come together in therapy sessions may find it easier to communicate and express their feelings in front of a neutral third party (‘Therapy for unmarried couple’ ND: website). The absence of joint sessions in the indigenous Alago *Epawoza* concept of marriage preparation is a disadvantage because the couple cannot discuss together how to achieve effective communication whenever conflict arises. Erikson rightly argues that “In premarital counseling both partners typically attend therapy sessions together. Therapy may include individual as well as joint sessions if there are personal issues or concerns that emerge during the course of counseling” (Indiana Polis Therapist website, ND: website).

3.4.4.2.3 Undue relevance attached to circumcision

From the traditional Alago perspective, male circumcision was viewed as a rite of passage into manhood. As such, boys who were due for circumcision were made to endure severe pain, considering the manner through which the rite was performed. Though the act of circumcision itself is not a bad practice, withdrawing the boys from the normal society under the guise of going to see their ancestors when in reality it was for the purpose of circumcision was a hindrance to transparency. When such an orientation is taken into marriage, it can be a recipe for marital instability.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have discussed three theoretical frameworks underpinning this study. These include Prevention, Contextualization and the See-Judge-Act. The researcher argues that premarital counselling is a preventive measure which seeks to help develop the right knowledge and skills among intending couples that would deter them from getting into a state of instability in their intended marriages. Hence it focuses on the promotion of healthy or stable marriages by exploring issues such as communication and conflict resolution skills, finances, parenting and extended family relationships, among others. The writer also posits in this chapter that this study needs to be viewed from a contextual lens because the communication of skills for marital stability with intending couples is a task that requires the integration of content and context for a desired action to emerge. We have also seen that the See-Judge-Act theory is an important framework in this study as it helps us to observe the problem of instability in Christian marriages carefully, and reflect on it analytically, before we can recommend actions that would promote marital stability. From the theoretical discourse of the current chapter, it can be seen clearly that there is no one adequate lens through which the problem of marriage instability among the Alago people can be properly viewed and tackled; rather it requires a mixed approach, such as the combination of preventive, contextual and evaluative principles as shown in the above narrative.

This chapter has also brought to light the methodologies and methods used in conducting this research. In terms of design, it was shown that this study was carried out through the qualitative empirical research approach by examining the interface between the Christian and the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* concept of marriage preparation towards marriage stability. It was argued

that since the topic of this research is relatively unexplored among the indigenous Alago scholars and indeed the ERCC, the use of individual in-depth interviews and focus group discussions as qualitative research methods would be adjudged as the appropriate ways through which data could be gathered from the local population within the location of the research. Four categories of research participants were drawn from the research site for the individual in-depth interviews thus: ERCC Ministers, Elderly persons in Alago land, Wedded Alago Christian couples and Divorcees in Alago land. Focus group discussions were conducted among ERCC ministers/elders group, Indigenous Alago Elders group and Divorcees group. The thematic analysis method was used in this study as it enabled the researcher to identify, analyze and present themes within data obtained using the inductive coding method. This chapter also revealed the methodological limitation of this study, which lies in the fact that since the researcher is an insider among the Alago ethnic group and a clergy of the ERCC, there is the risk of bias and subjectivity rather than viewing issues at hand from the perspective of an objective researcher. However, it was pointed out that the researcher's awareness of this limitation enabled him to deeply explain his role as a researcher to the participants in order to maintain a safe distance from them and to help them view him as a scholar with an objective mind seeking critical information that will contribute to knowledge. Based on the researcher's knowledge of the ethical issues involved in this study, the privacy of the research participants was respected. Participation was voluntary and participants who volunteered to be interviewed were assured of anonymity through the use of pseudonyms in reporting their views.

In the current chapter, I have discussed the general issues associated with the understanding of marriage among the Alago people as well as the Alago indigenous model of marriage preparation in the context of *Epawoza*, pointing out its merits and weaknesses. I have argued in this chapter that marriage preparation among the Alago people was a communal affair as every responsible member of the community was expected to contribute in one way or the other towards the actualization of marriage once the act is initiated. The Alago people believe that to ensure adequate stability in marriage, early preparation was sacrosanct. As a community, the Alago people share in the responsibility of raising disciplined children who would turn out to be responsible wives and husbands, hence there was no hiding place for any lazy or immoral child

within the Alago community. They conduct investigations into family histories of lovers before marriage proposals were approved, to avoid any regrets after marriage. The community participates in providing bridal-wealth and dowry requirements so that no intending couples carry the burden alone. Prior to the wedding, couples are reminded about the good values they must take into marriage and are warned about certain behaviors that lead to divorce, which they must never exhibit. It is crucial to note that despite the good things inherent in the Alago indigenous model of marriage preparation, it has its demerits which we have also highlighted in this chapter.

The narrative in this chapter is a testimony to the fact that the Alago indigenous culture is so rich in its own unique way, especially in terms of marriage preparation. Though there are weaknesses as shown in this discourse, one can argue that even the western culture has a lot to learn from the advantages of the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* concept of marriage preparation, as no particular human culture can be said to be perfect or superior to the other. It is my submission that both western and African cultures should be allowed to interrogate each other, especially now that there is a constant quest for answers to bridge the expanding gap among diverse cultures of the world (Besley & Peters 2012:2). Since the overall goal of this thesis is for us to have a comprehensive premarital counselling model that the ERCC can adopt in preparing Christians for a stable marriage, the insights we can draw from both the strengths and weaknesses of the Alago indigenous model of marriage preparation as well those insights from the ERCC model which I present in chapter four, would be of great benefit.

Chapter Four

The Historical Overview of Evangelical Reformed Church of Christ (ERCC) and its Model of Premarital Counselling

4.1 Introduction

In chapter three, the theoretical frameworks of this study were presented. These theories are: the theory of Prevention by Ignaz Semmelweis, the contextual theory as postulated by Jerome Bruner and the See-Judge-Act theory of Joseph Cardijn. These three theories are key to this research because they provide the researcher with ways through which his research questions, presented in chapter one of this study, are addressed. Chapter three also paid attention to the research methodologies and methods governing this study. It was argued that because the study seeks to examine the interface between the Christian and the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* concept of marriage preparation, a qualitative empirical research method was an appropriate research design for this thesis. In the researcher's opinion, individual in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were the two appropriate methods for the collection of data from the research participants within the location of the study. It was also demonstrated that those who participated in providing the researcher with their views on key issues relevant to this work did so voluntarily even as their privacy was protected by the researcher. The concept of marriage from the Alago perspective, and the meaning of the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* concept was also discussed in chapter three as well as the Alago indigenous model of marriage preparation; stating its strengths and weaknesses.

This chapter seeks to present a brief history of the establishment and growth of the ERCC, as well as its pillars of faith, vision and mission statement. In presenting a concise story of the ERCC in this chapter I shall be paying particular attention to the advent of the gospel in Alago land through the activities of the ERCC missionaries, as well as the reaction of the Alago people to the gospel and the influence/impact of the gospel on the life of the indigenous Alago people. The policies and practices of the church, especially those related to premarital counselling, will

equally be discussed in this chapter. Discussion on the ERCC model of premarital counselling will feature in this chapter with the view to examining the interface between the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* model of premarital counselling which I have presented in chapter five and the ERCC model that will be stated in this chapter. This will provide the premise upon which to formulate a new comprehensive premarital counselling model that the ERCC can adopt for the enhancement of marriage stability among its members.

4.2 The historical overview of the ERCC

The ERCC was established in 1916 by the South Africa Branch of Sudan United Mission (SUM), which was founded by a German called Dr. Hermann Karl Wilhem Kumm¹⁶ (Manga 1999:46). The present Headquarters of ERCC is located at Alushi in Akwanga Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Dr Kumm's vision to propagate the gospel of Jesus Christ in "Sudan"¹⁷ was inspired by a speech delivered by Mr. J.J. Edward in October 1895, which centered on the need for the Christianization of North Africa (see Maxwell 1954:2; Affiku 2014:50). Dr Kumm voluntarily offered himself for mission work in the Sudan sub-region with the objective of converting to Christianity hundreds of traditional worshipers who were in danger of being Islamized and to halt further spread of Islam in Central Sudan¹⁸ (Maxwell 1954:2; Emmah 2011:2; Affiku 2014:50). As a first step towards actualizing his passion for the mission work in Sudan, Kumm travelled to Cairo in Egypt on 11th January, 1898 where he began training in the Arabic Language. The period of Kumm's stay in Cairo was quite fruitful as he was also

¹⁶Dr. Kumm was described as a man "with strong features and handsome, winsome in character, an excellent speaker, and above all else a man in love with his Lord" (Fifty Years in Mada Hills Church 1966:4; Manga 2007:1).

¹⁷The "Sudan" referred to in this study is not the present Sudan Republic that got its independence on 1 January 1956, rather it was a region in Africa covering south of the Sahara and Egypt to Sierra Leone, Liberia, the northern parts of Ivory Coast, Gold Coast, Dahomey, Nigeria, Cameroon, French Equatorial Africa, Belgian Congo, and Uganda; and from the Gambia and Senegal in the West to Abyssinia in the east (*The Encyclopedia Britannica: A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, Literature and General Information (Eleventh edition) Vol. XXVI* (Cambridge: University Press, 1911), p. 9. Karl Kumm, who founded the SUM, understood Sudan as "a country larger than Europe minus Russia, with about fifty to eighty million people that are waiting to be evangelized" (Kumm 1907:64, Emmah 2011:8).

¹⁸ Sunday Emmah explains that what was known as Central Sudan was later called "Hausaland, Northern Protectorate, Muslim north, far north, upper north, core north and presently as Northern Nigeria" (2011:2)

privileged to be mentored by H. Grattan Guinness¹⁹, a British evangelical leader who was acquainted with the challenges of mission work in the Sudan hemisphere (Maxwell 1954:2; Affiku 2014:50). A short while after his marriage to Lucy, Guinness' daughter (see figure 3 in Appendix 2), the new couple went back to England where they recorded success in terms of convincing many people to support the missionary agenda in Sudan, a success that later resulted in the formation of German Sudan Pioneer Mission (GSPM) in 1901 with Eisenach²⁰ as the mission headquarters. Within the same year, the name of this new mission body was changed to Sudan Pioneer Mission (SPM) and on Wednesday 15th June 1904 the present name, Sudan United Mission, was adopted to accommodate many Christiandenominations that have joined this missionary society (Maxwell 1954:24-26; Manga 1999:46; Affiku 2014:91).

Maxwell argues that the SUM galvanized massive support from Christian friends in England, Ireland and Scotland, after which the first board of directors were appointed. The board of directors later met and appointed the Executive Committee as well as other sub-committees for onward recruitment of missionaries to the Sudan mission field as well as mobilizing financial resources to support the missionaries (1954:26; Affiku 2015:91). It was on 23rd July 1904 that the first batch of four missionaries²¹ sailed to Sudan and arrived at Lokoja, Nigeria on 10th August 1904 (1954:35-38, Affiku 2015:91). Upon their arrival in Nigeria, Kumm thought it wise to consult with Lord Lugard²² in Zungeru²³ who suggested Wase as a suitable place to begin the SUM work. Therefore, on the 3rd of September 1904 the four missionaries moved to Ibi²⁴ near River Benue where they settled and commenced the mission work which was spearheaded by the SUM. Having done some feasibility study of the nature of the work on the ground, Kumm returned to England in 1905 and from there he travelled to a number of countries such as the

¹⁹ H. Grattan Guinness later became the father-in-law to Karl Kumm upon his marriage to Lucy, his daughter, in the year 1900. He was also credited with the release of a monthly magazine titled "Sudan and the Region Beyond", a publication which aimed at raising mission awareness with regards to the challenges in the Sudan region and beyond (see Maxwell, *Half A Century of Grace*, pp.21-24; Affiku 2015:91).

²⁰ Eisenach was the place where Martin Luther, the father of the German Reformation was born.

²¹ The names of four men who were recruited and sent to the Sudan as pioneer missionaries of the SUM include: Dr. Karl Wilhelm Kumm; Dr. Ambrose H. Bateman; Mr. John. G. Burt and Mr. J. Lowry Maxwell.

²² Lugard was the first British Governor General of Nigeria during the colonial era.

²³ Zungeru was the capital of the British protectorate of Northern Nigeria from 1902 until 1916. Presently, Zungeru is a town in Niger State, Nigeria where the Niger State Polytechnic is presently located.

²⁴ Ibi later became the first Headquarters of the Sudan United Mission in Nigeria.

United States of America (1906) and South Africa in (1907). His visit to South Africa led to the founding of the South African branch of SUM that was launched in 1909. This new branch was formed as a result of cooperation from heads of the then leading denominations in South Africa, who later constituted an Executive Committee (EC) that was saddled with the task of recruiting missionaries for the work in Sudan (Affiku 2015:92). Responding to an interview with Sunday Emmah, Alan Blackshow, a former member of the EC, explained that the qualities looked for by the Executive Committee in recruiting missionaries to Nigeria thus included a specific testimony of one's conversion to the Christian faith, a sincere belief in the entire Bible as the Word of God, an assurance that God has called one to do mission work, one who is hale and hearty, a good command of English language, an ability to adapt to other languages, a sound knowledge of Scripture, experience and enthusiasm for service in the vineyard of God, a spirit of sympathy for others and readiness to take a humble position in the service of the Lord, ability to tolerate people with different views and likes, and a willingness to rely completely on God for the provision of all needs among other qualities (Emma 2011:6).²⁵

In a bid to sustain the spirit of cooperation within the SUM South Africa branch, this missionary organization operated based on an interdenominational and non-denominational policy (Emmah 2011:3). These policies gave a certain degree of freedom to each member denomination on certain Christian doctrines and at the same time maintained the interdenominational and non-denominational character of the mission body for the realization of its objectives (Emmah 2011:3).²⁶

The committee set up by the SUM South Africa branch recruited two men who were willing to come and work in Nigeria. These men were Mr. Vincent Henry Hosking of the Observatory Methodist Church (OMC) Cape Town and Reverend George Botha of the Dutch Reformed

²⁵Emmah obtained this information from Blackshow during an interview held on 18 November 2007 in Silvermine, Republic of South Africa.

²⁶“Sudan United Mission (S.A. Branch), ‘Statement of policy: relationship with the World Council of Churches’, adopted by the Executive Committee of South African Branch, based on the statement issued by the Sudan Interior Mission (19 August 1965). This policy was applicable in the early years” (see Emmah 2011:3).

Church (DRC) Eastern Cape (Maxwell 1954:14; Manga 1999:47; Affiku 2015:92). But before they came to Nigeria for the work, they first went to England where they spent two years undergoing medical training at Livingstone College. They eventually arrived in Nigeria in 1908 and started work among the Mbula people on a Saturday 14th December, 1909 (Manga 1999:47). In 1911, the South Africa Branch of SUM sent another missionary to Nigeria, by the name of Mr. Arthur Sidney Judd. The new missionary joined Hosking and Botha in the mission work in Mbula region. But because the work in Mbula was not yielding much success, it was closed down two years after its commencement (Palma 1996:63; Manga 2007:7). This team of missionaries later went down-south and opened their first mission station at Salatu among the Tiv people, and as a result of progress of work in this region, a second mission station was opened at Zaki Biyam (Maxwell 1954:96; Manga 2007:7).

It is worth noting at this juncture that the South African Dutch Reformed Church (Afrikaans) represented by Rev. Botha and the South African Methodist Church (English) represented by Mr. Hosking and Mr. Judd had worked together in the mission field for about a decade until in 1915 when the Reformed partners made a formal request for permission to allow them to exercise control over the work among the Tiv people. Their request was granted after series of consultations resulting in the parting of ways between the two denominations of the SUM South Africa branch in Nigeria. Consequently, there was need for a new leader who would spearhead the affairs of non-Dutch Reformed mission, hence in a meeting which took place at Ibi in 1916, the SUM Field Council appointed Judd as the leader of the English speaking missionaries. Judd undertook a tour of the Nasarawa Province where the Ninzam, Gwandara, Numana, Nandu, Mada, Rindre, Eggon, Alago, Koro, Tiv, and Beri-Beri ethnic communities were found to see which of the communities was more suitable for them to start work. Having been advised by the Assistant Resident Commissioner of Nasarawa Province with headquarters at Kafanchan in Jema'a Division, Judd and his team decided to open a new mission station in Keana among the Alago people in 1916 (Palmer 1996:63; Manga 2007:8; Emmah 2011:116,117). The year 1916 in which the SUM South Africa mission (English) started work in Keana marked the birth of ERCC. Sadly, Mr. Hosking, whose wife had died in Wukari on 9th September 1913, also passed on about four years later on Tuesday 4th September 1917 due to a dreaded disease called yellow

fever, and was buried in Keana. Today, the ERCC has a Clinic which is built as a memorial at the site where Mr. Hosking's grave is still visible (see figure 4 & 5 in Appendix 2).

The Alago people of the ERCC would live to remember Mr. Hosking for initiating the translation of the gospel of St. Mark into Alago language, though he could not complete the work before he was snatched away by the cold hands of death (Manga 2007:9; Affiku 2015:93). Below is an excerpt of the Alago translation of the Gospel of Mark began by Hosking:

oMak

oMak 1 oYohana Ino oBatisma Kyo Owe tu

(oMt. 3:1-12; oLk. 3:1-9, 15-17; oYh. 1:19-28)

¹ Ikyikyo ko oshu neshi ikweyi ko oYesu oKiristi Oyi ko Owuso. ² Byoni inobane Ishaya ta ni mo: 'Ma, n ya to oyolehon oleho, ya yo ohobu wo, ko kyo owe ya gbishi wo.'^{a3} Oko ka ashe ya yogwu ipu ko ododa ya kamo, 'Ala kyo owe tu da Adole, kyo owe tiriri da anu.'^{b4} Kweyi oYohana wa, ya tonu ipu ko ododa shini ase na shagbotu shini ona yuwa yo obatismo shini ana yo ozalabi wa na. ⁵ Kpiri ka ase ka agye ko oYahuda, kpa ase ko oYerusele, we ebe nu, ba shagbotu ko ozalabi wa kweyi oyuwo oBatisma ipu ki Ishu ko oYoda. ⁶ Oshiye ko oYohana atu kpo oya ko orakwimi kpo okpa ko gbo ogbeyi nu. Kweyi ozarore nu wi ikpaga kpi inyi ke eyi. ⁷ Oya tonu mo: 'Itikpin ashe ni shun ni ya wa, ni kwo ogwa ko okpabawu nu n ya gege ya yi lo. ⁸ N ya ya ala obatismo kpi inyo, anu ke ya wa ya ala obatismo kpo Omaku Sere.'²⁷

New workers later joined Mr. Judd to continue the work in Keana. They were Mr. W. Brailsford and his wife, Rev. Ivan-Hepburn and Miss. Janet Mary Ayliff, who later became the wife of Mr.

²⁷This is a reprinted portion of the Gospel of Mark which was translated into Alago language by V. H. Hosking. The surviving hard copy of the pioneer work done by Hosking had already been irreparably damaged except for the reprinted soft copy which I have obtained from Pastor Kenneth Inarigu, a current member of the Alago Bible Translation committee, via email on 1st November, 2016.

Judd. With the arrival of the new missionaries in Keana, the translation of the gospel of Mark in to Alago language which was started by Mr. Hosking was completed.²⁸The work in Keana did not record much success²⁹; therefore, in 1920 Mr. Judd went to Randa, a Ninzam land, where he opened a mission station and established a school for Christian Religious Instruction (CRI).Notable among the first products of this school were Pastor Maman Audu and Pastor Ambi, the first indigenous pastor to be ordained.³⁰In December 1922, the Holy Communion was celebrated for the first time at Randa with three communicant members partaking (Affiku 2015:93).In March 1924, after a week of prayer and fasting, seeking the face of the Lord concerning where to open a new mission station, the Lord directed Rev. Ivan Hepburn and Mr. J. Dawson to Lezzin Lafia in 1926, which is today known as Wana among the Eggon people. More mission stations were later opened, such in Ancho among the Mada people in 1937; Gwagi land and Rindre land in 1939; Lafia (1939) and in Alushi, Kagbu, Obi and Ayu in the 1940s(see Leisle 1966:9-10; Palmer 1996:64, Affiku 2015:93).

In 1958 the church successfully formalized her registration with the Corporate Affairs Commission of the Nigerian government as “Ekkliyyar Kristi A Sudan, Lardin Dutsen Mada” (in Hausa language), meaning (Church of Christ in Sudan, Mada Hills Region) with registration number 495 (see The Constitution of the ERCC 6th Edition 2014:2). In what appears as a quest for identity, the name of the church went through changes over the years. Emmah argues that because the SUM branches had adopted an interdenominational and non-denominational approach during the period of their mission engagement in Nigeria, the initial name of the church portrays the national identity of the South African missionaries who brought the gospel to the then Nasarawa Province of Nigeria (2011:14). Emmah further posits that the national leadership

²⁸Building on the earliest effort of Vincent Hosking, the Alago Bible translation committee in collaboration with the Nigerian Bible Translation Trust (NBTT) had commenced the translation of the whole Bible into Alago language.

²⁹ Sunday Emmah argued that three possible factors accounted for the poor response of the indigenous Alago people to the gospel: First, the sudden death of Hosking, who, together with Judd, started work at Keana. Second, the impact of the indigenous Alago religion which the people preferred to the new faith. Third, the feeling by the indigenous people that the missionaries were not consistent in what they taught. They wrongly accused Mr. Brailsford of marrying two wives while the natives were only permitted to have one and that Mr. Hosking’s death was masterminded by his colleagues who wanted to inherit his belongings (2011:118).

³⁰ Pastor Ambi’s ordination took place at Randa on January 16th1955. Two days later Pastor Abimiku Anzaku was also ordained as at keffi –Wambai.

of the church therefore saw the need to change the church's name so as to reflect their desire to become a denomination and to have autonomy over church affairs (2011:14). From inception to 1957, the church was called SUM Mada Hills Branch. In 1958, the church adopted an indigenous name: "Ekkliyyar Kristi a Sudan (EKAS) Lardi Dutsen Mada" meaning Church of Christ in the Sudan, Mada Hills Zone. In 1972, the name was changed to "Ekkliyyar Kristi a Nigeria (EKAN), Lardi Dutsen Mada," which when translated into English means Church of Christ in Nigeria. According to Emma, "The basis for this change was simply to substitute 'Sudan' with 'Nigeria'. 'Sudan' had become a republic and, as such, it became ambiguous to maintain the name EKAS" (2011:14). In 1981 the church adopted the name "Church of Christ in Central Nigeria." This change took place after the South African missionaries finally left the Nigerian soil in 1978. The last change of name occurred in 1991 when the present name "Evangelical Reformed Church of Christ" (ERCC) was signed into law. This change was said to have been informed by the church's desire to return back to her "Reformed" roots (2011:14). The South Africa branch of the SUM adopted a wholistic approach to their work as they did not only limit their engagement with the people to preaching and teaching the Bible alone but paid attention to the health and educational needs of the locals.

The Evangelical Reformed Church of Christ (ERCC) is into partnership with various ecclesiastical organizations within and outside Nigeria. Some of these organizations include: Tarayan Ekkliyyoyin Kristi a Nigeria (TEKAN) meaning Fellowship of the Churches of Christ in Nigeria (FCCN); Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN); Christian Education Advisory Committee (CEAC); Evangelical Literature Fellowship of Nigeria (ELFON); Nigeria Evangelical Missionary Institute (NEMI); Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN); Christian Rural – Urban Development Association of Nigeria (CRUDAN); Christian Media Fellowship (CMF); Christian Health Association of Nigeria (CHAN); New Life for all (NLA); Christian Central Pharmacy (CCP); Rural Urban Christian Organization of Nigeria (RUCON); World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC); African Communion of Reformed Churches (ACRC); World Council of Churches (WCC); Action Partners (AP); Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC); Reformed Ecumenical Council of

Nigeria (RECON); and Protestant Churches of Netherlands (PCN) (ERCC Constitution 2014:16-17).

The ERCC is governed by elders and each council of elders is headed by a minister. The highest governing body of the church is called the General Church Council (GCC) which is headed by the President, followed by Conference Councils (CFCs) in descending order with Arch Deans as heads. Local Church Councils (LCCs) are headed by Chairmen who are ordained ministers and Class Councils (CC) which are headed by Evangelists (The Constitution of the ERCC 2014:19 – 21). The church functions through its spiritual groups which include the Choir, Women's Fellowship, Men's Fellowship, Boys' Brigade and Girls' Brigade. Others are Youth Fellowship, Musical Band, Prayer Band, New Life for All and Sisters' Fellowship (The Constitution of the ERCC 2014:87). Over the years, tremendous growth and expansion have been witnessed in the church. As stated earlier, the church started in Keana, but has now dominated most parts of Nasarawa state. It has also expanded to other states in Nigeria like Kaduna, Plateau, Benue, Bauchi, Kano, Niger and Abuja – the Federal Capital Territory. In recent times the ERCC mission directorate has embarked on aggressive urban mission that has resulted in the establishment of ERCC worship centers in cities like Port-Harcourt, Anambara, Onitsha, Oweri, Ogun, and Lagos. According to statistics obtained from the ERCC programme of events for its Centenary celebration titled "*Celebrating a Centenary of God's Grace*", the membership of the church is put at about 2 million parishioners with 780 Classes and Mission Stations, 415 Local Church Councils (LCCs), and 10 Conferences. There are 571 ordained ministers³¹ and 1,650 trained pastors and missionaries (2016:23; see also Angolo 2016:223). The ten Conferences of the ERCC are Murya Conference, Assakio Conference, Lafia Conference and Nasarawa Eggon Conference. Others are Akwanga Conference, Abuja Conference, Randa Conference, Gimi Conference, Kango Conference and Keana Conference (ERCC Constitution 2014:4).

³¹ During the ERCC Centenary celebration, a total of 52 pastors were ordained as Reverends, bringing the present number of ordained ministers in ERCC to 623 (see ERCC "*Programme for the Ordination of 52 Pastors*" 2016:6-57).

From this historical backdrop, the ERCC can be said to have made some significant progress from its inception to date. However, given the fact that the church had just celebrated its centenary³² (100 years of its existence), one would have expected more achievements than the ones recorded. Manga blames this slow pace of growth on the attitude of the early missionaries. He observes that almost ten years after the South Africa Missionaries started work in Keana in 1916 there were only two places of worship with 45 converts who attended church service. Commenting on the attitude of the missionaries who took the gospel to Eggon land, Manga argues that they were carried away by the joy of having the opportunity to preach to the natives so much so that they did not take into account the customs and traditions of the people. He further tables that if they had taken their time to contextualize the gospel, it would have turned out to be an advantage for the missionaries in winning more souls (2012:3). I agree with Manga's argument that inadequate contextualization in the presentation of the gospel to the locals by the missionaries is the underlying reason for the rather slow pace of growth witnessed by the ERCC over the past one hundred years of its existence. However, to be fair to the missionaries, one could say there were pockets of efforts they made in making the gospel relevant to the people in their culture such as translation of the gospel into indigenous languages and the way they encouraged the locals to sing gospel songs in their indigenous languages. It is against this backdrop that I see the contextual theory as one of the important frameworks for this study as it seeks to offer a premarital counselling model that can make more meaning to the Alago people within the ambit of their context.

4.2.1 ERCC vision and mission statement

According to the ERCC Constitution, the goal of the ERCC shall be to adore and revere God. This vision shall be achieved through the following objectives:

- To teach converts the word of God, in order to build the Body of Christ, for the development of church worship through Jesus Christ.

³² The ERCC celebrated its centenary from 11–20th November, 2016 at the crusade ground of the church Headquarters in Alushi.

- To develop the church through these activities: Evangelism, education, media and social services. The ERCC shall further achieve these objectives through prints, electronic media like radio and television, and the internet, and any other means that does not violate the objectives and teaching of the church.

- To feed the hungry, clothe the poor, help the needy, to also uplift the spiritually and physically challenged.

- To assist the Federal, State, and Local Governments in building a united, vibrant, peaceful and rich country so as to enhance the social development of the people and to glorify God.

- To implement all or any of the above mentioned, under the leadership of her trustees or agents/representatives or through joint effort of a sister Church or company (2014: 6-7).

4.2.2 ERCC pillars of faith

As a mission-founded church, the ERCC theology and beliefs reflect those of their founding fathers, the South Africa branch of the SUM, who were of the Methodist and Reformed background. The motto of the ERCC is “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel” (Mark 16:15). For the purpose of identification, the church has a logo which is the globe (world map) with equator, latitude and longitude and a red cross stretching from the north to the south, with an open Bible and green color in the background (ERCC Constitution 2014:5). The church believes and teaches that:

1. The Holy Bible is God’s Word; divinely inspired, and infallible. It is the complete revelation of God’s intentions, for the salvation of mankind. It is living and active and is the final authority (II Timothy 3:16; II Peter 1:21; I Corinthians 2:13). This means that whatever counsel one needs to be able to live a stable life even concerning marriage is found in the Bible.

2. There is only one God, the Creator of all things, all powerful, eternal and everlasting, existing in three persons; God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, all in one (Deuteronomy 6:4; Hebrews 1:1-13, Colossians 1:15-19).

3. Jesus Christ is God, who became man through his conception by the power of the Holy Spirit. He was born by the Virgin Mary. He died and rose, thus became the sacrifice for our sins. He then ascended into Heaven where He is seated at the right hand of God as High Priest and a Mediator for all (Luke 2:3-35; Philippians 2:5-8; 1 Corinthians 15:1-3).

4. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Godhead. The Holy Spirit is the one who brings about spiritual birth (that is, the Holy Spirit gives new life to those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ (John 14:16-17; Romans 8:9-11, 15; I Corinthians 6:19). The Holy Spirit baptizes, that is, brings a true believer into relationship with Jesus Christ, thus, making a believer united in the body of Jesus Christ through the Spirit (I Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:26-27; Romans 6:3-4). The Holy Spirit put its stamps on a believer who has become God's possession forever (Ephesians 1:13-14, 4:30). The Holy Spirit fills the believer (that is, lives and empowers those believers who have committed themselves to walk with and work for Him (II Corinthians 3:18; Galatians 5:6, 22-25; Colossians 3:17). The work of the Holy Spirit is to glorify God in the life of believers. The Holy Spirit leads, teaches, and empowers them, by bestowing on them diverse gifts to do the work of service to God and humanity. This includes helping ministers to counsel intending couples aright (John 3:3-6; I Corinthians 6:19, 12:13; Ephesians 5:18; Acts 1:8).

5. Baptism and the Lord's Supper (Holy Communion) are the two sacraments commanded by our Lord Jesus Christ. Baptism is to be administered to those who believe and confess the Lord Jesus Christ as well as attend the baptism course. The mode of baptism is by immersion in the name of God the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.

6. Human beings are created in the image of God for good works (Ephesians 2:10; Titus 3:8). Faith without works is dead (James 2:17). Therefore a Christian is called into the life of holiness

to proclaim this, through the power of the Holy Spirit, and also, the ministry of spreading the gospel to the whole world. The Holy Spirit gives diverse spiritual gifts as He pleases to Christians to strengthen them in the ministry for the glorification of God. At the judgment throne of Jesus Christ, believers will give account of their stewardship (I Corinthians 3:12-15; 2 Corinthians 5:9-10; Romans 12:4-11; Ephesians 4:11).

7. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to believers as He pleases, without any respect to persons. It is for the edification of the body of Christ, and effective ministry to God. God gives in addition gifts as: faith, prayer, service, pastoral gifts, teaching, preaching of the gospel, officiating, knowledge, wisdom (Romans 12:6; I Corinthians 12:4-11; Ephesians 4:11). Other gifts of the Holy Spirit listed in the word of God are: gift of tongues, healing and more. These gifts are signs of the power of God and ERCC recognizes them to be used in an orderly manner (John 16:13-14; Acts 1:8; I Corinthians 14:1-40).

8. The blessed hope of the Christian is the return of Jesus Christ in the body, to establish God's Kingdom and reign for a thousand years. This is when believers will be raptured, both the living and the dead. It is in the light of this hope that every believer in Christ works with fervent spirit (John 14:1-3; 1 Corinthian 15:51-52, I Thessalonians 4:13-18; Titus 2:11-14, II Peter 3:11-12) (ERCC Constitution 2014: 8-14).

The abovementioned beliefs and teachings of the ERCC are not exhaustive, but the ones presented in this chapter are those related to the subject of this study.

4.2.3 ERCC policies and practices regarding marriage

The church's policies and practices regarding marriage include the following:

1. Marriage is a holy institution in the presence of God (Ephesians 5:20-33).
2. Christian marriage is between two people (man and woman) who believe and profess Christ as their Lord and Savior.

3. On their own accord, the man and the woman have chosen to be married and remain together in accordance with biblical teaching as long as they are both alive.
4. Love, patience, mutual understanding and respect for each other are the keys to a successful marriage.
5. Where the marriage has broken down irretrievably, and when all avenues of church interventions have failed, the spouse who has remained faithful to the other spouse who is in violation of the marriage vow, may be permitted by the church to re-marry.
6. All marriages contracted in the church must have the full consent of the parents of both the groom and the bride.
7. The marriage certificate shall bear the signatures of: The bride, the groom, bride and groom's parent, a witness each for the bride and groom, and the officiating minister.
8. The Local Church shall always ensure that the intending couples undergo both "pre and post" marital counselling on regular basis.
9. The couple shall undergo a medical test the first three months and a second one three months later.

4.3 The advent of Christianity (ERCC) to Alago land

This segment helps us to see how Christianity penetrated into the Alago land and the impact the gospel has made on the indigenous beliefs and practices of the people. Generally, the advent of Christianity to Alago land can be credited to the missionary activities of the Sudan United Mission (SUM) and the Roman Catholic Mission (RCM) in Nigeria. These two missionary organizations began work among the Alago people in the early part of the 20th century (see Omaku 2014:29). But for the purpose of this research, more attention will be given to the missionary activities of the SUM (ERCC) than those of the RCM in Alago land. As stated earlier, the SUM started work among the Alago people at Keana³³ on 1 July 1916, the official

³³Keana is one of the Alago settlements, founded at about 1232 AD. It is located in the southern part of Nasarawa state of Nigeria, about 67 kilometers away from Lafia, the state capital city and about 50 kilometers north of the Benue River (Adisa 2011: *Nasarawa State – "Home of Solid Minerals"* <http://www.cometonigeria.com/region/north-central/nasarawa-state/> Accessed 23rd November, 2016). The area covers 1,048.1 km² and has a population of about 95,040, according to the 2011 estimation (Nasarawa state, Nigeria – population statistics and location <https://www.citypopulation.de/php/nigeria-admin.php?adm1id=NGA026> Accessed 27th March 2017).

birthday of the ERCC. Even though the growth of Christianity at Keana took a rather slow pace, the missionaries never closed up the mission station at Keana. Emmah confirms this argument thus: “Whatever the reasons, the mission work did not progress at Keana. By 1925, the mission reduced Keana Station to an outstation and visited the station regularly from Randa and Wana. Alaku Achuku, one-time Cook to a number of missionaries, assisted in taking care of Keana station” (2011:119). Though the door for the propagation of the gospel was later opened for the missionaries in Randa among the Ninzo people and in Wana among the Eggon people, the SUM missionaries never lost hope in winning the Alago people for Christ. Hence in the early 1930s, two female missionaries, Miss Winifred Wells and Miss Bowman from the British branch of the SUM, advanced their missionary exploration from Lafia mission station to Agwatashi, an Alago town which is about 15 kilometers north of Keana. But because Agwatashi was comparatively smaller than Obi, the missionaries decided to settle at Obi from where they regularly went and worked in both Agwatashi and Obi (Oyigbenu 2005:82). Contrary to the story of mission work in Keana, the Christianization of Agwatashi recorded rapid progress so that Agwatashi became the first Alago town to be elevated to the status of *GU* (Local Church Council). With this development, Obi, Keana, Assakio and other Alago towns were placed under Agwatashi (2005:82). In 1946, Mr. Allan W. Adam and Mr. Evelyn D. Lesley, who were of the SUM South Africa branch, took over the work at Agwatashi after the British branch of the SUM willingly handed over the work to them (2005:82; Emmah 2011:162). Among the first Alago converts of the ERCC at Agwatashi were Agbo Okugya, Mallam Dauda Amirikpa, Odu, Omame Odu, Adeka Odu, Mallam Agyeno Dangana, Ogbonya, Ogbole of Adi Nyako’s house, Adokwe Asonya, Agye Egwa, and Elabo Amegwa. The second generation of converts were Ogbanwo, Iyiwose Amirikpa, Adi Nyako, Adole Owena Oshaku, Idefu, Oyigbenu Omame Asoneshi Agye among others (2005:82). Some of these early converts among the Alago were trained by the missionaries as indigenous pastors and they assisted the missionaries in spreading the gospel to other Alago towns and villages. One of such notable indigenous pastors was Dauda Amirikpa who took the gospel to Assokio. Amirikpa’s exploits at Assokio led to the conversion of notable citizens like Musa Assakio, Idi and Mallam Amokpa (2005:83). The missionaries were impressed with the performance of Pastor Amirikpa so that they transferred him to Wase.

Unfortunately, as Oyigbenu rightly puts it: "... he who went fishing for Jesus ended up in the big fish of Mohammedanism as he got converted to Islam" (2005:83).

After years of repeated engagement of the Alago people of Keana with the gospel, ERCC eventually got itself established in Keana. Keana remained a class under LCC Agwatashi for about two decades, after which it became a Local Church Council (LCC) in 1965. In November 2013, ERCC Keana was inaugurated as a Conference. It was carved out of Assakio and Murya Conferences. The induction of the pioneer Archdean, Very Reverend Philimon Amaha and the pioneer Administrative Secretary, Rev Samuel Obaba took place on 23rd January 2014. These two leaders were appointed by the General Church Council (GCC) to spearhead the affairs of the Conference pending an official election of the Conference executives and delegates. The first Conference convention was held at ERCC Agwatashi, the Conference Head Quarters from 2nd-4th May, 2014 (see figure 6 in Appendix 1). The Guest Preacher at the first Convention of Keana Conference was Very Rev Peter Mairabo, the then Administrative Secretary of Murya Conference. During the epoch-making convention, the Conference held its first election. According to the minutes of the first meeting of ERCC Keana Conference held on 1st May 2014, the following persons were elected into various leadership positions: Very Rev. Samuel Achohol – Assistant Archdean, Rev. Joseph Anzaku – Assistant Administrative Secretary, Mr. Philip Tar – Treasurer, and Very Rev. Charles Nuhu – Assistant Treasurer. Other Conference Delegates elected at the convention include: Very Rev. Joshua Abimiku from LCC Kekura, Mr. William Emmanuel from LCC Ungwan Gindiri, Mr. David Onuku from LCC No. 2 Obi, Mr. Peter Adokwe from LCC No. 1 Obi, and Very Rev Ishaku Bahago from LCC Daddere. Election of the Keana Conference Women Fellowship was also done; resulting in the emergence of the following persons as leaders: Mrs. Paulina Osayi – Women Leader, Mrs. Esther Dennis – Assistant Women Leader, Mrs. Abigail Orume – Secretary, Mrs. Ruth Silas Musa – Assistant Secretary, Mrs. Lydia Jacob – Treasurer, and Mrs. Maryamu Josiah – Assistant Treasurer.

At its inauguration, Keana Conference was made up of thirty (30) Local Church Councils (LCCs); nineteen LCCs from Assakio Conference were merged with eleven (11) LCCs from

Murya Conference to make up Keana Conference. The current Local Church Councils (LCCs) in Keana Conference include: Kaduna Koro, Daddere, Tudun Odobu, Gidan Adamu, Atabula, Abagu, Mararaba Obi, Ungwan Gindiri, Akpeka, Ikposogye, Obi No. 1, Obi No. 2, Kwasur, Alosi, Agaza Keana, Agwatashi, Imon, Mahanga, Igwa, Kanje, Awe, Kekura, Borkonu, Adudu, Atseember, Jangwa, Azara, Agina, and Kertyor. Presently, Keana Conference plays host to three educational institutions of the ERCC; two are sacred and one is secular, namely, ERCC Pastors' College Obi, Conference Bible Training School (CBTS) Agwatashi, and ERCC Secondary School Obi.

4.3.1 Reactions of the Alago people to the advent of the Christian gospel

As noted above, the advent of Christianity to Alago land did not receive a robust welcome as there was opposition both by the indigenous religionists and the Muslims. I have shown that though the ERCC started in Keana among the Alago people, their reluctance in accepting the gospel compelled the missionaries to relocate to Randa, a Ninzo land, where they opened a new mission station without closing the one at Keana. From the missionary perspective, Hepburn in his article *Mohammedans and the Pagans at Keana* argues that the Alago people simply preferred the religion of their ancestors to the Christian gospel: He says the Alago “follow the ways of their fathers” (1922:154). In a similar reaction, Farant, the Secretary of the SUM concurs: “The gospel has come to this people bringing the news of the “Unknown God”. So far none has left his idols to accept Him, but the assault does seem to have shaken faith in the old things...when are we to see these people made bold by the Holy Spirit, renounce their idols and accept Christ the Savior” (1923:48). The question begging for answers here is what are the factors accountable for this early resistance of the Alago people to the gospel? From the viewpoint of the indigenous people of Keana, they felt that there were inconsistencies in what the missionaries taught the people. W. F. Graffin portrays this in his report of the accusation of polygamy and witchcraft by the Alago people against the missionaries thus: “The efforts of the missionaries became more difficult when word was spread that Mr. Brailsford came with two wives while the native Christians were only allowed one and that Mr. Hosking’s death had been contrived in order to take over his belongings” (1961:4). Emmah, however, observes that the

view of the indigenous people of Keana about the missionaries was a misconception which he attributes to the people's cultural beliefs. For example, like other African tribes, the Alago man can marry more than one wife. A man has the right to inherit his deceased brother's property, hence in some cases, a person can kill his brother through witchcraft so he may take his belongings (2011:118-119).

Apart from the initial resistance faced by the missionaries, some of the first indigenous converts to Christianity were also persecuted by their own people, especially from immediate family members who saw Christianity as a threat to their "serene monolithic society that worshipped their God in accordance with the dictates of tradition and culture" (Oyigbenu 2005:81). Oyigbenu documents a narrative by one of the earliest Alago Christian converts, Joseph Iyiwose Amirikpa, of an opposition by a mother, who was a traditionalist, against her son, Mallam Oyigbenu Omame, who was a new Christian convert. The story has it that Oyigbenu's mother would repeatedly threaten him by carrying a gourd to the entrance of the church and ask her son to fill it with her breast milk with which she nursed him to become a man. When Oyigbenu's parents realized that their son was so resilient about his new-found faith, they changed strategies by giving him double portion of land to till on Monday as compensation for the work he failed to do on a Sunday. Oyigbenu's faith in Christ was so strong that he later became one of the leading elites in the entire Alago land (Oyigbenu 2005:84).

The above account shows the kind of courage and resilience the early Alago Christian converts exhibited in the face of persecution and opposition, which resulted in the further advancement of the gospel in Alago land. Another instance of a negative reaction to Christianity in Alago land during the missionary era was the one that came from the Muslim faithful who felt they could rely on the powers of the feudal lords to marginalize the Christian minority. They often reported the activities of the Christian converts to the then Emir of Lafia, Yusuf Musa who was a Muslim. Oyigbenu explains that on one such occasion, the Emir ordered the arrest and detention of two prominent indigenous Christian leaders in Alago land, Mr. Agbo Okugya and Mr. Ogbale, for allegedly converting Alago children to Christianity. According to Oyigbenu, the men were

tortured and were asked to give up their faith or face the option of being locked up in jail. It was gathered that while Ogbole gave in to the pressure and accepted Islam, Mallam Okugya held tenaciously to his faith and consequently spent one month in prison. However, with the intervention of Miss Wells, a missionary, Mallam Okugya was eventually released (2005:85). The threats of the feudal lords could not weaken Mallam Okugya's zeal for preaching Christ, as he continued to ring the church bell every Sunday. Again, he was invited by the Emir of Lafia and was directed to stop the ringing of the bell. But Mallam Okugya explained to the Emir and his council that the ringing of the bell was synonymous to the muezzien used by the Muslims to call their adherents to prayer and asked if he could be allowed to blow the whistle as a substitute, and his request was granted. This time the Christian faithful blew the whistle with renewed vigor, so much so that the situation became unbearable for their persecutors. As a result of this development, the authority eventually allowed the restoration of ringing the church bell (2005:85-86).

Despite these negative reactions to the gospel, the sacrifices made by the missionary organizations in Alago land and those of their first converts resulted in the conversion of many whose hearts were ready for the harvest as well as socio-economic transformation amongst the Alago people. Shedding more light on the kind of sacrifices made by the missionaries towards the transformation of the Alago nation, Oyigbenu observed that because the white missionaries were committed to evangelizing the people who were not literate, they had to endure the pain of learning the Hausa language, which was the common language of communication then. Usually, they would go to Zaria, a predominantly Hausa city, to be trained in Hausa language before settling down for work in their various places of assignment (2005:84).

It is also pertinent to note that apart from passing through the Hausa language training in Zaria, the missionaries also went through the pains of learning the indigenous language of the Alago people to facilitate easy communication of the gospel message to the people. We have earlier made mention of Vincent Hosking who not only committed himself to the translation of the gospel of Mark into Alago Language, but also paid the supreme sacrifice in Alago land and was

buried in Keana when he could have opted to return to South Africa, his country of origin, for better medical attention when his health was failing. From the researcher's experience, today, the Alago people of the ERCC are the dominant ethnic group in Keana and Assokio Conferences of the ERCC; their presence is also high in ERCC Murya and Lafia Conferences. They are also in the forefront in terms of spiritual, material and financial contributions towards the general development of the ERCC.

4.3.2 The impact/influence of the Gospel on the Alago people and their indigenous beliefs and practices

Like other Africans, the advent of Christianity in Alago land has impacted both positively and negatively on the Alago people. Affirming this argument, Ugwu says, "although the imported world religions have brought in some positive influences or effects on the Nigerian communities, they have also dealt a staggering blow on our social, economic, religious and political systems" (2002:1). As mentioned earlier, the Sudan United Mission (SUM) had continued to operate side by side with the Roman Catholic Mission (RCM) in bringing about salvation and positive transformation among the Alago people. This was complemented by the simultaneous influence of westernization and modern technology which accompanied the preaching of the gospel. On a positive note, the preaching of the gospel, in particular, has transformed the spiritual understanding of the Alago people, leading to the conversion of many to Christianity. The gospel has influenced one of the fundamental belief systems of the Alago people, the concept of reincarnation. The indigenous Alago believed that those who live a good life are able to reincarnate and rejoin their family after they have died, hence when a woman gives birth to a child within the period of mourning a deceased relative, the newborn child is given the name of the deceased. But the wicked do not reincarnate in human form; rather, they become associated with an evil spirit that causes misfortune to the living (Oyigbenu 2005:57).

The question one may ask is did the Alago have any criteria by which they identified an incarnate person? According to Omaku, the answer to this question lies in the claim that "the

body of such incarnate person bears some marks on the exact spots where the incarnate person had such marks or scars on his body in his previous existence. Also, the revelations from the soothsayer are accepted as testimonies that attest to the truth of the belief” (2014:73). This traditional belief has now changed owing to the influence of the Christian gospel. Even though newborn babies still assume names of deceased members of the family who are believed to have left good legacies, such names are given to children by their parents with the hope that the newborn baby will grow to continue with the good work the deceased was known for, and no longer in the belief that the soul of the departed has returned to inhabit a new body.

The gospel has impacted positively on the Alago people in respect to their attitude toward the consumption of *ize* (local beer). The consumption of *ize* is so common among the indigenous Alago people that its brewing process served as a local calendar for important festivals like *Ogiri* and *Amiri*. For instance, the first day of the *Amiri* festival was called *eno ni ize ya gi inyi* (the day in which the millet for brewing the local beer is soaked) and the last day of the festival was called *eno ni ize ya gwa* (the day in which the local beer would be ready for consumption). Usually, the process of brewing the local beer takes about seven days, which is equivalent to the one week duration of the festival celebration (see Oyigbenu 2005:66-67). It has earlier been noted in this chapter that during the missionary era the indigenous Alago people resisted the Protestant mission but preferred the Roman Catholic mission, partly because the RCM tolerated certain traditional practices such as the consumption of alcoholic drinks like *ize* (2005:84). However, today, many Alago who have embraced the Christian faith no longer partake in drinking *ize* or any drink that intoxicates. They now drink *ogwo* (local soft drink made from guinea corn). Such abstinence from alcoholic drinks distinguishes them from other non-Christian members of the community. By abstaining from alcoholic drinks, the Alago Christian faithful act in keeping with one of the statements of covenant of the ERCC brethren enshrined in their baptism card which states: “We will separate ourselves from lusts of the flesh, lying, anything that intoxicates and whatever that is against the teaching of the Scripture” (ERCC Baptism Card ND:6). During the missionary era, indigenous tunes were adopted, given Christian lyrics and are now sung during worship services by Alago Christian converts. Such contextualization of the

gospel has continued to serve as great inspiration to the Alago Christians, particularly during their annual conventions³⁴.

On the negative side, the missionaries seemed to have undue disregard towards some cultural values of the Alago, as it is the case with other Africans who converted to Christianity during the missionary era. For instance, the missionaries encouraged the Alago to renounce their indigenous names and adopt Christian names upon their conversion to Christianity as a mark of identification with the new faith. Though this measure may have pleased the early Christian converts, it has contributed in the gradual erosion of certain important cultural values of the Alago people such as their indigenous names and the *Epawoza* understanding of marriage preparation, which are aspects of their cultural identity. Perhaps the missionaries thought that most aspects of the Alago culture were demonic or not godly enough to be sustained by their converts. This phenomenon is similar to what Hassan writes about one of the things the missionaries required of the *Baganda* people in East Africa and its resultant effect: “On baptism, the *Baganda* were required to adopt Christian names and renounce those of their divinities (*Lubaale*). The two types of divorce shook the foundation of the community as it ultimately concerned the harmony or balance within the society” (Hassan 2015: website). Chitando (ND) also affirms this submission when he wrote about a sociolinguist in Zimbabwe, Pedzisai Mashiri, who observed that “from the 1930s to the 1970s it was obligatory for Africans to drop their traditional names and accept biblical names on baptism”. According to Chitando (ND), Mashiri identifies two reasons for the undue disregard for African traditional names by missionaries: The difficulty encountered by white missionaries and employers in pronouncing African names and the belief that an English or Christian name was a symbol of salvation. It is instructive to state that by compelling the Africans to drop their native names and assume English names, the missionaries acted in ignorance because, like it is the case with other Africans, some of the

³⁴ The Alago Christians have an umbrella body called the Alago Christian Association of Nigeria (ACAN) which usually holds their general convention thrice every year (March, July and October) on a rotational basis across the Alago towns and villages to sustain their indigenous *Epawoza* (communal) lifestyle which dates back to the pre-Christian era. One of the major highlights of the convention is the Alago indigenous musical concert whereby gospel songs set into indigenous tunes are presented in a competitive manner from each Alago town and village. Such conventions provide an opportunity for the Alago Christians to fellowship together as a people irrespective of their denominational affiliations and to witness their faith in Jesus Christ to their unbelieving brethren as Alago language is used as the medium of communication during the convention.

Alago names are attributes of God. For instance, *Owusoweshi* – God is medicine or solution to every problem, *Owusosheka* – God is greater than idol, *Owusogye* – God knows. Also, some Alago names are native proverbs and wise sayings while others are expressions of the people's joy and ill feelings (Omake 2014:73). Unfortunately today, due to the impact of the gospel, westernization and globalization, some Alago parents still borrow western names and give them to their children even without knowing the meaning of such names. However, others who have realized that indigenous names give a people cultural identity have started giving their children indigenous names, but they do so carefully by selecting names that have good qualities such as *Ozotu* – Patience, or *Oneshi* – Goodness. While names like *Abayun* – they are troubling me, or *Amowuin* – they belittle me, are considered bad names; hence wise parents avoid using them in naming their children (2014:73). From the above information, it can be observed that, for instance, the synergy between Alago indigenous tunes with Christian lyrics which dates back to the missionary era, has continued to be a great source of inspiration to the Alago Christians to date. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about marriage preparation among the Alago Christians today because the premarital counselling provided to intending Christian couples in Alago land by ERCC ministers is done without recourse to the indigenous *Epawoza* concept of marriage preparation. This is an indication that the missionaries either paid little or no attention to ensuring marriage stability among the Alago people or they had no premonition that the kind of premarital counselling given to intending couples by the church, devoid of the communal participation of the indigenous Alago people were known for, could be counterproductive. O'Donovan believes that Africans who have been brainwashed to renounce their communal culture in favor of the individualistic lifestyle of western culture are losing a godly value and are in danger of losing the peaceful human relationships evident in their sense of community (O'Donovan 2000: 11-12).

Speaking about the need to work with people's culture in order to bring about positive transformation, Kraft says, "In order to bring about such change ... persons are more likely to be effective if they are aware of the cultural patterns and processes of the culture in which they work and if they work *with* or in terms of these patterns and processes to bring about the changes they seek (1998:353). Kraft's argument points out two important strategies that the missionaries

who worked among the Alago people probably ignored: Awareness of the people’s culture and working with cultural patterns of the people. If this is true, what could have been the factor responsible for the missionaries’ lack of awareness of the cultural patterns of the Alago people? Manga, writing about one of the strategies used by the missionaries who founded the ERCC, seems to have addressed this question when he posits that the missionaries stayed in an isolated place known as a “mission compound”, away from the settlements where the indigenous people were found, for the purpose of discipling the new converts. This was necessitated by the belief that salvation was an individual affair (2012:4). Manga further observed that the missionaries were so zealous in evangelizing the locals that they had little or no time to get themselves acquainted with the nature of customs and traditions of the people. If the missionaries had taken time to analyze the interplay between the Christian and the Alago indigenous practices regarding marriage preparation, cases of marital instability and divorce among the Alago might have not reached the alarming rate as it is today. In the following section, I shall be discussing the understanding of premarital counselling in the ERCC and factors militating against marriage stability among the Alago people of the ERCC.

4.4 The understanding of premarital counseling in the ERCC

Table 4.4 Respondents’ understanding of the meaning of premarital counselling in the ERCC

The meaning of premarital counselling	No of Respondents	Percentage%
Marriage education given by pastors and church elders to intending couples so as to help them have stable marriages.	8	53.33
Discussing with intending couple about vital aspects of Christian marriage with the aim of helping them prepare for marital challenges.	5	33.33
Advice given to a man and a woman who are preparing to marry each other on how they can handle marital	2	13.33

problems when they get married.		
Total	15	100%

From the table above, the responses of 8 (53%) of the respondents showed that they understood premarital counselling as marriage education given by pastors and elders of the church to the intending couple so as to help them have a stable marriage. To sum up the predominant definition of premarital counselling, the researcher views it as a specialized type of counselling that involves educating persons who are preparing for marriage with the aim of helping them develop skills for a stable and enjoyable marriage.

4.4.1 Factors militating against marriage stability among the Alago of the ERCC

Table 6.4.1 Respondents’ understanding of factors that are responsible for marriage instability/divorce among the Alago Christians

Factors accountable for marriage instability in ERCC Keana Conference	Frequency	Total No of Respondents	Percentage %
The movement of Alago women to the cities for financial reasons usually for a long period before returning home	7	10	70 %
Extra marital affairs	5	10	50 %
Lack of adequate premarital counseling	4	10	40 %
Spiritual incompatibility	2	10	20 %
Parental influence and interference	2	10	20 %

The table above presents the views of ERCC ministers who have worked among the Alago people and divorcees in Alago land on factors militating against marriage stability among the Alago Christians. From the above table, 7 respondents (70%) understand that the movement of

Alago women to cities like Lagos, Kano and Abuja for economic reasons, usually staying there for long period of time before returning home, is the major factor accountable for marriage instability among the Alago people. One of the respondents observed that “It appears the Alago women have a mentality that if they do not travel to the city to look for money they are not yet civilized. Some of them stay away from their husbands and children for months, in fact even up to a year. Sometimes they even travel without the consent of their husbands and sometimes the husbands allow them to go because they cannot meet all their demands if they stay at home” (Monday 24th/5/2016: interview). Perhaps this negative trend has become a common phenomenon among the Alago Christians due to the influence of the gospel and modern civilization which gave emancipation to the women (see Taylor 1994:185). This factor, in my view, underscores the significance of the See-Judge-Act theory of Joseph Cardijn, which is one of the theoretical frameworks of this study, because a pastoral examination of this finding will enable us have a synergy that would promote stable marriages among the Alago people. This finding also helps us understand why this study focuses on examining the interface between the Christian and the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* concept of marriage preparation. As noted earlier in chapter five of this study, in the past, the indigenous Alago people glorified the chastity of the woman and as a measure to sustain this cultural value, their women, both single and married, were usually restricted from moving outside their boundaries. The Alago indigenous rite of *kwinu* (virginity test) and *inarigu ko okpa* (oath taking by a widow that she was innocent of infidelity) were all modalities put in place to keep the woman in check. One can therefore argue that the freedom that the Alago women have today to travel to cities far away from home is one of the changes that have occurred in the life of the Alago people as a result of Christian teaching and modernity, which liberated the women from men’s domination. However, some Alago Christian women have abused this liberty by embarking on such economic tourism which often exposes them to immoral influences that affect their marriages negatively. Another respondent says “I divorced my first wife because after she returned from one of her trips to Kano I noticed some changes in her body and I insisted that we must go for HIV screening as a condition for accepting her back as my wife. She was tested positive while I was negative. She begged me to forgive her for traveling to Kano against my wish and I told her I have forgiven her but I could not receive her back because of her HIV status” (Ebenya 24th/5/2016: interview). From my

experience, temporary separation between husbands and their wives occasioned by women going to the cities to look for money have exposed many married couples in Alago land, both men and women, to sexual temptations and high risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Five respondents (50%) identified extramarital affairs as one of the factors responsible for marriage instability among the Alago people in ERCC. A respondent narrates her experience: “Actually my husband used to take good care of me and our children by providing food and paying the children’s school fees. But problems started after the death of one of his brothers. He took his late brother’s wife to our house and married her against my wish claiming that his action was biblical. Since then he no longer relates to me as his wife even though my children and I are still living in his house. I am aware he is presently having an affair with another woman” (Amos 26th/5/2016: interview). Such sex-related factors that are inimical to marriage stability are sometimes a result of disagreements related to the desire of each spouse even when the couple are communicating with each other (see Mack 2013:117-118; Odukoya 2008:7). From the narrative of the above respondent, it also appears that culture played a role in the issue of widow inheritance. Lack of adequate premarital counselling was also identified by four respondents (40%) as a factor resulting in marriage instability among the Alago people of the ERCC. A respondent who did not have any premarital counselling experience before his wedding regretted that: “I wish the church had counselled us before our marriage which ended in divorce just few months after the wedding; perhaps it would have helped us to take more time in studying each other and to understand that we were not compatible for marriage in the first place” (Ashiki 13th/6/2016: interview). Like other churches in Africa and particularly in Nigeria, the ERCC is, perhaps, contributing to some of the problems in marriages among the Alago people due to lack of adequate pastoral counselling (Taylor 1999:187). One of the respondents attributed cases of marital instability in ERCC to low-level of pastoral training of the ministers. According to the respondent, “Many ERCC pastors are not able to counsel intending couple properly and I think it is because they are not advanced in pastoral training” (Timothy 13th/6/2016: interview). Taylor anchors this argument when he tables that “As far as the church in Africa is concerned, it seems that many of the problems associated with Christian marriage are caused by outdated forms of church administration, and the shortage of pastors with a full and up-to-date training in

counselling” (1999:187). Commenting on the level of training required of a premarital counsellor, Stahmann and Hiebert (1997) in Nganga&Wasanga (2010) argue that for a minister to be able to give adequate premarital counselling to an intending couple, they must have attained a Master’s degree in ministerial training. From the five ERCC ministers in Alago land who were interviewed in this research, only one person (20%) has a 1st degree in theology; the other four (80%) have a diploma in theology. Going by Stahmann and Hiebert’s argument, it would mean that none of the five ministers interviewed is qualified to offer adequate premarital counselling. Even if one lowers the standard down to having a 1st degree in pastoral training, it will still show that only one minister (20%) of those interviewed was qualified. This shows that there is a serious need for adequate pastoral training of the ERCC ministers towards improving the effectiveness of premarital counselling in the church. Two respondents (20%) state that spiritual incompatibility in Christian marriage is one of the factors that account for the alarming cases of divorce among the Alago people. One of the respondents narrates that she was baptized before their wedding while her husband was not and for that reason the church initially told them that their marriage would not be joined in the church. But one of her uncles, who was a strong member of the church, intervened on the matter and the wedding took place on the condition that her husband would get baptized immediately after the wedding. Unfortunately, two weeks after their wedding her husband threw away his wedding ring and claimed that it got lost, because he never bought another ring for replacement. She further said that to this day her husband has yet to be baptized; in fact, he hardly goes to church as most of his friends were Muslims and he mingles with them more than his few Christian friends. She revealed that her husband has now married a second wife and has packed his belongings to stay with her, adding that when their house was burnt down during the last ethnic crisis, it was one of her brothers who offered her a room in his house where she was currently living with her children (Daniel 26th/5/2016: focus group).

Another respondent observed that “I can say that my ex-wife was not truly converted. I remember she only went to church and confessed that she received Christ as her Savior because she was told that unless she made that public confession in church she was not yet a Christian and our wedding could not take place” (Osuko 24th/5/2016: interview). From the researcher’s

experience, inter-religious marriage, especially between Christians and Muslims, are sometimes tolerated within the Alago communities. Perhaps the ideology held by some Alago, that the girl-child has no permanent religion until she gets married, accounts for this flexibility. This kind of marriage happens among the Alago people probably due to a lack of adequate understanding of the Word of God. According to Akanni, spiritual compatibility must be the first thing to consider in the joining process of Christian marriage so that the spirit of both the husband and the wife can be alive to God (2004:214). Two respondents (20%) were of the view that marriage instability among the Alago people of the ERCC is caused by parental influence and interference. A respondent laments that:

The greatest mistake I ever made in my entire life was that I got married to my first wife just to please my mother. I didn't actually date her, it was my mother who approached the lady on my behalf and made arrangements for the wedding while I was working in Lagos. The lady I personally paid her bride price was found to be pregnant for another man when our wedding day was already fixed. Therefore, since my mother wanted me to wed on the same day with my immediate elder brother unfailingly, she received back the bride price I paid for the lady that disappointed me and settled for this woman that I never said to her 'I love you' before we wedded in church (Osuko 24th/5/2016: interview).

Another respondent said that her mother-in-law was the cause of the suffering she and her children are presently passing through. She revealed that her mother-in-law started making trouble when her husband gave her some money to start a building project in the village. According to the respondent, her mother-in-law had always complained that though she suffered to make her son what he is today, she was the one enjoying her son's money. She said her husband believed the evils his mother kept speaking against her and started acting cruel towards her; finally he served her with a divorce letter. She lamented that today, it is the mother-in-law who occupies the house she and her husband built in the village (Igabo 26th May 2016: focus group).

The above experiences reveal how the influence of parents and in-laws on a couple could sometimes have a negative impact. It is for the purpose of regulating the excesses and interference of parents and in-laws on marriages that Bimpong (2013) advocates for a premarital counseling that involves in-laws. The influence of parents and in-laws on a marriage can either be positive or negative depending on the nature of their involvement. There are biblical examples of supportive in-law relationships such as the relationship between Ruth and Naomi, Peter and his mother-in-law, and Jethro, who guided Moses. But parents and in-laws can sometimes be a heavy burden for the couple to bear if their influence on the couple is negative; for instance, David's father-in-law went to the extent of tracking him down to kill him (Townsend 2008: website). The relationship between parents/in-laws and the couple can be supportive rather than destructive if healthy boundaries are clearly set before the wedding and kept when the couple are married. In the following segment, I shall be discussing the ERCC model of premarital counselling among the Alago people.

4.5 The ERCC model of premarital counselling

In the ERCC, the responsibility of ensuring that intending couples undergo premarital counselling is vested in the Local Church Council which is headed by an ordained minister (The Constitution of the ERCC 2014:16). Usually, the premarital counselling process begins upon a couple's declaration of intention for a church wedding to the minister and continues till the wedding day. From my experience as an ordained minister, it is the minister that arranges with the couple the time and venue for the counselling. Additionally, the style of counselling and the frequency of the minister's interaction with the intending couple are left to the minister's discretion as the church does not have any specific rule concerning this. The ERCC Constitution simply enjoins ministers to ensure that the intending couples are counselled on a regular basis (2014:16). Under this section, I shall be discussing the ERCC model of premarital counselling.

4.5.1 Educating the intending couple about issues related to the stability of marriage

From my experience as an ordained minister in the ERCC, premarital counselling sessions usually provide the minister with an opportunity to educate the couple on vital topics that would promote stability in Christian marriage. The common issues about which the minister educates the couple include the following:

4.5.1.1 Helping the intending couple to cultivate an awareness of their spiritual compatibility for marriage

The first area of emphasis in the ERCC premarital counselling is the spiritual condition of those that are preparing for marriage. Usually it is the minister that seeks to find out from the couple whether both of them are born-again Christians, baptized members of the church, and are in full fellowship with the church. A respondent in the ERCC ministers/church elders focus group discussion explained that he usually cautions intending couples that marriage must be entered into according to the will of God and must not be rushed into based on outward beauty alone but also based on good character and spiritual maturity. He says he warns the youths against the present Pentecostal influence that makes it easy for them to attribute every decision they make to the Holy Spirit by saying, ‘The Spirit tells me to marry her’ and sometimes when one checks very well one will find out that there is nothing spiritual about it (Akawu 26th/5/2016: focus group).

One of the respondents recounted some of the things his pastor emphasized during one of the premarital counselling sessions they had: “Our Reverend emphasized that our spiritual life must be upright and that we must dedicate ourselves to church activities in order to succeed in our marriage. He urged that we should take our marriage vows very seriously as failure to do so can lead to painful consequences” (Sunday 13th/6/2016: interview). Another respondent said, “I remember my Reverend told us that as a couple we must have the fear of God in all that we do in order to succeed in our marriage” (Ogiri 13th/6/2016: interview). Stressing the importance of genuine Christian conversion and maturity to the stability of marriage, Dollar submits that “During the dating process, the two of you should have plenty to talk about. If you are a

Christian, the first thing you need to know before you make a lifetime commitment is if the person is hungry for God. Find out if the person is truly born again” (2002:60). Dollar further asserts that the things to find out as to whether the person one is dating is truly a Christian include: reading the Bible regularly, when and how the person prays, how the person talks, what the person often thinks about, how often the person goes to church, and whether the person has to be motivated to seek after God. If a Christian is considering marrying a person who is recently converted to Christianity, it would be like an adult marrying a child (2002:61). After an intending couple has an assurance of the new birth, there is also the need for spiritual growth which can be attained through fellowshiping with other believers, praying together, as well as studying the word of God together (Akanni 2004:216). In my view, the spiritual life of the couple deserves priority attention in premarital counselling because “the spirit of a man is the person he is inside... it is also the part of him that can either be dead or alive to God” (Akanni 2004:216). Once the spirit of a man is joined to that of a woman, both of them seem to see things with each other’s eye, but if the spirits are in opposition there will always be a breakdown from the inside (Akanni 2004:216).

4.5.1.2 Helping the intending couple to know their health/pregnancy status

As a method of premarital counselling in the ERCC, the intending couple is required to undergo medical examination twice before the wedding day. The ERCC Constitution provides that the first medical test shall be carried out within the first three months of the couple’s declaration of intention to the minister that they want to be married. The second medical screening shall be conducted within the last three months (2014:16). This means that the ERCC minister must be given at least six months’ notice of an intention to be wedded in the church if he must meet with this constitutional provision. One of the ministers states that in one of his counselling sessions with an intending couple, he found out that the man was HIV positive while the woman was negative. According to the minister, he asked if they had any sexual knowledge of each other during their courtship and both of them answered in the affirmative. He then explained to them some of the implications of joining the two of them in marriage given that they were a mixed-status couple. But the lady who was non-reactive insisted that not even the fear of HIV could

stop her from getting married to the young man because she loved him. The lady said even if she would die the following day after marrying the man she would be satisfied because it would be known that she died as his wife. The minister adds that having prayed to God for the forgiveness of their sins, he treated the matter as confidential and proceeded with the wedding (Yohanna 24th/5/2016: interview).

Some medical experts have argued that “For mixed-status couples, the possibility of HIV infection is a constant reality. There is always a risk of transmitting HIV, but you can minimize it” (AIDS.gov 2015: website). However, studies have shown that “Having HIV does not prevent you from dating or marrying—it just may require a little more responsibility and trust from you and your partner (AIDS.gov 2014: website). The World Health Organization’s position on mixed-status couples is that “In addition to correct and consistent use of condoms, counsellors may suggest that the HIV-positive partner take antiretroviral drugs, regardless of his or her immune status. Studies show that this can both keep the positive partner healthier for longer, and reduce the risk they will pass the virus to their loved one” (‘World Health Organization’ 2012: website). Another respondent narrates how they (the minister and his council of elders) handled a case of premarital pregnancy. The minister explained that sometimes one finds out during the premarital investigation that the bride-to-be is already pregnant and such was usually a difficult situation deal with. He said there was a case in which the bride-to-be tested positive for pregnancy but she confessed that another man was responsible for the pregnancy she was carrying and not her proposed husband. The bridegroom-to-be also confirmed that he never had any sexual intercourse with the lady during their courtship. In tears the lady asked the man and the church elders for forgiveness. The elders asked the man what he thought should be done about the issue and he asked for time to think about the way forward. After a discussion with his confidant, the man came back and said he had made up his mind to marry the lady though she was carrying another man’s baby in her womb, and he took her as his wife. According to the minister, the marriage was no longer a church affair because the lady was already pregnant. Therefore, the church elders promised to keep their lips mute on the matter and later placed both of them under church discipline (suspension from partaking in Holy Communion) for the premarital pregnancy and for the out-of-church marriage (Goge 3rd/7/2016: interview).

From my experience, the ERCC wedding policy does not allow for a wedding to be held if a case of pregnancy is established with an intending bride. This is because the ERCC believes that premarital sex is a sin against God and when such an unholy act results in pregnancy, it becomes a public sin which requires public discipline in line with the teaching of the Bible which states: “Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that others may take warning” (1 Timothy 5:20). Commenting on the consequences of sexual gratification outside marriage, O’Donovan observes that “When people try to satisfy their sexual desires outside marriage, marriages are destroyed, families are ruined and individual lives are brought under the curse of God’s judgment” (1996:284).

A respondent in the ERCC ministers/church elders focus group discussion pointed out that he usually involved parents of the intending couple in his premarital counselling because they would help him obtain some facts about the intending couple in relation to their biological fitness for marriage. Sharing his experience, the respondent says there was a case of a marriage that was contracted in the church without proper investigation. After the wedding, the wife later found out that her husband could not perform his duty as a man to his wife (meaning the man was not sexually active). The husband convinced the wife to keep the matter as a secret between them and arranged with another man to satisfy his wife sexually. As a result of this arrangement, the wife bore two children for her husband. After giving birth to the second child, the woman said she was fed up and could no longer continue in such self-deception. She later divorced the man and got married to a Muslim. Her second marriage did not last long before she died; leaving her two children. The respondent further admits that he, therefore, involves parents of the intending couple in his premarital counselling to find out from them if there is something they know about their children which renders them unfit for marriage, to avoid unpleasant situations such as the one narrated above (Mutashi 26th/5/2016: focus group).

Other topics that the ERCC minister educates the intending couple about during premarital counselling include finances, sexuality, in-law relationships, parenting, communication, roles/responsibilities, and conflict resolution.

4.5.2 Interfacing between the bride and groom's families and between the families of the intending couple and the church

The minister usually presents the marriage proposal of an intending couple to the local church council of elders who will delegate the church's marriage committee to oversee the marriage preparations. The marriage committee has a duty to interface between families of the intending couple and the church for the purpose of ensuring that all ecclesiastical and traditional requirements relating to the proposed marriage are met in accordance with the church policies and practices. This is because the church will not officiate the marriage if the traditional aspects are not met. However, there are exceptional cases where the family of the bride may permit the church to officiate the marriage even when some traditional requirements for the bride price are still outstanding. This usually happens after negotiations are reached between the two families. From the researcher's experience, in most cases, members of the Church marriage committee usually accompany the family of the intending husband to the family of the intending wife during the payment of bride price to provide a Christian presence in an occasion that is purely regarded as traditional. At times the church representatives join the family of the groom-to-be in soliciting for a beating down of the bride price if it is considered to be too exorbitant. The church delegation also assists in pleading for the removal of any ungodly requirements from the list of items required of the family of the bridegroom. A respondent recalls that when they were preparing for their wedding, his in-laws included two cartons of beer in the list of items which he was required to give as bride price. The respondent said he tried to explain to them that as a Christian it would not be proper for him to give alcoholic beverages as part of his wife's bride price, because it goes against what he believes. But his in-laws insisted and they kept dragging on the matter because they also claimed that they were Christians. According to the in-laws, there was a need for them to include the two cartons of beer in the list of items required because they had to provide drinks for other non-Christian family members and guests who take beer –

threatening that they would reject the bride price entirely unless the young man complied. Fortunately for the young man, the church representatives were present on the day they took the bride price to his in-laws. Upon their arrival at the family compound of the bride, the church delegates called two influential elders of the bride's family aside and interacted with them. The two men later went back and spoke with other stakeholders of the family and the items they took to them as the bride price were finally accepted without the cartons of beer earlier required (Ogiri 13th/6/2016: interview).

From my experience, a church wedding can be delayed or even postponed if the two families (that of the bride and groom) fail to reach an agreement over the payment of bride price. O'Donovan has this to say on the outcome of delaying a Christian marriage due to certain cultural demands: "Such reasons may seem to make sense but they lack God's wisdom and God's blessing. Delaying marriages for such reasons often lead to long engagements. In such cases the engaged couple may be tempted to have sex with each other before marriage because their desires are so strong...which leads to sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies and abortion" (2000:80). Let me also observe at this point that some times what we call Christian marriage is reduced to a "white wedding" which is a western culture that has greatly influenced the African church. Such misconceptions might also be responsible for the delay in young people getting married. Never the less, Christians who insist on high bride price are making the big mistake of placing their value systems on material things, which are only temporal. Apostle Paul encourages Christians to place their value systems on things that are eternal rather than on earthly things (Colossians 3:2). High bride price or dowry (popularly called *gara* in the Hausa language) does not guarantee a stable and successful Christian marriage. Success in Christian marriage depends on doing what pleases God. People may find acceptance in the sight of men, but will not be received by God because of their ungodliness. Akanni believes that wisdom and patience is needed in handling matters relating to high bride price and unbiblical cultural demands. He pointed out that while the bride and the groom prayerfully discuss with parents over it, such issues should not be used as an occasion to insult or dishonor parents as there is no heart so hard that God cannot break it (2001:35). The church marriage committee usually presents its report to the church elders through the minister. If the elders are satisfied with the

report of the marriage committee regarding the level of preparations for the marriage, the minister would then be permitted to seek the consent of the bride and groom's parents for the marriage notification to be announced.

4.5.3 Obtaining the consent of the bride and groom's parents on the proposed marriage

Another method of premarital counselling in the church is seeking for the consent of the bride and groom's parents on the planned wedding. Before the wedding day, the church invites the bride and the groom alongside their parents to sign an agreement that all the requirements³⁵ for the intending marriage have been duly met in accordance with ERCC policies and practices, which are grounded on both African and Western values, and that the church can proceed to notify the congregation. Here is a sample of the ERCC marriage agreement register:

I ... son of ... wish to notify the congregation that all requirements have been met for the marriage between ... daughter of ... and me according to the Christian tradition. I am willing to fulfill other conditions necessary for the notification of this marriage in line with the Christian teaching. I also testify that there is no other marriage between me and another woman apart from ... and I do not know any reason why the congregation should not be notified about our marriage in accordance to the Christian teaching (see ERCC Marriage Agreement Register).

The ERCC marriage agreement register is usually endorsed by the groom, the bride, bride and groom's parents and the officiating minister. Usually, the presentation of the bride for the wedding is done by her father or guardian to the church through the minister during this event. The signing of the marriage agreement register served as a formal giving of the bride to the church for onward joining of the marriage as the church does not give room for any giving of the bride's hand for marriage on the wedding day.

³⁵ Usually, the requirements include settlement of the bride price, which varies depending on the custom of a particular ethnic group, and premarital checks such as pregnancy and HIV screenings.

4.5.4 Notifying the congregation about a couple's intention for a Christian marriage

Premarital counselling in the ERCC involves galvanizing the support of the church for marriage stability; the notification of marriage serves this purpose in the sense that once the congregation is notified about the proposed marriage, they are expected to be interceding for the couple in prayers and to assist them in terms of their financial and material needs for the marriage. After the consent of the couple and of their parents are obtained, the minister then notifies the church about the intending marriage, usually in the language the congregation best understands, at least eight days before the wedding day (ERCC Service Handbook ND:8). The ERCC marriage notification reads:

This is to be announced that all matters relating to the marriage of ... son of ... and ..., daughter of ... have been completed and that the couple wish to be married according to Christian practice. If anyone knows any good reasons why this marriage should not take place according to Christian beliefs and practices, let him/her now declare it or remain silent forever (ERCC Service Handbook ND:8).

It is important to observe here that neither the ERCC Service Handbook nor the ERCC Constitution clearly spell out such reasons that may warrant cancelation of a marriage proposal. Also, the two important documents of the ERCC do not provide any *modus operandi* for handling any reasons that may be advanced against a proposed marriage should they arise. However, from the researcher's experience, some of the reasons that could call for termination of a proposed marriage in the ERCC include evidence of pregnancy before the wedding day, incompatible genotype, or if one of the couple is tested positive for HIV. Again, how these issues are handled depend on the wisdom of the minister. The proposed wedding may be called off if the bride-to-be is tested positive for pregnancy. Such pregnancy was regarded as evidence that one of the couple or both of them have indulged in sexual intercourse before marriage, which is a disciplinary issue in the church. Other conditions that may terminate an intended marriage in ERCC include certified medical evidence that one of the couple is HIV positive and the other negative, a case of incompatible genotype, or if there are proofs that one of the intending couple

was already a husband or wife to some other person. After investigations are carried out, any of the couple found to have acted in violation against the church doctrine would proceed on church discipline.

4.5.5 Planning of the wedding programme in collaboration with the couple and their families

The ERCC believes that a well prepared order of wedding service is an important method of premarital counselling (ERCC Service Handbook ND:7). The wedding day is one of the days a couple would live to remember all their life if it is well planned. Usually the minister goes through the order of the wedding service with the couple; educating them about the significance of the vows they would make before God and the kind of responses expected of them during the officiating of the wedding. Taylor argues that “The order of service for a Christian wedding should be clear and easily understood by the couple themselves and by their families and friends sharing in the service. This means going through the service very carefully with the couple beforehand and conducting it in clear and open way” (1994:191). Taylor further explained that a well-planned wedding programme is not only a blessing to the couple and their families but also a witness to other guests at the wedding who are not Christians. To buttress his point, Taylor cited a reaction by a guest at a well-planned Christian wedding service thus: “I was married recently, in a registry office, because I’ve always been a convinced atheist. But this was such a wonderful wedding today that I really regret I am not a Christian and cannot have a marriage like that” (1994:192). Therefore, the minister, in collaboration with the couple, designs the wedding programme so as to achieve the objective stated above. A typical ERCC wedding programme includes the following key elements: singing of hymns and special songs (by various spiritual groups); welcome address by host minister; solemnization of marriage (by the officiating minister); the sermon; prayers for the couples and free will offering in support of the couple (see ERCC Service Handbook ND:7-11).

It is important to note that the content of song ministrations by spiritual groups in the church such as the choir and the women's fellowship as well as that of the sermon preached on the wedding day are expressions of worship and thanksgiving to God for the gift of marriage as well as exhortations to the couple on what they must do or avoid, to achieve stability in their marriage (see Mack 2013:232).

From my personal experience, during the special prayer for the couple the minister may invite other ordained ministers present to come and join him as they surround the couple in laying their hands on them for divine blessings. This is usually done to show that the couple needs to count on the spiritual support of ministers for the success of their marriage. After the special prayer session offered for the couple, the minister then asks them to take their seats as they prepare their hearts for the wedding sermon (see figure 7 in Appendix, 1). The solemnization of the marriage is immediately followed by a sermon which is usually centered on Christian marriage. After the sermon is delivered, the minister invites the wedding party³⁶ to sign the marriage register which is in duplicate; the original copy is presented to the couple as a proof that they are legitimately husband and wife and can be tendered as an official document to both sacred and secular institutions when need arises (see figure 8 in Appendix 1).³⁷ The duplicate of the marriage certificate is kept by the minister as one of the vital church records that can be used in future to help resolve any legal matter that may pertain to the couple or to help church members trace their roots within the larger family of God's people (see Laron 1996:115).

4.5.6 Collecting of wedding gifts and donations to support the couple

During the wedding service, an opportunity is given for free will offering and donation of wedding gifts to support the new couple. Usually, Bible gifts are presented to the couple during

³⁶ In ERCC, the wedding party required to sign the marriage register include the bride, the groom, bride and groom's parents, a witness each for the bride and groom, and the officiating minister (ERCC Constitution 2014:16).

³⁷ Given the fact that the ERCC is a duly registered church with the Corporate Affairs Commission of Nigeria as mentioned earlier in this chapter, the marriage certificate which is issued to the couple on their wedding day is a legal document. By having their marital union solemnized by the church, the couple no longer needs a court certificate to legalize their marriage.

the wedding service to teach the couple that they must seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness before other material things (Matthew 6:33). Other wedding gifts such as money and clothes are given to the couple during the wedding reception; the essence of this gesture is to help the couple begin their marriage life without much stress. Sometimes these wedding gifts go a long way in helping the new couple offset any outstanding debt that might have been incurred during the wedding preparations. One of the respondents mentioned that “I had to obtain some crates of minerals and Maltina (soft drink) on credit from a supermarket to provide refreshment during our wedding because all the money my parents and I saved towards my wedding went into settlements of the bride price, refreshment arrangements, and cost of transportation. But we really thank God for the financial support we received from the church during our wedding. A day after our wedding, we were able to pay all the money to the owner of the supermarket when the empty crates were returned” (Ogiri 13th/6/2016: interview). Another respondent said: “If not for the money the church gave us during our wedding, I wonder where my husband would have gotten the money to balance the bus driver who conveyed my parents and relations that came for our wedding” (Sunday 13th/6/2016).

4.6 The advantages and disadvantages of the ERCC model of premarital counselling

4.6.1 The advantages of the ERCC model of premarital counselling

4.6.1.1 Assessing the spiritual compatibility of intending couple

Almost all the wedded couples interviewed mentioned that during their premarital counselling the ministers helped them to evaluate their spiritual relationship before they were joined together as husband and wife. Usually, the minister seeks to know if the man and the woman are both baptized members of the church and are currently in good standing as communicant members. Often, the minister would ask for their baptism cards to check if they do partake in Holy Communion regularly. He would also ask about their prayer life as well as their participation in church activities. I think that this is an important measure towards promoting marriage stability. As earlier mentioned in this chapter, one of the respondents who is a divorcee blamed her present predicament on herself and one of her uncles for ignoring the implications of marrying a man

who was not a committed Christian (Daniel 26th/5/2016: focus group). I disagree with the philosophy that says, “Differing spiritual beliefs need not be a problem as long as couples discuss and reach an understanding of how they will function together spiritually in practice, beliefs, with children, etc” (Erricson, No Date). This is because the testimony of the divorcee in question shows that reaching an understanding on how to cope with such differing spiritual beliefs before marriage could only be a superficial exercise that may lead to painful regrets. I think that while assessing the spiritual compatibility of intending couple may not be important for some, it is of paramount importance for a Christian, because Christian marriage is also a spiritual relationship and spiritual compatibility will influence the quality of other aspects of the marriage relationship such as the physical and the emotional aspects. Though it may be difficult for the minister to assess the spiritual condition of a partner before marriage, it can be helpful for a person to ask if their partner is born again, prayerful and interested in spiritual activities in the church (see Akanni 2004: 216). The ERCC’s emphasis on evaluating the spiritual compatibility of couples before marriage gives them the benefit of building their marital relationships on Christian values, trust, and love that would enable them to experience a special sense of joy, a spirit of team work and stability in their marriage(‘Evaluating your Spiritual Relationship Before Marriage, website).

4.6.1.2 Medical screening before the wedding

Helping an intending couple to have be aware of their health status before marriage can deepen their love for each other as well as prevent an existing problem from getting worse. The ERCC policy of premarital medical examination is in line with one of the theoretical frameworks of this study, the theory of prevention. As noted earlier in chapter three of this study, the practice of hand washing with a chlorine solution by medical doctors before touching a sick person was attested to have prevented infections (Gericke 2005). The testimony of one of the respondents about the merits of the premarital medical examination they went through affirms this argument. The respondent said he was initially scared when his Reverend (pastor) told them that they needed to go for a medical test as one of the church requirements for their wedding. He said he knew his own HIV status was negative, but was not sure of the HIV status of his wife to be.

After the medical screening, both of them were confirmed non-reactive to HIV, the pregnancy status of his intended wife was also negative. He said the doctor's confirmation really gladdened their hearts so much that they both congratulated each other on that day; adding that the result of the medical investigation has continued to serve as a great encouragement for them to remain faithful to each other in their marriage (Ogiri 26th/6/2016).

Other benefits of pre-marital medical checks include helping the couple to avoid a number of genetic, hereditary and communicable diseases, maintain a better life for their children and grand-children, control the prevalence of disability and the delivery of children with abnormalities, maintain early detection and treatment of diseases, and secure stable marriages ('Caring for the future: Advantages of Pre-Marital Medical Screening.' ND).

4.6.1.3 Church presence during the settlement of bride-price

Despite the fact that there are different types of marriage in Nigeria due to the nation's cultural and religious diversities, the payment of bride price has remained an essential part of a valid customary marriage in the country (allAfrica.com ND: website). In the ERCC, the settlement of issues related to the payment of bride price is a prerequisite for a church wedding. The process of meeting the customary requirements of marriage in Nigeria can sometimes result in bitter arguments and disagreements between the in-laws. Therefore, the presence of the church representatives at such occasions to interface between the family of the intending groom and that of the intending bride usually helps in bringing such disagreements to the barest minimum. It also sends a message to the couple, as well as other witnesses present at the occasion, that every aspect of Christian marriage, including payment of bride price, is sacred and matters to the stability of marriage, provided it is carried out in accordance to biblical principles. Akanni affirms: "Unless the parents refuse to take any dowry (bride price), it is a necessary part of the process of getting married. It also serves as a token of the agreement between the two families concerning the marriage. On no occasion should a Christian run away with a girl (or a man) in the name of marriage without settling the bride price. It is unbiblical" (2001:34). During the

payment of bride price of ERCC members, one of the church representatives is usually asked to offer the opening prayers to mark the commencement of deliberations. This gesture helps participants in the discussion to give the Holy Spirit a chance to guide them aright.

4.6.2 Disadvantages of the ERCC model of premarital counselling

This segment deals with the weaknesses inherent in the existing ERCC model of premarital counselling with the view that the church will get rid of them and adopt a more robust and comprehensive model of premarital counselling that will be proposed in chapter eight of this study.

4.6.2.1 Lack of synergy between the ERCC and indigenous models of marriage preparation

One of the demerits of the ERCC model of premarital counselling is that it does not take into account some potential resources inherent in the values of the indigenous people pertaining marriage preparation. The church has continued to maintain a model of premarital counselling that was handed down to it by the missionaries. Giving the fact that the African society is rapidly changing due to modernization and industrialization, it will not be proper for the church in Africa to have a premarital counselling model that is purely African in nature; neither will it be good for her to have a premarital counselling model that is purely western-oriented. What the ERCC needs is a counselling model that synergizes between Christian values and traditional values of the indigenous people. Kapolo (ND) rightly supports the above assertion when he says:

The changes currently taking place in the continent do not accommodate the pure African family system. A new family model is required, one that retains traditional values while accommodating insights from other cultures and taking into account the rapid changes in family, politics, religion, and economy. A pastoral counselling model for contemporary Africa must combine the insights of traditional African life care and modern family counselling systems.

The current model of premarital counselling offered by the ERCC ministers can therefore be described as insensitive to the culture of the indigenous people. This is why the contextual theory adopted for this study is quite significant. Bruner (1960) argues that contextual learning seeks to help the learner discover principles for the desired change from their environment through engagement in active dialogue. For instance, the life of an African finds definition within their community. “Particular situations have to be judged on the basis of their impact on the community. In order to avoid misunderstandings within the community, each family has the responsibility to instruct its members about the common goal of the entire community. Phrases like ‘It takes a village to raise a child’ and ‘I am, because you are’ reflect the African way of life. These phrases also reflect the responsibility of the community to raise children together” (Nganga 2010). So when premarital counselling is officially made to be the duty of pastors and their church elders alone (see ERCC Constitution 2014:16), the desired result may be difficult to achieve. This weakness will be addressed in the new comprehensive model of premarital counselling that I seek to put across in this work, even as guidelines will be given for the adoption of useful resources from the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* (communal) model of marriage preparation into the church’s current model of premarital counselling.

4.6.2.2 Minimal involvement of female counsellors

As earlier mentioned in chapter four of this study, the ERCC does not ordain women as ministers though they may be elected into leadership positions right from the Class Council to the General Church Council. This means that 100% of ministers who participated in the individual interviews and have been trained to offer premarital counselling in ERCC were male. And of the five participants at the ERCC ministers/elders’ focus group discussion, only one (20%) was a female. The only possibility of having a female counsellor offer premarital counselling in ERCC is when she happens to be a council member in the church; but even at that point the female counsellor usually offers counselling to the intending couple only from her experience as a married woman as she may have little or no formal training in counselling generally. This situation makes it difficult for the female perspective of marriage to be adequately addressed in the ERCC premarital counselling model. It is in line with the above situation that Nganga and Wasanga advocate that “Female Ministers should form part of the premarital counselling team to help

address the female perspective” (Nganga 2010). I agree with Nganga and Wasanga’s opinion because when premarital counselling is left in the hands of male counsellors who are ministers, some of them may be shy to address the female of the couple on issues of sexuality in deeper dimensions. In view of the fact that the ERCC believes that Christian marriage is between a man and a woman who believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior (ERCC Constitution 2014:14), the relevance of deliberate involvement of female counsellors in the church’s premarital counselling team cannot be overemphasized.

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented the historical development of the ERCC; stating its theology and beliefs system, vision and mission statement as well as its policies and practices, especially those related to the issue of premarital counselling. The chapter also examined the advent of Christianity (ERCC) in the Alago land, how the Alago people responded to the gospel, as well as its impact. What emerged clearly from the shortcomings of the missionaries as they sought to Christianize the Alago land was that the missionaries maintained undue disregard towards some cultural values of the Alago people, such as the *Epawoza* (communal) lifestyle and indigenous names while at the same time importing the western individualistic culture to the people under the guise of Christianization. Unfortunately, this missionary strategy led to the gradual erosion of certain important cultural values of the Alago people, particularly the *Epawoza* (communal) pattern of marriage preparation which they were known for.

The findings in this chapter have also revealed that the ERCC model of premarital counselling usually begins when a couple makes their intention to get married known to the minister and the timing for the premarital counselling is six months prior to the wedding day. The church also makes premarital counselling a church affair because the responsibility of offering premarital counselling rests on the shoulders of the local church minister and his council of elders. It has been pointed out that the ERCC has no rule concerning the location, number of sessions, duration of each session and style of premarital counselling; these are left at the minister’s

discretion. The methods of the ERCC premarital counselling include educating the couple on the need for spiritual compatibility as well as medical checks; interfacing between the bride and groom's families during payment of bride price; obtaining the consent of the bride and groom's parents on the proposed wedding; notifying the congregation about the wedding; planning the wedding programme in collaboration with the couple and their families; and collecting wedding gifts to support the couple. The discussion in this chapter further revealed the weaknesses of the ERCC model of premarital counselling, namely, lack of synergy between the church and indigenous models of marriage preparation as well as minimal involvement of female counsellors. Since the primary objective of this study is to formulate a more comprehensive model of premarital counselling that will benefit the Alago, I intend to achieve this by drawing from themes that have arisen from the indigenous Alago model of premarital counselling which I have discussed in chapter five and those that have emanated from this chapter.

From the summary of the findings in this chapter, I think there is no justification in continuing to blame the missionaries for the current challenges resulting in domestic violence and alarming rate of divorce among Alago Christians and other members of the ERCC when the ministers are still holding onto the pattern of ministry the missionaries bequeathed to them. It can be argued that what the ERCC ministers need in terms of improving their premarital counselling ministry for marriage stability today may have to do with changing the church's methods of doing ministry from the way it was introduced to them by the early missionaries over a century ago. The see-judge-act theoretical framework of this study enables us to see through the pattern of premarital counselling bequeathed to the church by the missionaries. The challenge before the church today is to examine its current practices in the light of the context of its congregants so that transformation can occur through intentional implementation of concrete actions.

In chapter five, I will dwell on the changes that have taken place in the Alago methods of premarital counselling due to influences from Christianity and modernity. I will also discuss, through a pastoral lens, the interface between the ERCC and the Alago indigenous *Epawozam* models of premarital counselling. This will serve as a basis for the development of a

new comprehensive premarital counselling model that would assist in providing the change needed by the ERCC in ministering to members who are contemplating getting married.

Chapter Five

Synergistic Premarital Pastoral Counselling (SPPC) Model for the ERCC Resulting from the Interface between the Alago Indigenous *Epawoza* and the ERCC model of premarital counselling

5.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter I paid attention to the historical development of the ERCC; the advent of Christianity to the Alago land; how the Alago people responded to the gospel, as well as its impact on their lives. The ERCC model of premarital counselling was also discussed in the previous chapter where we saw that it deals primarily with the provision of marriage education by the ministers and their council of elders with the intending couple, with the view to help them develop skills for coping with future marital challenges. Chapter four also brought to light the advantages and disadvantages of the ERCC model of premarital counselling.

The objective of this chapter is, first, to examine the changes that have occurred in the manner in which the Alago people prepared their young ones for marriage due to the influence of Christianity, Islam, westernization and modernity. Second, the chapter seeks to examine the synergy between the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* and the ERCC model of premarital counselling through the lenses of the see-judge-act theory and the contextual theory. As earlier argued in chapter three, neither the Alago nor the ERCC method of premarital counselling is able to achieve marital stability among the Alago Christians independent of the other; that is why there is need for an all-inclusive model of premarital counselling that provides a synergy between the themes that have emanated from the Alago way of preparing young people for marriage and themes arising from the ERCC model of premarital counselling (chapter five and chapter six respectively). The ideas I obtain from this dialogue enable me to address the key research question of this study: What aspects of premarital counselling from the Alago indigenous knowledge systems can be used by the church to improve stability in Alago marriage in Nigeria in a context that is full of domestic violence and alarming rates of divorce? I shall seek to achieve this from the perspective of respondents who gave their views during the interview

exercise. This chapter also seeks to develop a comprehensive model of premarital counselling for the ERCC which is called: Synergistic Premarital Pastoral Counselling (SPPC). I shall synergize the methods of premarital counselling examined in the previous chapters which were found to be useful with other important insights drawn from our detailed study of other literature which were identified as lacking in the Alago and the ERCC current models, with the view to enhancing stability of marriages among the Alago people. The discussion in this chapter takes into cognizance the three theoretical frameworks underpinning this study, namely, prevention, contextualization and the see-judge-act theories. The proposed Synergistic Premarital Pastoral Counselling (SPPC) is discussed under two major sub-topics: exposition of the SPPC model, and application of the model. Under the application of the SPPC model, the following elements are considered: encouraging early premarital counselling through godly parenting; conducting group premarital counselling with the youth; conducting premarital counseling with the intending couple; involving parents/guardians of the intending couple in premarital counselling; and conducting a comprehensive premarital checks before the wedding. Others are: notifying the church about the intended marriage; guiding, planning and conducting the wedding program in collaboration with the couple; mobilizing material support for the couple; the need for referral in premarital counseling; and recruiting competent and gender sensitive premarital counselling personnel.

5.2 Changes noticed in the Alago traditional *Epawoza* methods of marriage preparation

5.2.1 Paradigm shift on the right of choosing a marriage partner

One of the questions I asked the respondents during the interview exercise was, “Are there any changes now which you have noticed from the way the Alago people used to prepare their young ones for marriage?” One of the first themes that emerged from the respondents on the changes experienced was the idea of choosing a marriage partner. As noted in chapter five, a respondent narrated how fathers had the right to choose a wife for their sons as early as at the birth of a baby girl in the community by tying a piece of coin around one of the wrists of the baby girl, which served as a mark of her being booked for marriage (Omame 3/7/2016: interview). Kore confirms this when he points out that though there are variations in the way marriages took place among

different African tribes, one thing that can be said to be common about marriage in most African societies during the pre-colonial era is that fathers had the special right to decide who marries their children (1989:34). Usually parents made the arrangements for the person their sons and daughters would marry, taking into cognizance the reputation of the families with whom their children and they themselves would be having such a lifelong relationship (1989:34). Kore further explained that this situation is however changing in many African societies owing to the influence of western culture and civilization (1989:34). Youths who want to get married take the initiative themselves by looking for marriage partners of their own choice through friendship and courtship. But in the course of time they make it known to parents who, in most cases, formally contact the parents of the girl (1989:35). Gehman (1996) affirms that the shift in the right of choosing a wife equally results in the transfer of the responsibility of paying the bride price: “In the past the family chose the girl, but today the young man chooses his bride. So this creates a difference in how the dowry is obtained, for the responsibility of paying dowry rests with the young man”.

Another respondent said “I remember in those days you cannot marry a woman against the wishes of your parents because our people believe that a child does not know anything. In fact, there is an adage that says, ‘what an elderly person can see while in a sitting position, a child cannot see it even if he climbs a tree’. But today, due to modernity, many children think they know even better than their parents whom they usually term as ‘old school’ (those who belong to the old generation) therefore we usually witness conflict between children and their parents when it comes to deciding whom to marry” (Amokpa 3/7/2016: interview). From the above narrative, it shows that unlike in the past, today the Alago youth exercise the right of choosing their marriage mates even beyond their cultural boundaries, and later communicate the same to their parents to seek their blessing. The level of submission to the wishes of parents has also degenerated within the Alago communities. Commenting on the erosion of the value of respect for the elderly among the Alago people due to modernity and western influence, Omake asserts that a lot of young people assume that because of the western education they have acquired, they no longer owe any respect to the elders in their communities, whom they often regard as the unenlightened (2014:69). I think with the changes brought about by western civilization and the

influence of the Christian gospel in Alago land, conflicts seem to be inevitable in terms of whose interests should supersede when it comes to deciding whom to marry. This was however not common during the pre-colonial period as the wishes of parents were usually the command of their children. The question that comes to mind is whose interest must supersede when deciding whom to marry? Parents do have the right to decide whom their children should marry, but they must be allowed to guide their children so that they do not choose in error. The reason for giving parents a chance to guide their children in terms of choosing a marriage partner is that sometimes the parents may have made mistakes in the past, and they would not want the same mistake repeating itself in the marriage of their children. Giving their wealth of experience, they can as well guide their children on good qualities to look out for in choosing the person they would want to spend the rest of their life with (Amaraeibu 2009).

Amaraeibu has made a valid argument here with regards to the interplay between parents and their children in terms of choosing a marriage partner, particularly in emphasizing that both parties have a stake in this affair. Usually it becomes a problem where boundaries of involvement are not clearly delineated. In the proposed comprehensive model of premarital counselling, the need for an understanding of how to maintain healthy boundaries between children and their parents in terms of choosing a marriage partner will be stressed so that conflict of interests does not impede on the success of the marriage.

5.2.2 Attitudinal change towards character formation and property accumulation

Of the ten elderly Alago persons who gave their responses during the individual interview and the focus group discussion, seven (70%) pointed out that unlike in the past when parents were concerned about molding the character of their children with the view to preparing them to be good husbands and wives in the future, some Alago parents today worry more about what property their children can take into their matrimonial home than helping them to develop good character. This is often evident in situations whereby marriages are delayed, not because parents need more time to inculcate marriage etiquette in their children, but because they would want to gather enough property that they feel should be taken to the matrimonial home as *gara*(dowry).

In the past, there was moderation in the quantity of things that the bride takes to her matrimonial homes. Usually, like in Idoma culture, “The bride's mother buys her cooking utensils and food because she is not expected to go to the market for the first five market days after her marriage” (‘Nigeria: Marriages in Nigeria’ ND: website). This implies that the concerns of parents in the past were on meeting basic necessities of the intending couple rather than taking advantage of the intended marriage to satisfy their ego through display of wealth. Commenting on the negative implications of delaying marriages for the purpose of accumulating property for the intending couple, O’Donovan argues that such reasons appear to be good from the human point of view but when viewed from the divine perspective they amount to foolishness because they do not bring about the desired blessings for the couple; rather the couple ends up yielding to sexual temptation for the satisfaction of their strong desires, which exposes them to the risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections, premarital pregnancies, and abortion (2000:80).

Today, pride in displays of wealth during marriage occasions is not only in the parents but has also caught up with the youth themselves who think they must look for money through whatever means, even against the wishes of their parents, to get the best wedding gown/suit, hire the best catering services etc for their marriage. Responding to the question of whether there are any changes now which have been noticed from the way things used to be in the past, Omamesays, “Our children today have overpowered us! For example you see a young lady will travel to the city against the wishes of her parents in the name of going out to look for money to purchase properties for her dowry, and by the time she returns home she is already corrupted and defiled. Unlike in our days, young people today think that money is the ultimate” (3/7/2016: interview). Amokpa mentions that “In those days both the young man and the young woman usually took quality time to understand the character of each other right from their childhood. When both of them matured, their respective families took time to counsel them on how to live peacefully in their marriage. You don’t just get married because you have enough money to marry as some youths do today!” (3/7/2016: interview). Omaku attests to the above submission as he describes the current materialistic tendencies of the Alago people: “People are so materialistic and so many marriages are crumbling because of materialism. The community values have degenerated as everybody thinks of himself and herself, and would grasp any

opportunity to accumulate wealth at the expense of the community members” (2014:69). Omaku makes a valid argument because he links the current state of instability in marriages to the present degeneration of societal values which, according to him is rooted in materialism. This attitudinal change is not unconnected with the fact that people in the society today, and even the church generally, tend to gravitate towards materialism more than integrity. Low (ND) argues that people become materialistic when they use other people and love things when in fact, they should love people and use things. Success in marriage also seems to be measured in terms of property accumulation rather than mutual love, commitment and peaceful coexistence between the spouses. Though study has shown that happiness can be determined by a person’s economic circumstances (Headey, Muffels& Wooden 2008:65), material wealth may not give ultimate satisfaction to a couple in their marriage without good character. The importance of placing the priority of decent character above the quest for material things is reflected in this Chinese saying: “If there is righteousness in the heart, there will be beauty in the character. If there is beauty in the character there will be harmony in the home. If there is harmony in the home, there will be order in the nation, when there is order in each nation there will be peace in the world” (Hunt1981:74).

5.2.3 Paradigm shift from African worldview of inter-dependency to the attitude of self-sufficiency

There seems to be a change in the attitude from mutual dependence on one another in the community to individualism. Contrary to the indigenous *Epawoza* (communal) lifestyle that the Alago people were known for during the pre-colonial dispensation, many Alago people today no longer appreciate communal interests as their attention is now on self-actualization, occasioned by the influence of globalization, westernization, urbanization and technology. One of the respondents said, “Our young ones today are borrowing from the culture of the white men; they no longer show the kind of love and respect we used to share in the past. Although the white men (sic) have brought us some good things, their culture has separated us from one another. We do say *epawoza* (we are together) but every person now is concerned about what happens in his or her immediate family” (Ozegya 26/5/2016: interview). Omaku anchors the above view when he

laments that the communal culture of the Alago has now been replaced with individualism, self-centeredness and unhealthy competition, even amongst brothers and sisters in the community (2014:69). Study has shown that during the pre-colonial era, the sub-Saharan Africans viewed marriage as a community affair and have acted towards it in that collective spirit. One of the major characteristics of the African society was the community participation in marriage. Marriage was never limited to the relationship between the couple alone but a covenant between two families. The voice of the clan on matters of marriage was prominent because as a result of marriage, a new member is welcomed and incorporated into the clan (Cormacburke.org 2010:website). Oyeka (ND) also compares the divergence between the understanding of marriage from the perspective of indigenous Africans and the Christian orientation when he argues that within the African cultural context, marriage is perceived as a communal phenomenon owing to the fact that it is the community that takes major decisions on a marriage and not the couple. But in the Christian orientation of marriage, it is the couple who, out of their love for each other, rooted in Christ, take conscious decisions about their future life together.

Let me add at this juncture that in some Alago communities today, you find that a couple is preparing to get married without members of their community knowing about it, except their immediate family members. Sometimes a community member only hears rumors that this and that person are getting married, and sometimes even when wedding invitation cards are served to members of the community, they are given at the last minute, which often does not give enough space of time for community members to participate meaningfully in the marriage proceedings. In such situations, the couple ends up going into marriage without tapping enough from the rich resources that the community can offer towards the stability of their marriage.

5.2.4 Virginitv testing

All the elderly Alago persons interviewed agreed that virginitv testing, which used to be an important act of marriage preparation in the region, has currently been abrogated as it is now regarded as an uncivilized practice. Though this change may be seen as a positive transformation

in Alago land, today the value of fidelity which this archaic custom sought to preserve has also become a mirage in the land. Omaku rightly notes that currently parents no longer uphold nor inculcate the ideals of fidelity and virginity in their children, a situation which has led to widespread promiscuity among young people, as well as elders in the society (2014:71). I absolutely believe that the Alago indigenous rite of virginity testing which was discussed in chapter five was gender biased and a violation of the dignity of the womanhood, but the problem I see with the extinction of virginity test in Alago land today is that there is no proper replacement of mechanisms for ensuring that young men and women maintain chaste until they are married. Though the rite of virginity testing was an uncivilized custom, it was an effective way of preserving chastity before marriage and had served to curb the spread of sexually transmitted diseases in the society as far as the indigenous Alago people were concerned. In some instances, if a bride was found to be a virgin, the groom's clan, out of excitement and appreciation, gave something in addition to the bride price already paid. At times the mother was given a cow as a mark of respect she deserved for bringing up her daughter in a decent way. On the contrary, a girl who was known to be loose could only hope to be married to an old man to help his first, second or third wife, which was regarded as a disgrace to her entire family (Cormacburke, 2010: website).

The Alago people have lost this rich African value and have embraced the western culture that tends to admire sexual permissiveness under the guise of respect for individual rights; resulting in corruption in individuals, especially in the young people (Cormacburke, 2010). A respondent recalled that "In those days during the traditional rite of *okwinu*(virginity testing), the song usually sang to a virgin bride was different from that of a bride that was already defiled. But today whether a bride is a virgin or not she would be celebrated on her wedding day because we no longer care to know!" (Adeka 26/5/2016: interview). Let me state that the Alago rite of *okwinu* also shows how sin was frowned on and how virtue was rewarded in the community. It has been argued that "... it is also true that the African retained and retains a keen sense of sin, especially in an area considered to be as sacred as sex. It is in fact this native African sense of sin (derived from his sense of sacred realities) that so predisposes the African towards Christianity.

The powerful attraction that Christianity has for him lies precisely in its being – and being presented as –a religion of salvation, of liberation from sin” (Cormacburke ND: website). Therefore, if one thinks that the virginity testing was like dirty water which must be discarded, wisdom requires that one does not throw out the baby with the bathwater (see Herman 2014).

5.2.5 Preparing the boy-child for marriage

As earlier mentioned in chapter five, responses from some of the elderly persons interviewed have revealed that Alago boys were trained and disciplined to be hard working at tilling the farms to enable them compete favorably with their age group whenever they would go to their in-laws’ farms to pay homage, which was regarded as part-payment of the bride price. In the evenings, the boys would usually engage one another in wrestling contests as a way of developing their capacity to protect their future wives. But now such processes of training aimed at preparing the boy-child for marriage are considered obsolete. The respondents agree that young men now compete in the intellectual space through the acquisition of modern education and vocational skills in various institutions of higher learning. Though a good number of parents still value hard work, especially in terms of farming, as an important factor for future marriage stability, priority is now given to western education. Today, instead of buying a small hoe for the boy-child so he can start going to farm, the first thing a parent thinks of buying for his son as he starts growing is a writing pen and a book (Atoshi 26/5/2016: interview). From my experience, I have observed that in most Alago clans today, the hitherto emphases on training the male child to be a good farmer so he can provide enough food for his wife and children when he finally gets married has drastically reduced as agriculture seems no longer to be a profitable venture in Nigeria. Farming today can best be described as a secondary occupation especially among the youths. But what are some of the reasons responsible for the gradual abandonment of this traditional occupation in which boys were trained, to qualify them as responsible husbands in the future? Perhaps the influence of the modern society makes some of them to feel that farming is no longer a civilized occupation. In an article titled, “*Why are rural youth leaving farming?*”, a publication of the United Nations, it is revealed that “... access to information, lack of credit and negative perceptions around farming are the leading reasons why African young people (some)

are leaving small farming at such alarming rates” (‘why are rural youth leaving farming?’ 2016: website). I think that the government has also not created an enabling environment for this traditional but relevant occupation to thrive in Nigeria and perhaps in other parts of Africa. Recently, the President of Council, Chartered Institute of Bankers of Nigeria, Segun Ajibola (2010), has blamed the current recession in Nigeria on the neglect of farming. Ajibola (2010) further lamented that the economic prospects of Nigeria was quite promising during the independence (1960) because agriculture was playing the leading role in the country’s economy, as it was contributing up to 80 per cent to the total export earnings. But currently, agriculture is contributing less than 10 per cent to income generated from exportation of commodities in Nigeria.

From my experience as one who grew up in Alago community and has worked in the region as an ordained minister, some of the youths who have graduated from the universities are now either idle or running from one office to another in search of white collar jobs without any significant success due to the high unemployment rate, while their ancestral farmlands are left fallow. The negative implication of this trend in Nigeria is that the western education, which most Alago boys have now acquired, does not seem to be providing enough food on the table for themselves let alone equip them for the challenges of paying their future bride price. It, therefore, implies that there is a paradigm shift from physical and vocational training of children in preparation for marriage to intellectual training/discipline.

Six of the respondents interviewed also agreed that the payment of bride price among the Alago clans has changed; a large percentage of bride price is no longer paid with farming but with money. Just as I have mentioned earlier, many youths can no longer engage in direct labor on the farm, hence the traditional farming for in-laws has gradually phased out. Farming for the bride’s parent has now been monetized; other requirements include crates of beverages, bags of grain and soup ingredients. One of the respondents gave a breakdown of the current bride price as follows: Money replacing farming for the father in-law – N 5,000 (Five thousand naira); Money replacing farming for the mother in-law – N 5,000 (Five thousand naira); Money for the

grandfather-in-law – N 5,000 (Five thousand naira) and money for the grandmother-in-law – N 5,000 (Five thousand naira); making a total of twenty thousand naira (N 20,000).³⁸ In addition to the monies that are usually paid in bulk, a set of modern bag containing assorted wraps including *Otenahekeh*(the traditional attire), underwear, towel, necklaces and other jewelry are presented as the bride price (Ozegya 2016: interview). In the past, the father of the bridegroom, his uncles and other members of his clan paid the bride price, but today the bridegroom himself takes most of the responsibility of settling the bride price because the young men are now more financially independent than in the past. Today, the spirit of greed is gradually skyrocketing bride price, resulting in the gradual loss of the significance of this indigenous practice, the exchange of love. Mbuvi et al rightly explain the change in attitude of many African parents today towards payment of bride price when they argue that in the past, bride price was given as an expression of love and gratitude to the parents of the girl and to demonstrate the level of commitment of the young man who wanted to marry the girl. But today the word “fees” is used by parents of the bride in referring to bride price, which must be given as compensation for the resources invested in the girl (1996:128). I think that even though there might be a designated amount as bride price, either in cash or kind depending on cultural divergences, the right approach to the payment of bride price is for parents of the bride to allow the suitor pay it according to his ability, because all hands are not equal. This will also show that they love their prospective son-in-law as much as they love their daughter. For example, Mbuvi et al argue that Abraham gave out of his wealth when his son, Isaac wanted to marry Rebecca, while Jacob, who was materially poor, gave his labor as payment of bride price to marry Rachel (1996:132). Given the current change in attitude towards bride price, there is a need for premarital counselling to include the participation of parents so that they may also be educated about the kind of role they are expected to play towards ensuring stability of the future marriage of their children. I will give details in the proposed comprehensive model of premarital counselling in the subsequent chapter.

5.3 The interface between the Alago indigenous and the ERCC models of premarital counselling

³⁸ The current Alago bride price is subject to review in line with inflation.

In this segment, I will be examining the interface between the Alago indigenous way of marriage preparation and the Christian (ERCC) model of premarital counselling with the view to extract positive values from the culture of the Alago people that the church can adopt towards enhancing stability in Alago marriages. I will also try to show how this engagement is important to persons within their own contexts. Msomi advocates that in ministering to people in their own context, counsellors must understand the dynamics of sympathy, empathy and interpathy. Augsburg (1986), cited by Msomi (2008:206), explains the relationship of these three concepts in counselling people contextually when he states that sympathy is the natural emotional response of the counsellor who tries to identify with the client based on their similar experiences. On the other hand, empathy is the helpful response of the counsellor to the client based on their divergent experiences. And interpathy is a deliberate effort towards knowing and understanding the view and belief of another person. The discussion on the interface between the Alago indigenous and the ERCC models of premarital counselling will include wedding notification, premarital investigation, personnel involved in premarital counselling, settlement of bridal wealth as well as collecting/distributing wedding gifts.

5.3.1 Notification of marriage among the Alago

The medium by which the community was notified that a couple was preparing for marriage was through the sharing of cola nuts to adult members of the extended family and well-wishers. On the other hand, the ERCC notifies its congregation about a proposed marriage through announcements usually passed by the minister during one of its monthly local church conventions or communion services³⁹ According to the ERCC Service Handbook, the notification of marriage “is to be read in the church, in the language the congregation will best understand, at least eight days before the date of the marriage” (ND:6). Historically, the purpose of the wedding notification was to enable the church and the couples to uncover any factors that might render the marriage invalid should the wedding take place. By notifying the public in advance about the couple’s plans to marry, hidden issues can be forced to come to light for

³⁹ Let me clarify here that in the ERCC, only communicant members of the church are allowed to have a church wedding because they are regarded as full church members (The Constitution of ERCC 2014:15). Confessional members who want to have a church wedding must get baptized and remain in good standing with the church.

possible redress ('Why doesn't the church publish marriage banns anymore?' 2015: website). In the ERCC, the wedding notification helps the church to resolve any issues that might be advanced by any member of the church against the marriage. The concluding statement in the ERCC notification of marriage reads: "If anyone knows any good reasons why this marriage should not take place according to Christian beliefs and practices, let him/her now declare it or remain silent forever" (ERCC Service Handbook ND:6). Yohanna recalled that while they were preparing for the wedding of a couple, he never knew there was a hidden issue until the wedding notification was read to the congregation. A member came and reported to him that the intending groom was already married and that his wife stayed in the village. After the report was carefully investigated, it was found out that the man truly has a wife and two children in the village. Consequently, the church elders later made their decision known to the intending couple that the ERCC does not endorse such marriages, hence the proposed marriage was nullified. Eventually, the couple went ahead and married each other in a traditional way (2016: interview).

If no good reason is presented before the church to invalidate the proposed marriage before the wedding day, it shows that the minister can proceed to join the couple as husband and wife.⁴⁰ The question is how did the Alago people respond to marriage notification? Usually the community begins to watch over the intending couple to guard against anything that might lead them to put the family and the entire community to shame. Relations and well-wishers also begin to prepare what to give in support of the couple, both in cash and in kind, before the wedding day. On the part of the groom's family, such support helps them in providing food and drinks to guests who may come to witness the wedding. And on the part of the bride's family, such community support assists them in acquiring *Gara* (bridal property) that the bride takes to her matrimonial home. The giving of a wedding cola nut to any member of the Alago community signifies that their support of the intended marriage really counts. The receiving and consumption of the cola nuts by members of the community is a sign that they have given their

⁴⁰ It is worth noting here that the current practice in the ERCC no longer gives room for any reason to be advanced against pronouncing the couple as husband and wife on the wedding day, so that no one is allowed to throw the entire church into confusion while the wedding ceremony is already taking place.

blessing to the proposed marriage and have accepted responsibility to stand by the couple in ensuring that the marriage works.

5.3.2 Premarital investigations

Among the Alago people, inquests are made into the character of the intending couple and the reputation of their family history. As we have earlier noted in chapter five, the Alago culture requires that parents investigate who wants to marry their son or daughter. In such cases, a marriage engagement can be called off upon the discovery of mental disease, epilepsy, mysterious deaths or similar problems from such family history. The fear was that such elements might negatively affect the stability of the future marriage; hence coping with a broken engagement was preferred to a divorce. As noted earlier in chapter six, the ERCC has a more formal procedure for conducting an investigation on an intending couple (see the Constitution of the ERCC 2014:16). By the authority vested in the ministers, they have the permission to probe into the life of the couple with the view to helping them bring out any matter that needs to be discussed, such as relevant to their spiritual and physical health conditions. Like it is in the Alago tradition, a marriage engagement in ERCC can also be called off if the result of investigations carried out poses a danger to the stability of the proposed marriage. However, from my experience as an ordained minister in the ERCC, the church does not encourage calling off a marriage engagement simply on the grounds that one of the couple has a bad family record. So long as both the bride- and groom-to-be are in good health, are committed believers in Christ, and are both committed to each other for marriage, they are usually encouraged to marrying each other provided their parents have given their consent. It has been argued that the premarital investigation can reveal some of the following: a history of unsuccessful marital relationship or divorce, children from previous relationship, a history of crime committed, and a history of severe psychological or bodily abnormalities ('Why should premarital counselling precede any marriage?' ND: website).

The above factors can lead to unforeseen complications later in the matrimonial home unless they are uncovered and addressed before the marriage takes effect. Running a premarital

investigation before marriage is not a demonstration of unfounded fear or hatred towards one's partner, rather it is a sign that a couple care for each other and about their future together, as a family ('Why should premarital counselling precede any marriage?' ND: website).Montgomery (2012) argues that in the present era, it is imperative for individuals to know who their future partner actually is and that regardless of how well a person knows their partner's background, investigations before marriage are significant.

5.3.3 Personnel involved in premarital counselling

In the Alago traditional model of marriage preparation, both male and female counselors participate in preparing the couple for marriage. In particular, the role of the female counselor in the Alago indigenous *Epawozam* method of premarital counselling is accorded prominence because as far as the Alago people are concerned, the woman is perceived as the home maker, not the man! This philosophy is reflected in one of the Alago adage, "*Onyawo ole*" which literally means "the woman is the home". The Alago people believe that an elderly woman is the best premarital counsellor for an intending bride because as a woman, she knows the nitty-gritty of home making better than a man. It is also instructive to reiterate that the *Okikpo* (one who serves as the spokesman for the groom during the settlement of the bride price) is usually a woman. In contrast, it was argued in chapter six that in the ERCC model of premarital counselling, 100% of ministers who provide premarital counselling are male counselors because the ERCC does not ordain women as ministers; and among the church elders who assist the minister in counselling intending couple only about 20% of them are female. The ordained ministers (male counselors) are expected to counsel both the intending bride and groom on their marital roles as husband and wife. Given the fact that the ERCC believes that marriage is a relationship between a man and a woman who believe and confess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior (see The Constitution of the ERCC 2014:15), in my opinion, the involvement of female counsellors in premarital counselling is sacrosanct. More discussion will be done on the personnel needed in premarital counselling under the proposed comprehensive model of premarital counseling that I shall be developing in chapter eight.

5.3.4 Settlement of bridal wealth and collecting/distributing of wedding gifts

Among the Alago people, the process of settlement of the bride price and presentation of wedding gifts was not left to the immediate relations of the couple alone but was a community affair. Almost all the wedded Alago couples interviewed affirmed that the support rendered to them by members of their various communities at the time of their wedding relieved them of a great deal of pressure associated with the preparation for their marriage. Usually in the communal spirit of the Alago people, a bridegroom who receives support from members of his clan towards payment of his bride price is expected to reciprocate the same to other younger members of his clan who would subsequently marry. Taylor affirms this when he posits that in some parts of Africa, “the whole clan or family has been responsible for any bride-payment. But the help received usually has to be repaid by the bridegroom, e.g. by contributing towards the bride payments of his younger relatives” (1994:176). Contrary to the Alago tradition where material support for the couple is assembled before the wedding day, the ERCC collects a free will offering on the wedding day for the purpose of supporting the couple so that they may be able to start off their married life without much stress. The ERCC encourages payment of the bride price, but does not have a functional policy for assembling financial and material resources from members of the church to support the intending couple, in terms of paying the bride price and dowry, despite the huge responsibilities associated with such requirements. In the ERCC, the task of settling bride price/dowry is entirely viewed as a cultural matter, more so that the requirements vary from one culture to another. However, the church presence is usually made at such occasions through its marriage committee members, for prayers with the families and for interventions whenever there is conflict between what the church teaches and what a particular culture requires. In what seems to be a quest for the protection of the right of the womanhood, Mangena and Ndlovu argue that payment of bride price on a woman reduces her human personality to a commodity due to the price that is placed on the woman in the name of giving her some sort of worth (2010:477).

A research finding also reveals that payment of bride price has an implication on domestic violence and reproductive health. Kaye et al state that, “Participants perceived bride price as indicating that a woman was ‘bought’ into the man's household, which reduced her household decision-making roles. It limited women's independence and perpetuated unequal gender power relations, especially regarding health-seeking behaviour” (2005:300). I think that paying a bride price for a woman does not necessarily turn her into a commodity, especially viewing it from the traditional Alago perspective where it is an act establishing the exchange of love between the family of the bridegroom and the family of the bride. Mbuvi et al rightly puts it thus: “If dowry is paid in the right way, it is good, for dowry brings the two families together. This preserved marriages for both families desired the marriage to succeed. However, we live in a changing society. Dowry has changed its meaning. It is now more commercial” (1996:131). I think it is the materialistic tendency of our present society, whereby parents demand excessive money before their daughter is given in marriage, which is giving rise to such negative implications of the bride price. Let me add that after Jacob labored under Laban for seven years to marry Rachel, his daughter, the book of Genesis records that the seven years seemed like few days to Jacob because of the love he had for her. From the context of this biblical passage, there was nothing suggesting that Rachel was commoditized; instead, as far as Jacob was concerned, Rachel was worth more than seven good years of uninterrupted labor. Therefore, drawing any implication on the payment of bride price should not be generalized – it depends on how it is viewed and practiced.

5.4 Synergistic Premarital Pastoral Counselling (SPPC) Model for the ERCC

5.4.1 Exposition of the SPPC model

This study seeks to offer a synergistic premarital pastoral counselling model which the ERCC can use in providing premarital counselling to the Alago people. The model is synergistic because it attempts to bring together useful insights drawn from both the Alago indigenous and the ERCC models of doing premarital counselling with the view to obtaining more effective machinery for dealing with marital challenges among the Alago people.

The English term 'synergy', which became operational in the 17th century, is derived from the Latin 'synergia' and Greek 'synergos' meaning working together (Jesus house dallas.org ND). According to Soanes & Stevenson(2004) the concept of synergy connotes two or more systems cooperating together so that the output emanating from such interface is greater than that which would have been obtained should the two systems function independently (see Hall& Howard2008:250). The significance of synergistic approaches to research problems is that a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem is obtained than either of the approaches dealing with the problem alone (2008:251).In the same vein, when a synergistic approach is applied in dealing with a particular phenomenon, it produces results that are usually unattainable if the two parties involved were to work in isolation from each other. Synergy encourages cooperation and team work between two independent forces towards achieving a common goal (Jesus house dallas.org ND: website). Writing about synergism in counselling, Cazier (2016) argues that it means each person is complementing the other partner by working together in harmony, which results in the achievement of greater energy. In this study, the proposed SPPC model seeks for a mixed approach in providing premarital pastoral counselling whereby the ERCC ministers will be able to combine insights from both the ERCC and the Alago indigenous *Epawozam* methods of doing premarital counselling to effectively help intending couples cultivate the knowledge and skills required for living a stable married life. The SPPC model promises to achieve positive effects, which the Alago and the ERCC current methods of premarital counselling are not able to obtain when allowed to operate independently.

The justification for the proposed SPPC model as a useful approach for doing premarital counselling among the Alago Christians is the ERCC theological justification for church engagement in reaching out to each ethnic group through the proclamation of the gospel, pastoral care and counselling, within the ambit of their contexts as reflected in its motto. The ERCC also upholds interaction between the gospel and cultural values of its members who come from diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria; provided such dialogue does not water down the teachings, policies and practices of the ERCC. The inclusion of African Traditional Religion (ATR) as a course of study in the curriculum of the ERCC theological institutions (ERCC Theological Seminary Fadan Ayu Handbook 2011) justifies the use of the SPPC model in the ERCC because

it seeks to make premarital counselling relevant to the African context. The blending of indigenous songs/dances with western hymns taught by the missionaries in the ERCC worship services today is an example of synergistic approaches in meeting the spiritual needs of church members. Another current example of such synergistic approach in ministering to the needs of the ERCC members which gives credibility to the SPPC model, relates to marriage in particular, in the sense that the church encourages its ministers to attend traditional marriages of its members in order to pray for the couple, celebrate with them in their rich cultural values, and to demonstrate that the church is interested in ensuring that what they are doing as a people gives them fulfillment and glorifies God. This appears to be in line with the ERCC theology which teaches that all human beings (irrespective of their culture) are created in the image of God (see The Constitution of the ERCC 2014:10; ERCC Service Handbook: ND: 2), which to me serves as a theological basis for the implementation of the SPPC model among the Alago people of the ERCC.

5.4.2 Application of the SPPC model

This section deals with the practical elements that need to be considered towards achieving the SPPC model that I am proposing. Under this section I will be discussing the logistics which are involved in the application of the new model after which each stage of the model will be discussed.

5.4.3 Logistics for the application of the SPPC model

By 'logistics,' I am referring to the practical strategies for the successful implementation of the Synergistic Premarital Pastoral Counselling (SPPC) model proposed in this study (Merriam webster.com ND: website). The following logistics should be noted in terms of using the synergistic premarital pastoral counselling model among the Alago Christians: First, the minister should initiate the premarital counselling process by serving the intending couple with a formal invitation, stating clearly the purpose, date, time and venue of the meeting. Second, counselling with the couple should be done in six sessions; each of these sessions lasting for two hours (Yilmaz and Kalkan 2010:1915) depending on which day will be convenient both for the minister and the couple. Details of each session are discussed subsequently in this chapter. Third,

the venue for the premarital counselling with the couple should either be at the pastor's office or the church building, but not the pastor's lounge. The point I am arguing here is that the meeting place for counselling with the intending couple needs to be conducive, free from unnecessary distractions and must give the couple the sense of privacy and confidentiality needed to be able to share their feelings and experiences freely with the minister. Fourth, the minister should explain to the couple about any financial commitment that may be required of them during the premarital counselling process so that they can prepare for it ahead of time. Such information should be made known to the couple at the first session of their meeting with the minister. Let me clarify here that unlike other secular or religious setups where fees are charged for marriage counselling services rendered (Grant 2012: website), the ERCC does not charge any fees as payment for premarital counselling offered to its members by the ministers. However, in the current ERCC practice, the couple pays for bills incurred during any of the premarital checks required of them by the church. This practice is reasonable and should be sustained in implementing the SPPC model among the Alago Christians.

5.4.4 Stages for the application of the SPPC model

5.4.4.1 Encouraging early premarital counselling through godly parenting

One of the themes that came out from the Alago model of premarital counselling was character formation in children as an early preparation for marriage. Godly parenting occurs when parents model the character of God such as love, care and forgiveness before the children so they can behave in like manner even as they grow and get married. Godly parenting is also characterized by training the child according to the teachings of the word of God, discipline and spending quality time with the child. It is instructive to note that parents have an obligation to train a child in the way they should go, so that when they reach the age of understanding they will stick to it. Five participants, representing 20% of the respondents who were interviewed, recommend that marriage preparation needs to begin right from the formative age of the child as it was done during the pre-colonial dispensation when child betrothal and early participation in the labor force were common (NCBI No Date: website) According to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the formative years of a child begin from birth through

the age of eight and it is within these early childhood years that the child develops intelligence, personality and social behavior (Reference.com ND: website). It has been argued that “It is important to focus on encouraging a child's intellectual and thinking abilities during these years, as it can have a significant impact on them later in life. It is difficult to make up for a lack of this encouragement at an older age because by the end of the formative years so many basic building blocks are set in stone” (Reference.com ND: website). Any investment made by parents towards shaping the character of their children during these formative years will yield great dividends later in their lives and will serve as a foundation for a healthy and stable future marriage.

Hence there is the need for the ERCC to teach and encourage parents to be committed in the responsibility of training their children in the way of the Lord, knowing that today’s children are the husbands and wives of tomorrow. One of the African proverbs says, “A stick is straightened while still young,” meaning that “We have to start early and instill healthy habits and practices in children and youth while they are still young and pliable” (African proverb.org 2010). This, for me, is the major emphasis of marriage preparation at the formative years of the child. Brown (No Date) tables that one of the purposes of marriage is for the couple to be able to raise godly children whose characters resemble that of God – their maker. In the Bible we read, “Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was *seeking godly offspring*. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth” (Malachi 2:15). Therefore, the role of Alago fathers and mothers in molding the character of their children towards presenting them as godly spouses in the future cannot be overemphasized. Brown further argues that “parents must be people of character if they are going to raise godly children. Children raised in a loving home, by parents with character, typically mimic the virtues demonstrated by their parents. In contrast, parents who are not around, who lack self-control in their speech or with their anger, etc., produce the same character in their children. They won’t be able to cultivate righteousness in them” (ND: website). Raising godly children in an unstable home can be practically very difficult as ‘Family Fortress Ministries’ rightly observes: “It is not easy to raise children when you have a strong marriage, but nearly impossible when you have a shaky marriage! Solidify your marriage” (2013: website). Some of the important things parents can do to raise godly children in their marriages include

developing an intimate/passionate relationship with God, maintaining a strong marriage relationship, agreeing on child discipline and consciously blessing the child. Others are understanding the child's greatest need, the father leading in parenting, and teaching the child to reverence God ('Family Fortress Ministries' 2013: website). It is worth mentioning that one of the current ERCC policies and practices is child dedication which is usually conducted during the Sunday worship service (ERCC Service Handbook ND: 16). The purposes of this service include thanking God for the gift of the child, sharing with the parent in taking the responsibility of training the child in the way of the Lord, praying for the parent and to bless the child (ERCC Service Handbook ND: 16). This can serve as a good opportunity for the minister to remind parents of their obligation to be committed in raising their children in godly manner. One of the three questions parents are usually asked by the officiating minister during child dedication reads: "Will you teach him the way of life which belongs to a Christian?" This question sounds too general and for that reason some parents may not understand what "the way of life which belongs to a Christian" really means. The minister should take some time to mention specific things that Alago parents must teach their children, such as regularly Bible reading/prayer, obedience to constituted authorities and hard work, which are essential in molding the child's character towards becoming a strong householder in the future.

Let me add that sending the child to Sunday school can help the child develop godly character that will benefit him or her in future endeavors like marriage. Studies have shown that persons whose parents sent them to Sunday school during their formative age are more biblically literate than those who did not attend Sunday school when they were young. This implies that the Sunday school is an important partner in godly child upbringing today (Shirley 2012: website). The duration for this stage of the SPPC model of premarital counselling among the Alago people should last until the individual attains the age of maturity when they are able to choose for themselves to accept and follow the ways of God (see ERCC Service handbook ND:17).

5.4.4.2 Conducting group premarital counselling with the youth

The United Nations (UN), for statistical consistency across regions, defines 'youth', as persons whose ages range between 15 and 24 years (UNESCO.org ND: website). The United Nations

Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) understands the term ‘Youth’ as a period within which individuals undergo transition from depending on others to becoming adults who are aware of their unique identities as members of a society (UNESCO.org ND: website). The youthful age can be very challenging for an individual because it is a transitional period whereby there is a shift from acting according to parents’ decisions to taking responsibility for one’s decisions, actions and inactions. At this point of human development, the need for proper guidance and counselling is sacrosanct in helping individuals make the right choices, as the choices they make can have lasting consequences in their lives. This is also the period that the youths learn certain behavioral patterns through associating with peer groups. I think that during the youthful period the responsibility of premarital counselling rests more on the minister and church elders than on the parents because at this point the youth who were raised in a godly way gradually become attached to the church. They also become conscious of the fact that the church is their spiritual home where they see the minister as a spiritual father and the church elders as spiritual uncles and aunts who watch over their lives (see *Nielson*, ND: website). The church needs to initiate group premarital counselling for the youth as an indispensable strategy for promoting marital stability among its members. Collins argues that “The fundamental belief in group counseling is that a small group can act as the agent of change and strongly influence those who choose to be members. This is in contrast to individual counseling where the counselor is seen as the sole agent of change” (1988:93). For example, topics that the minister can discuss during the group premarital counseling with the youth may include the concept of Christian marriage, courtship, dangers of premarital sex, etc. The youth as individuals may be shy to approach the minister for help on how to deal with the above issues, but when they find a group within which they can join others to discuss topics of common interest, they may find it easier to open up and seek for help from the counsellor and other members of the group. Help is obtained well when one is able to express their feelings verbally in an atmosphere where they are allowed to empathize (Collins 1988:95).

Group counselling gives counselees awareness that other persons have similar predicaments and thereby enhances a sense of belonging, confidence, and mutual assistance within the group towards overcoming such problems (1988:95). Perhaps one of the common aspirations that some

youth in the church today have is that one day they will get married and have their own family. As noted in an earlier chapter in this study, realizing this common aspiration among the youth, the Alago people had a forum whereby the *Isonwo*(young men) and *Isonya*(young women) were prepared for adulthood and marriage in a communal way, prior to the colonial era (see Oyigbenu 2005:60). There is no gainsaying the fact that the Alago Christian youth are missing the platform for mutual “emotional ventilation” which was an integral aspect of their culture. The current absence of group premarital counseling in the ERCC makes it difficult for the youth to have a platform for “emotional ventilation” as Collins would argue.⁴¹Therefore, from the lenses of the contextual theory and the see-judge-act theory, the communal way of preparing the Alago youth for marriage needs to be transformed and adopted by the ERCC as a matter of policy so that the Alago Christian youth can have a platform where they can share their frustrations, temptations, fears, hopes and aspirations, and be able to benefit from the insights that would emanate from the responses they would give to one another as members of a group, for the stability of their future marriages. Each local church council (LCC) of the ERCC in Alago land should have group premarital counselling for the youth, quarterly, every year. Each meeting should last for two hours so that enough time can be given for group discussions. The church building is a good venue for the group premarital counselling with the youth.

5.4.4.3 Conducting premarital counseling with the intending couple

While it is important for every youth in the church to attend group premarital counseling organized by the leadership of the church as discussed in the preceding segment, it is significant for the minister to give special attention to counselling couples who have made their intention to marry each other known to the church. This is because, as we have noted earlier in chapter two, Christian marriage is primarily about the two individuals, the man and the woman, who must address their personal issues before getting married (Isaac 2009: website). All the respondents interviewed recommended that intending couples should be counselled before they finally get married. The divergence I notice between the Alago and the ERCC methods of counselling the

⁴¹ From my experience as an ordained minister of the ERCC, currently, the church does not have a functional policy for group premarital counseling for the youth. The only opportunity available for the youth to have any group discussion is during their annual youth conventions which are usually held at various levels of the church. But even during such conventions, the choice of topics for group Bible studies rarely touch on marriage preparation as the organization of the program of activities is left in the hands of the youth leaders.

intending couple is that in the indigenous Alago method, the husband-to-be and the wife-to-be were counselled separately, while in the ERCC existing model, the intending bride and groom are counselled together. In view of the enormity of issues that the premarital counsellor will need to discuss with the couple before their wedding, it is good to begin the process of counseling the intending bride and groom early enough before the proposed wedding date. *Two to One* (ND) correctly affirms that “It is critical to begin the premarital process at least six months before your wedding date. This ensures that if areas are discovered during the mentoring sessions that you or your fiancé need further work on, there will be plenty of time to do so apart from the last-minute rush of wedding preparations”. When premarital counseling starts too late, the couple may not be able to concentrate well on what is being discussed because their attention would have been carried away by the pressure of wedding preparations. Thompson (2014) affirms that when premarital counselling does not start early enough, it becomes tougher to deal with complicated issues which need to be addressed before the wedding.

Here are the sessions to be covered in conducting premarital counselling with the couple:

Session 1: Introduction and preliminary discussions

During the first session, the counselor must bear in mind that each couple to be counselled may have different levels of maturity and needs as well as different circumstances. For some couples, it may be their first engagement, some may have been married before, and for some couples, children may or may not be involved in the relationship (Bible.org ND: website). Recognizing these variations in each couple will help the counsellor determine the best possible way to engage them in this helping relationship. Basically, in this session, the counselor needs to find out from the couple if both of them are Christians. This inquisition is very fundamental because unless the couple affirms that both of them profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the church will not be involved in the wedding (Bible.org ND; see also The Constitution of the ERCC 2014:15). It will be good for the counselor to have the bride tell the groom’s testimony of his faith and the groom tell the bride’s testimony of her faith; that way, the counselor will be able to understand whether or not the couple talk about their faith with each other, have interest in spiritual things, or really know each other as they should (Bible.org ND: website).

It is also important at this meeting to find out from the couple if they have done any preliminary medical checks on their own to ascertain their physical compatibility for marriage and whether there is something they would like to share with the minister about the outcome of the medical check. The earlier the first medical test is done the better for both the couple and the church, especially considering the fact that unless both partners express satisfaction with the medical status of each other it will be hard for the church to continue with preparations for the wedding. I will give details about this later in this chapter.

Session 2: Biblical teaching regarding Christian marriage

In the second session, the counselor should seek to ensure that the couple is committed to the biblical teaching regarding Christian marriage, such as the lifelong nature of Christian marriage, the duties of the wife and husband, and the tests of love (Bible.org ND). The counselor must stress the necessity of the couple's commitment to these biblical requirements which are key to the stability of their future marriage.

Session 3: The need for parental consent on the proposed marriage

The emphasis during the third session of counseling with the intending couple must be on helping them to see the need for having parental approval on their marriage (Bible.org ND: website). Even though parental approval for a marriage is not clearly required in the Bible, its importance is implied because should the church approve a marriage when one or more parents are against it, this can be a potential danger to the stability of the future marriage. The marriage must not be rushed if any of the parents refuses to endorse it; rather, time should be given for more prayers, persuasions as well as finding out reasons behind such hesitations in approving the marriage. If it is possible, the counsellor can seek the counsel of church elders or consult with other pre-marriage counsellors who are more experienced in addressing such problems, or better still, make referrals (Bible.org ND: website). For intending couples who may not have parents or

guardians, the ERCC does not have any policy on how to deal with such situation. However, it is expected that the couple find some elders of the church who can stand for them.

Session 4: Sexual issues

It is at this session that the counselor needs to discuss one of the topics that may sound uncomfortable to the intending couple but is very crucial to the future stability of their marriage, which is sexual purity (Bible.org ND: website). The counselor should avoid generalizing this topic but should try as much as possible to be specific (Bible.org ND). For instance, the counselor needs to find out if the couple is involved physically and the extent to which this has occurred. If they are involved physically, the counselor needs to let them know that they have acted wrongly before God and they need to ask God for forgiveness, after which the counselor can pray for them and warn them to refrain from physical intimacy till they are married (Bible.org ND). It is important to also find out if the couple has been involved physically with others and whether they have discussed it together. Other vital issues to find out may relate to pornography and/or sexual abuse. This could be very hurtful, but from the perspective of the preventive theory of this study, it is better for the couple to address this issue now rather than face them after they are married when damage might have already been incurred (Bible.org ND). As mentioned earlier in chapter three, Semmelweis argues that the washing of hands and instruments by nurses not just with soap but with chlorine solution as a preventive measure can drastically prevent or reduce infections. This theory was put to test and it worked (Bible.org ND). I think that by finding out from the couple the extent of their physical involvement with each other and with others, the counsellor will be helping them to do a thorough “hand washing” before they are married so as to prevent “infections”. As noted elsewhere in this study, even if an existing problem is discovered in the course of these findings, the counsellor can help the couple work on how to prevent the problem from getting worse. The best approach to helping the couple deal with any sex-related problem prior to their wedding is to have them turn to the Bible and read passages like Ephesians 5:3, I Thessalonians 4:1-8, and Hebrews 13:4. Having read these scriptures, the counsellor can then ask them what their positions are in relation to these verses (Bible.org ND).

Session 5: Handling of family finances, conflict resolution mechanisms, communications and in-law relationships.

In the fifth session, the counselor can discuss handling of family finances, conflict resolution mechanisms, communications and in-law relationships (Nganga & Wasanga 2010: website). I have discussed these topics extensively in chapter two under factors responsible for instability in Christian marriage. The counselor must help the intending couple to cultivate proper understanding of these issues and how they can negatively impact on their marriage unless they are well prepared to handle them.

Session 6: Parenting

The importance of this session is predicated on the reality that once the baby is born changes usually occur in the way the couple relates to each other. The counsellor ought to assist prospective couples to appreciate the fact that kids are blessings to their marital relationships, yet they present challenges such as sleepless nights, decrease in sex and intimacy and increased economic pressures which may lead to dissatisfaction (Couples-thrive.com: website). Going through this session with the counsellor can help prepare couples to cope with these future challenges successfully. This is in line with Bowen's "Family System Theory" which argues that within the boundaries of the family systems, ways of doing things often change "as certain family member's behavior is caused by and causes other family member's behaviors in predictable ways" ('Family System Theory' ND: website).

Session 7: Reinforcement of key issues earlier discussed and detailed discussion on the wedding day

This is the last session of counselling with the couple before their wedding. At this juncture, the counsellor will need to review the key issues discussed so far during the previous counseling sessions, with particular emphasis on the key Scriptures studied. Doing this is necessary to help the couple reinforce what they have learnt and to formulate goals for their marriage (Bible.org ND). It is also in this session that the counsellor must discuss details of the wedding day. These will include finding out from the couple the ministers they would want involved, how they intend

to dress for the day, what kind of wedding reception they intend to have, etc. This is where the counsellor needs to also educate the couple about church policies and practices regarding the nitty-gritty of the wedding day and the need for them to seek to honor God on their wedding day. The minister must also go through the wedding vows with the couple, get them acquainted with the significance of the wedding vows which they will exchange with each other on the wedding day, and explain to them the meaning of the Christian wedding symbols such as the unveiling of the bride and the wedding ring. It will also be quite helpful for the counselor to talk to the couple about issues like birth control, the wedding night and sex after marriage (Bible.org ND). It is important for the minister to carefully instruct the couple, from the word of God, about things they must avoid on their wedding day and anything that may throw them into problems after the wedding. Such things may include alcoholism (Prov. 31:4-5; Rev. 1:6; Isa. 5:11-12), ostentation (show of wealth) (Phi. 2:5-9; Rom. 12:16; 1Pet. 5:5-6), and excessive borrowing (1Tim. 6:6ff Deut. 15:26; Prov. 22:7) (see Akanni 2001:40-42). The couple should be encouraged to dress in a modest, decent and presentable manner and be punctual ('Marriage procedure in the church' ND: website).

5.4.4.4 Involving parents/guardians of the intending couple in premarital counselling

The primary purpose for involving parents of the intending couple in premarital counseling is to seek their consent for the proposed marriage, which gives some level of security to both the couple and the church (Bible.org ND). In the Alago model of premarital counselling, the consent and participation of the parents of the intending couple was paramount. In fact, one of the respondents said that once the consent of the parents was obtained, it was the name of the father of the groom and that of the father of the bride that were often mentioned in connection to the preparation for the proposed marriage rather than the couple's names because the parents were usually more popular than the couple in the community. For example, the Alago would say, "We are preparing for the marriage of the son of Akpakya and the daughter of Okugya" (Idasho 12th /4/2016: interview). In the ERCC, as mentioned in chapter six, the consent of parents is usually obtained in a formal way by asking parents of both the bride and groom to commit themselves in signing a marriage agreement register (see The Constitution of ERCC 2014:15-16; ERCC Marriage Agreement Register ND:1). Apart from that, there are three other important things the

minister should discuss with parents of the intending couple: First, he should seek to help the parents of the couple realize that their support counts in ensuring the stability of their children's future marriage. The minister must remind the parents of the need for them to continually pray for the success and stability of the intended marriage of their children and should sustain the tempo even after they are married off. Parents should also be helped to understand the need to make themselves available to willingly offer any meaningful suggestions to the couple should the need arise.

Second, the minister needs to find out from the parents if there is anything abnormal or hidden about their son or daughter that they would like to share with him in confidence, which, if later discovered by the partner, can be a threat to the survival of their marital union. Although this may sound discomfoting to the parents, discussing such issues before the couple are wedded is better than ignoring them, only to have them surface after the couple are already married. As noted earlier in chapter six, one of the respondents recalls a sad situation whereby a bride never knew that her husband was impotent until after their wedding, and few years after the marriage they divorced. According to the respondent, that particular experience made him aware of the need to involve parents of the intending couple in his premarital counselling; with the hope that they may be able to give a true testimony of the fitness of their children for the proposed marriage (Mutashi 20th/5/2016: interview). Due to the sensitivity of such discussions, I think the minister should first meet with the bride and her parents separately and then meet with the groom and his parents separately for such inquests, before meeting with all the parties in a joint session if need be.

Third, in-laws can sometimes get in the way of the couple, consciously or unconsciously, thereby causing problems in marriages. Since the desire of every good parent is the success of their son or daughter's marriage, it will therefore be appropriate for the minister to talk with the parents on their changing roles as their children are entering into a new relationship with their spouse. Townsend has identified some circumstances that may lead to in-law conflicts in the marriage. The first is favoritism. According to Townsend, it is expected that parents usually develop some

kind of deep relationship even with their adult children. Wise parents usually accept their child's marriage partner as they do to their biological children, especially if that person is good. This attitude can affect their child's marriage in a positive way. However, there can be turbulence in the marriage if the parents show that they have more preference for their child than the child's spouse ('Today's Christian woman' 2008: website).

In view of the above consideration, the counsellor needs to talk to parents on the need for them to avoid any action or inaction that might suggest favoritism. The parents must also be instructed to welcome their child's spouse as they would welcome their biological child. Another common circumstance that can result in a bitter relationship between the in-laws and the couple is what Townsend calls intrusiveness. He rightly explains: "Some parents cross over the line of responsibility and respect. Becoming too involved with the couple, they may meddle unintentionally, leaving the couple feeling smothered or controlled. Although they think they are acting lovingly, they are not allowing the couple enough breathing room" ('Today's Christian woman' 2008: website).

Again, the discussion with parents of the couple can afford the counsellor an opportunity to educate or remind them of the importance of limiting their involvement with the couple to a minimum and maintaining healthy boundaries in their relationships. Under normal circumstances, it will be good for the premarital counselling involving parents of the intending couple to be held at least once before the wedding, preferably after the third session of premarital counselling with the intending couple, which means three months before the wedding. However, there might be a need for more talks with parents of the intending couple, especially when controversial issues emanate during the initial meeting, which may necessitate scheduling of another meeting or series of meetings towards addressing them. Again, two hours sounds reasonable to me for each counselling meeting involving parents of the intending couple and the venue must equally guarantee the privacy of all participants. The ministers must also serve parents of the intending couple with a formal invitation, stating clearly the purpose, date, time and venue of the meeting.

5.4.4.5 Conducting comprehensive premarital checks before the wedding

The understanding of marriage as a lifelong commitment in which the couple care for each other calls for the need to know whom a person is committing his or her entire life to before the marriage finally takes place, to avoid unnecessary stress and frustrations (Nigerian bulletin.com ND: website). As noted in chapter seven, in the Alago culture, such premarital checks were usually conducted by parents of the intending couple who by reason of their age are believed to have more historical facts than the couple. The parents would investigate the character of the person who wants to marry their son or daughter. They would also check if the family has any history of mental disease, epilepsy, mysterious deaths or similar problems. As the ERCC existing method of premarital counselling provides, the minister, who on behalf of the church oversees the premarital checks done by the couple, needs to help the couple realize that premarital checks do not mean that the couple no longer trust or love each other; rather, it shows that they actually care for their future happiness together as hidden issues are opened up for discussions and possible solutions ('Why should premarital investigation precede any marriage?' ND: website). The current premarital investigation conducted by the ERCC which only focuses on pre-wedding medical tests (The Constitution of ERCC 2014:16) is too limited. As the world is becoming more complex day by day, the need for a more comprehensive premarital check before marriage is inevitable; in fact, it can be catastrophic to marry a stranger. In a polite manner, the minister needs to instruct the couple about what premarital checks are required of them by the church before they get married. To avoid possible abuse of the premarital checks by the church, the couple must not be coaxed, but should be allowed to voluntarily do the checks, having been made aware that it is in their best interest to do so. It is equally of importance for the minister to treat any information made available to him as a result of the investigations with utmost confidentiality to enhance checks and balances in the system.

I will be doing the discussion on premarital checks before the wedding in two parts, namely, medical checks and other background investigations.

5.4.4.5.1 Premarital medical checks

The notion that once a person has found true love he or she should simply go into matrimony because love is what really matters and nothing more can be disastrous. To also think that “love conquers all” and nothing else matters can lead to problems as well (Nairalan.com. ND: website). The couple needs to be encouraged to have an honest discussion about their medical histories as well as their families’ medical histories (Health Net pulse.com 2014). This is important in helping the couple make informed consent about the lifelong relationship they are going into. *Nairaland Forum* affirms that “The knowledge of your intending partner’s health status by no means implies that marriage is not possible but it gives you an avenue to make informed consent and it enables you and your spouse to seek proper medical care early to prevent unnecessary stress and burden during marriage (Nairalan.com. ND: website).

However, chances are that medical certificates may be carrying the views of the one who has it rather than their actual medical status due to fraudulent practices. To guard against such fake practices, the current ERCC practice in which the minister must take the couple to a medical center recognized by the church and must ensure that the medical certificate is duly signed by an authorized practitioner, should be sustained. I would like to recommend that the ERCC should encourage intending couples to conduct the following medical checks before their wedding:

Genotype test- This helps in determining whether one has the sickle cell gene. It will be an act of selfishness for two persons who have this gene to marry each other if they want to have children of their own blood. It means they are only interested in their own happiness and not the happiness of the children they will give birth to. But it will be fine if the couple agree to have children by adoption (Nairalan.com. ND: website).

Blood group and Rhesus factor test- This test helps a couple know their blood group type. “Blood group is assigned to an individual as A, B, O and AB with another component known as the Rhesus factor which is referred to as positive or negative” (Nairalan.com. ND: website). With the advancement of science and technology, a couple needs not worry much about which blood group they belong to, although knowing it is important.

HIV test – Knowing one’s HIV status before marriage is important for the couple because if a spouse’s partner turns out to be positive, and they agree to go ahead with the marriage, they can be counselled on how the partner who is negative can be protected and how they can care for each other as well as have healthy children of their own (Nairalan.com. ND: website).

Hepatitis test and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) – It is argued that though a hepatitis test is very important not only for intending couple but for everyone, it is perhaps the STD with the least sensitization (Nairalan.com. ND: website). A couple need to do hepatitis screening and screening for other STDs like gonorrhea, syphilis, warts, etc., before engaging in any sexual relationship, otherwise they can lead to fertility problems and miscarriage (Nairalan.com. ND: website).

Fertility tests – First, this helps dismiss the fear that one’s partner is not sexually active. Second, it is important for couple who desire to have children of their own. Any fertility issues discovered can be addressed as early as possible without the couple going through the “unnecessary biological, psychological, social and emotional trauma associated with barrenness” (Nairalan.com. ND: website). Though the primary purpose of Christian marriage is companionship between the husband and the wife, infertility is a serious problem that can destabilize the marriage relationship especially if the couple desire to have children of their own.

Pregnancy test– Although a pregnancy test is usually one of the requirements for a church wedding in the ERCC, it is not explicitly stated in the church’s legal document.⁴² One of the provisions under “Family Life and Marriage” in chapter five of the ERCC Constitution simply states, “The couple shall undergo a medical test in the first three (3) months and a second one three months later” (2014:16). Since this constitutional provision does limit the medical test to a particular condition, I think that the usual pregnancy test is one of such medical tests implied in

⁴²In the ERCC practice, the ordained minister or a trusted church elder will go with the couple to a recognized hospital about one week before the wedding day and collect the result of the pregnancy test on behalf of the church. If the test turns out positive, no ordained minister from the ERCC will wed the couple. However, the church can sanctify the union if the couple agrees to live together as husband and wife. Usually, the liturgy for the sanctification of marriage differs from that of a wedding (see ERCC Service Handbook ND: 7-11 and 12-15 respectively).

the ERCC Constitution as a prerequisite for a church wedding. There are, however, controversies surrounding this practice in Christendom as some Christians question its justification while others argue for its sustainability. For example, those who question the validity of pregnancy testing before a church wedding view it as an unnecessary invasion of privacy and that a pregnancy test before marriage is not a justifiable measure to fish out and discipline church members who commit fornication (Nairalan.com. ND: website). Those who argue that a pregnancy test is a necessary requirement for a church wedding base their argument on the fact that by biblical injunction, intending couples are not supposed to be engaging in sexual intercourse prior to their wedding, as that amounts to fornication and places the couple at risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs) (Nairalan.com. ND: website). They also argue that though God is the one who judges everyone, the church needs to take such a stand for the protection of its public image, because people who question the justification for pregnancy testing before a church wedding are the very ones who would accuse the church of hypocrisy when they hear that members of the church give birth to full term babes 5–6 months after the church wedding (Nairalan.com. ND: website). I think that the premarital pregnancy test is important in this comprehensive model of premarital counseling not only because it protects the public image of the church, but also because by so doing, the church will be demonstrating that it has the best interests of the couple at heart. A respondent confirms this, as stated in chapter six, where he told a story of a bride-to-be who once confessed that the groom-to-be was not the one responsible for the pregnancy she was carrying, when the result of the pregnancy test conducted by the church revealed that she was positive (Dodo 26th/5/2016: interview). Such discoveries can help the couple make informed decisions about their future.

5.4.4.5.2 Other premarital background investigations

As noted earlier in this chapter, in view of the complex nature of the world we live in today, premarital checks for a Christian couple should not be limited to medical checks alone but should include some background investigations as well. This will help a spouse have a reasonable degree of knowledge about his or her partner before making any serious commitment for the marriage, without allowing emotions to cloud his or her judgment (ICS World.com ND: website). It also ensures that no important information that one needs to know about his or her

soon-to-be spouse is hidden. Giglio (2015) explains that the main reason why background investigations are important before the wedding is to enable to partners to have peace of mind that the person they are about to marry does not have any hidden things that might threaten their future happiness in the married life. Desiring to know the past of a loved one ought not to be viewed as being unkind to the person, rather it allows room for one to be aware of who the partner truly is and accept them for who they are before the wedding.

In fact, according to Osewa (2015), background checks can help a couple know whether their potential spouse is a blood relative or not. This is especially important for couples who are of the same ethnic group but have met each other far away from home. Some of the questions a couple should be asking towards understanding the person they want to build their life with, according to the International Counterintelligence Services ND), include the following:

Has your partner been hiding or avoiding discussing his or her past?

Have you met any of his or her friends, family, or coworkers?

Has your partner asked to use your credit card or for a small loan? Has he or she been unusually curious about your finances?

Has your partner been overly curious about your whereabouts? Has it turned from cute and flattering to obsessive and intrusive?

The above questions can help a couple do their personal background investigations. However, there are certain aspects of this background investigation where a partner would need the services of a confidant or to hire a professional investigator from the Department of State Security (DSS) or the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of Nigeria (Osewa ND: website) to conduct the checks, such as whether the “soon-to-be spouse has a criminal background, where they came from, if they have been engaged or married before and if they are hiding anything” (Giglio 2015: website). In view of the fact that hiring a professional investigator for a premarital background investigation is not yet a common practice in the ERCC, it is important to emphasize here that the church needs to create this awareness among its members through teaching and

seminars so that the intending couple, and indeed the church at large, may appreciate the good intention behind the premarital background investigation. The outcome of premarital background investigations may lead to calling off a proposed marriage, especially when problems that pose a great danger to the marriage are uncovered – yet it is better done than ignored. As Giglio (2015) rightly argues, “It is better to experience the loss of a loved one before marriage than the lies and deception that result in an expensive and emotionally draining divorce”.

Interestingly, the indigenous Alago people understood this as an indispensable preparation for marriage stability even before the advent of western civilization, as no parent would want their children to marry a person who is not well known by the family or marry into a disreputable home (Oyigbenu 2005:62). Therefore, I think that applying this method of premarital counselling with the Alago Christians will promote self-discovery within their cultural context.

5.4.4.6 Notifying the church about the intended marriage

As mentioned in the previous chapter, notification of marriage is characteristic of both the Alago and the ERCC models of premarital counselling, except for the fact that they differ from each other in terms of the way the announcements are made to the public (ERCC Service Handbook ND: 6). Some churches like the Roman Catholic Church or the Anglican Church use the terms “banns of marriage” which refer to “the public declaration of an intended marriage, usually formally announced on three successive Sundays in the parish churches of both the betrothed” (The free dictionary.com ND: website). Banns also refer to “an announcement in church of your intention to marry and a chance for anyone to put forward a reason why the marriage may not lawfully take place” (‘Your Church wedding.org’ ND: website). From the above considerations, it is clear that notification of marriage or banns of marriage help bring the Christian community to the same page as the intending couple about their intentions to marry, so that the marriage may be accepted by the faith community as lawful.

Additionally, marriage notification should serve as an invitation of the congregation to pray for the intending couple as they prepare to be joined together as husband and wife (‘Your Church wedding.org’ ND: website). I think that the importance of praying for the potential couple as a

congregation cannot be overemphasized, especially considering the pressure that the couple are usually under as they prepare for their wedding day and for a new life after the wedding. It also sends a message to the couple that praying together is a key to stable marriages. A study showed that couples who pray together have a below average probability of divorce (Marriage preparation.com. ND: website). “When a couple prays together there is less room for pretense, untruth of any kind or any kind of attitude of superiority over one’s spouse; each of them will be encouraged to develop attitudes of humility, service, listening and caring for....and all of this is good for marriage!!!” (‘Marriage preparation.com’ ND: website). Omartian (2008) affirms that “Every time you and your spouse pray separately for one another, great things happen in your relationship. Prayer is truly powerful. But when you pray together, that power increases tremendously, and so do the results”

5.4.4.7 Guiding, planning and conducting the wedding program in collaboration with the couple

A wedding program, according to Pierce (2016), is “the perfect way to remember your day, thank people who made it possible, and to let out-of-town guests know who's who”. Hefter (2015) views it as “a list of what, when or whom or you can take this keepsake of your wedding and use it to narrate your day”. I think that a wedding program is a document that gives a picture of what the wedding looks like. Generally, details of a wedding program may include names of the couple, date and location of the wedding, order of events, names of officiating ministers, names of all songs and their presenters, names of the wedding party and their relationships to the couple (Bridal guide.com 2016: website). Other additional information that can be found in a wedding program include brief biographies of the couple and/or wedding party, names of musicians, cake baker, catering company, wedding planner, favorite quotations, explanation of religious and ethnic rituals/traditions, if generally unknown by many guests, as well as appreciations (Bridal guide, 2016: website). I have given a typical example of the ERCC wedding program in chapter six.

From my experience, sometimes wedding programs in the ERCC are planned and printed by the couple without input and vetting of the minister. I think that this is not proper, because you sometimes find that too many amendments are made on the program of events during the wedding service. This can be avoided if the church, through the minister or other church elders, plans the wedding program in collaboration with the couple. It will be good for the minister to vet the printed copy of the wedding program at least a week prior to the wedding, before copies are multiplied for distribution during the wedding service. Such checks will promote orderliness in the presence of God and will help portray the good image of the church before the invited guests. The ministers must ensure that the wedding service is properly planned such that it might be a great source of blessing to the couple and a powerful witness of the Christian faith even to non-Christian guests (see Taylor 1994:192).

5.4.4.8 Mobilizing material support for the couple

Generally, preparation for marriage is a huge responsibility and can sometimes weigh the couple down unless they are supported materially. Hence the support of the church in this regard can cushion the effects of this burden on the couple. Most of the wedded Alago couples interviewed affirmed that the material support given to them by the church made a positive impact on their life in a number of ways. A respondent confessed that the free will offering the church collected and gave them on their wedding day enabled them to settle the money they owed for the additional drinks they purchased to serve the guests (Ogiri 13th/6/2016: interview). Another respondent testified that the support they received from the church helped her husband to balance a debt to the bus driver who conveyed her parents and other relations to the venue of their wedding (Sunday 13th/6/2016: interview). I think this existing practice of the ERCC is quite commendable and should be sustained because it serves as a transformed communal support that the indigenous Alago people used to give to the couple as they prepared them for marriage. The church must continue to teach and encourage its members to support one another, in line with Paul's admonition in Galatians 6:2 where he says, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." Affiku rightly says, "Pastors and teachers of the gospel of Christ must see to it that no Christian should ever think that he/she is totally independent and doesn't need help from others, and no one should feel excused from the task of helping others.

The body of Christ – the church - functions more effectively when the entire church membership works together for the common good” (2015:157).

In addition to the current free will donations mobilized by the church to support the couple on their wedding, I think the church must go beyond that by being proactive in advocacy towards checking the excesses of some cultural traditions that demand high bride-price and dowry for marriage. According to Sambe, Avanger and Agba, high bride-price/dowry often compels an intending couple to incur huge debt which they eventually take into the marriage, thereby encouraging poverty; it also commoditizes the woman and subjects her to domestic violence (2013:68). The desire for excessive accumulation of dowry exposes the girl to sexual abuse and the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases; the overall effect of these is that they lead to marital instability. In chapter six, I have shown that the craving for excessive dowry is among the reasons why some Alago girls travel to the cities to engage in all manners of “businesses” to make money. From the pulpit, the church must condemn this ungodly desire and teach Christians to be happy with what they have. The church must equally teach parents about the need for them to control the accumulation of dowry and the negotiations of bride-price by having the bride’s father himself, or a committed Christian elder in the family, chair the meeting rather than leaving it to some unsaved relative (Mbuvi et al 1996: 132). This will enable Christian parents to have the primary voice in the negotiation, otherwise when the unsaved chairperson of the committee to discuss the bride price/dowry makes certain recommendations, the Christian parents and others will usually be afraid to contradict him or her (1996:132). Through advocacy, the church should seek to liberate its members from the shackles of ungodly traditions and cultural expectations. To achieve this noble objective, I think the church should set up a marriage awareness committee who will have the responsibility of identifying the different ethnic groups within the church, with the view to meeting with the traditional authorities for discussions on the dangers of excessive bride price/dowry on the stability of marriage and development of society. The Bible seems to have provided a basic principle for Christians with regards to bride price, in Genesis 24, where something is given voluntarily to show appreciation to the parents of Rebecca, but nothing was demanded. After Rebecca’s parent gave their consent to the marriage, she was given the opportunity to decide whether to wait or to go immediately for marriage (1996:132). I think that

if the traditional authorities will understand this and allow Christians in various jurisdictions to prepare for marriage their own way by adopting this biblical principle, this will serve as an unprecedented support that the church can give to the intending couple towards the stability of their marriage.

5.4.4.9 The need for referral in premarital counseling

Premarital counseling may not be considered therapeutic in the sense that any trained pastor, lay leader in the church, couple or individual can come alongside the intending couple in a mentoring type of relationship (Biola University Center for Marriage ND: website). It is rather a preventive approach to solving problems. However, certain premarital counselling situations may go beyond the ability of the person doing the counselling. In such circumstances the need for referral becomes inevitable. One of the ethics of counselling is referral. Since counselling is based on the philosophy that clients should receive the best help that is available, it then becomes reasonable for a counsellor to try to identify the cause of the problem, ascertain its nature and degree and decide whether they can handle the problem or not. An honest counsellor would not try to manage a problem they are not qualified to handle, but would always refer the client to someone one who is more competent or a professional like doctor, or psychologist (Kiriswa 2002:30-31).

In premarital counseling, personal factors, time factors or even the failure of the client to make significant progress can also be good reasons why the counselor should do a referral. Kiriswa cautions that “A counselor should neither attempt to do what someone else can do better or engage in counselling if he/she does not have the time to deal with it adequately” (2002:31). As noted above, the counsellor’s personal relationship with the intending couple needs to be examined. In a situation whereby the relationship between the counsellor and the counselee is too intimate or damaged, it will be wise for the counsellor to consider referring the counselee to another counsellor. If such circumstance is explained to the counselee in an encouraging tone it is likely to yield a positive outcome (2002:31). I think that it is not a sign of weakness on the part of the counsellor who refers a counselee to more qualified personnel than him or her, instead it is a demonstration of competence and it shows that the counsellor has the best interest of the client

at heart. Therefore helpers who are able to identify situations needing better qualified hands to handle them deserve commendation (Austin Peay State University.edu ND: website).

For referral in premarital counseling to be effective among the Alago Christians, counsellors need to personally connect the couple to the personnel who will give them further assistance. They should give the couple the contact information of the personnel, such as his/her name, phone number and location for appointments to be made with the professional ('Austin Peay State University.edu' ND: website). If there is any useful information about the couple that the counsellor feels the professional needs to know, the communication should not be done in the presence of the couple to avoid giving them an impression that their problem is becoming known to everyone in the church. The counsellor must be mindful of confidentiality as an ethical implication involved in doing referrals. For instance, it is proper to always obtain the permission of the couple in relating any information about them to the professional who will give them further help (Austin Peay State University.edu ND: website). The counselor needs to inquire from the couple whether they have kept the appointment with the professional and from their responses the counselor will be able to know whether their meeting was helpful to them without necessarily squeezing any information out of them on their return (Austin Peay State University.edu ND: website).

5.4.4.10 Recruiting competent and gender sensitive premarital counselling personnel

The need for qualified personnel who would facilitate the SPPC model of premarital counselling among the Alago people is indispensable. In chapter two of this thesis, I argued that some of the factors that are responsible for marriage instability among Christians today are ecclesiastical in nature because the church is also failing to provide adequate premarital counseling and pastoral care to its members (see Taylor1994:187). And in chapter six I stated that forty percent (40%) of ministers, wedded couples and divorcees who participated during the individual interviews and focus groups affirmed that the lack of adequate premarital counseling in the church is one of the factors accountable for marriage instability among the Alago Christians. There is a need to emphasize the quality and composition of premarital counselling personnel in this comprehensive model of premarital counselling for the ERCC. It is my submission that the

ERCC premarital counselling team must be persons who have integrity, adequate training in pastoral counselling, and must include both male and female counsellors. It has been argued that “It is very important that qualified personnel do this crucial counseling (premarital counseling) so that people who receive it are adequately helped” (Nganga and Wasanga 2010). Barlow comments on one of the challenges that premarital counsellors have and what they need to do to overcome such challenges: “Often, pastors are not trained in premarital counselling and may not think they have the skills to adequately prepare couples. One way to overcome this obstacle is to have pastors attend classes that focus on premarital counselling. Training is useful in any area of a job, and this area seems to be a necessary priority for pastors” (1999: website). Like other Africans, the indigenous Alago people attach premium to the quality and composition of those who give premarital counselling to the young ones, as stated elsewhere in chapter seven. Writing on the priority that traditional Africans give to the quality of counselor Kiriswa says:

In African tradition, counselors were people of high integrity, maturity, experience and natural wisdom. Traditional counseling placed too much emphasis on the age of the counsellor. As such, children did not qualify to be counselors because in most African societies age was a sign of experience, wisdom and maturity. A special place was given to elders, specialists like artisans, leaders, rain makers, medicine men and women and diviners (2002:30-31).

In the light of the see-judge-act theory of this thesis, the examination of the interface between the ERCC and the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* concept of marriage preparation reveals that unlike what we have seen in the Alago tradition where women play prominent roles, there is minimal or absence of the involvement of female counsellors in the ERCC current model of premarital counselling. Therefore, in this comprehensive model of premarital counseling that I am proposing for the ERCC, I advocate the participation of more women, especially the minister’s wife, in the ERCC premarital counselling team; this is necessary because marriage from the perspective of the ERCC is an institution that permits a relationship between a man and a woman (see The Constitution of ERCC 2014:15). As noted in chapter seven, there is no justification for the woman who, I think, is in a better position to educate the bride about the nitty-gritty of home-making to be excluded from the premarital counselling team of the church. I do not think there is any aspect of Christian counselling that calls for the participation of both male female counselors

like premarital counselling. The involvement of female counsellors will promote gender sensitivity and the achievement of better results. In view of the realization that the ERCC does not ordain women as ministers but encourages ministers' wives to support their husbands in the task of the ministry, I think that one key area that is calling for the minister's wife to support her husband is that of preparing intending couples for marriage. I agree with the argument that "The Bible does not address the involvement of the pastor's wife in any ministry. In other words, the pastor and his wife determine how active the pastor's wife should be. The main area of responsibility for any wife is to support and be submissive to her husband (Ephesians 5:22–25). However, if the Lord calls a man into the ministry, He calls the whole man, and that includes the man's wife and his family" (Pastoral care inc. ND: website). It is equally counterproductive when the personnel involved in premarital counseling in the church are themselves insecure due to marital problems in their own marriages (see Alan & Donna 2006:1). To be competent to give premarital counseling to an intending couple, the home of the minister or any elder in the church who is doing premarital counseling must be a role model for other marriages in the church.

5.4.5 Experimental need for assessing the effectiveness of the Synergistic Premarital Pastoral Counselling

For the SPPC model to be adjudged as having succeeded or failed, its effects on the marriage stability of couples who are ministered to needs to be experimented. For instance, an experimental group (Yilmaz and Kalkan 2010: 1911) of five to ten couples out of those who have received premarital counselling based on the SPPC model among the Alago Christians can be observed over a space of five years after their wedding. Another set of five to ten couples who did not receive the SPPC model of premarital counselling among the Alago Christians can also be observed within the same space of time after their wedding as a control group (2010:1911). Then the marital stability of the experimental group is compared with that of the control group and the result arising from such an experimental study can tell us whether the SPPC model has succeeded or failed. Chances are that when the SPPC model proposed in this study is put to the test among the Alago Christians of the ERCC, significant improvement will be noticed in the stability of Alago marriages. This is possible because similar research findings have shown that

marital relationship enhancement programs based on prevention and contextual frameworks like the SPPC model have resulted in “a lower divorce rate and a higher relationship trust” in different cultural contexts (2010:1911; see also Parker, 2007; Stahmann, 2000; Markman, 2006; and Stahmann & Hiebert, 1997).

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I examined the changes that have occurred in the way the Alago people prepared their young ones for marriage due to influences from Christianity, Islam, westernization and modernity. I have also done a pastoral examination of the interface between the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* and the ERCC model of premarital counseling which served as a suitable foundation for the Synergistic Premarital Pastoral Counselling (SPPC) model that I have developed for the ERCC towards preparing intending couples for marriage.

Findings from the discussion on changes noticed in the Alago traditional *Epawoza* methods of marriage preparation in this chapter have shown that the right to choose a marriage partner has shifted from fathers to their sons, which sometimes becomes a source of conflict between parents and their children who want to get married. Hence the need for an understanding of how to maintain healthy boundaries between children and their parents in terms of choosing a marriage partner and in living the marital life was identified and incorporated into the new model of premarital counselling that this study proposes. It was found that unlike in the past when the intending couple and their immediate families depended on the clan for support during the period of preparation for marriage, today intending couples and their immediate families tend to be self-sufficient, hence they no longer count on the support of the clan when preparing for marriage. It was also pointed out that the priority that parents used to give to the development of decent character in their children as a way of preparing them for marriage has now shifted to struggling for material things, at the detriment to success of the future marriage. Findings have also revealed that in trying to discard some of the cultural elements of the people that were regarded as uncivilized, such as virginity testing, the baby was thrown out with the bathwater, in my view, as the values of sexual purity and fidelity are now considered undesirable along with this traditional ritual that is today considered obsolete and uncivilized. The farms were the training

grounds for boys in preparation for marriage, but today the schools have taken over as places where parents now believe they can prepare their sons better to face the economic challenges of marital life in the future.

Findings from the analysis of the two models show that the underlying reason behind cases of domestic violence and the alarming rate of divorce among the Alago people in Nigeria can be attributed to the limitations of the existing premarital counselling among both the Alago indigenous people and the ERCC. The discussion made us aware of the insights the two contexts provide through their approaches to premarital counseling. I have shown that notification of marriage gives room for members of the community to advance reasons why the intended marriage should not take place, if there are any. This measure helps to ensure that a couple is lawfully married and that the marriage deserves to be honored by all members of the community. It also serves as a call to the community to support the couple in whatever way they can. Other insights from the two models of premarital counselling include premarital investigations, the composition of premarital counselling personnel that is gender sensitive, as well as settlement of bride price and collection/presentation of wedding gifts. However, there are other insights or themes discovered from our detailed study of other literature in general, which show limitations of either the current Alago and ERCC models. These include early premarital counselling through godly child upbringing, group premarital counselling with the youth, involving parents/guardians of the intending couple in premarital counselling, and the need for referrals in premarital counselling.

The discussion on the examination of the interface between the ERCC and Alago methods of premarital counselling suggest that the ERCC model of premarital counselling is not comprehensive enough since it does not take into cognizance the culture of the people to whom the ministry is directed, hence it presents opportunities for improvement. Similarly, it can be argued that though there are aspects that require transformation in the indigenous Alago methods of doing premarital counselling, it should be viewed as an expression of who the people really are and as a relevant asset that the ERCC can explore towards improving its existing approach to premarital counselling among the Alago.

The proposed Synergistic Premarital Pastoral Counselling (SPPC) model seeks to assist the church in its quest toward promoting healthy and stable marriages for Christians by harmonizing the elements that emanated from the Alago indigenous and the ERCC models of premarital counselling, as well as insights from literature on contemporary premarital counseling approaches, into a single model that the ERCC can use in providing premarital counselling to the Alago Christians. The contribution I have made to the body of knowledge is in response to the limitations observed in our previous examination of the interface between the Alago and the ERCC models of premarital counselling. I have argued that premarital counselling should begin right from the formative years of an individual through the inculcation of societal and spiritual values in children, rather than leaving it till a few weeks to the wedding when the mind of the couple can hardly assimilate anything meaningful due to pressure. I have proposed that pastors must encourage parents on the need to invest their time and resources in raising godly children through godly parenting, which can enhance stable future marriages. The need for the church to start group premarital counselling for the youth with the idea to provide a forum where young adults can ventilate their feelings through sharing of ideas, aspirations, temptations, or frustrations that are common to them and seek help from the counsellor as well other members of the group about their future, has been advocated. I have stressed the need for thorough premarital counselling with the intending couple. To achieve this, I push strongly that the minister initiates the counselling process through a formal invitation to the couple, spelling out the purpose, date, time and venue for the meeting. I suggested that the SPPC model should be conducted in six sessions, one each month for a duration of two hours. This, I argue, will give enough space of time for facilitation, discussion and reflections on key marital topics such as the need for spiritual compatibility, the role of husband and wife as taught in the Bible, relationship with parents, sexual purity, finances, conflict resolutions, communications and the wedding day.

In the synergistic premarital counselling model proposed in this chapter, I have argued for the involvement of other stakeholders such as parents of the couple and members of communities in which the couple belong. The involvement of parents/guardians of the couple in the counselling process is for the purpose of helping them understand the importance of supporting the decision their children are making for marriage, and the need for them to maintain healthy boundaries of

relationship with their children once they are married to avoid possible in-law conflicts. In my opinion, the need for marriage notification to be given to the community in which the couple belongs will help send a message to the community that their endorsement of the intended marriage and support really matter to the wellbeing of the marital union. In this new model, I have argued strongly for couples to conduct premarital checks before saying the 'I Do' and that this should include premarital medical checks and other background investigations, such as whether their partners have any criminal record, where they come from, whether they were married before, and if children were involved in a previous relationship. The objective of such premarital checks is to help the couple know the person they intend to share the rest of their life with and to make informed decisions. Another element of the comprehensive premarital counselling model given in this chapter is guiding, planning and conducting the wedding program in collaboration with the couple so that the wedding service might be a great blessing to the couple, the guests, and an honor to God. Other themes discussed include mobilizing material support for the couple and the need for the minister to be sensitive enough to make referral in premarital counselling, especially where there are issues the counsellor is not able to address properly, perhaps because the counsellor-client relationship is too intimate or too strained. It was shown that the onus lies on the church to recruit competent and gender sensitive premarital counselling personnel for effective counselling to be offered to intending couples.

In the quest to ascertain the effects of the SPPC model proposed in this study on marital stability of the Alago people, I have argued for the need to put the model to a test through experimental and comparative research whereby couples who receive the SPPC model and those who did not receive it will be observed over a period of five years. Apart from the fact that the conduct of such experimental research on the proposed SPPC model will enable us to assess its effectiveness on marital stability, it can also enable us to generate useful insights towards formulating a better model that the church can use in the near future in trying to curb the spate of domestic violence and divorce among the Alago of Nigeria. The proposed synergistic premarital pastoral counselling (SPPC) model discussed in this chapter can serve as a reference point for other synergistic approaches required by the ERCC in meeting the pastoral needs of church members who are caught between the values of their indigenous cultures and the teaching of the

Christian gospel. The next chapter is the last segment in this study and I shall be focusing on summary of the research findings, conclusions and recommendations for further research.

Chapter Six

Summary of findings, conclusions and recommendations for further studies

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed the changes that have taken place in the Alago indigenous model of marriage preparation over the years. The chapter also examined the interface between the models of premarital counselling within the ERCC set up and the Alago indigenous context. I have drawn insights from the two approaches and have incorporated them in the SPPC model presented in the previous chapter. Some of the themes highlighted in the new comprehensive model include encouraging early premarital counselling through godly parenting, conducting group premarital counselling with the youth, conducting premarital counselling with the intending couple, involving parents/guardians of the intending couple in premarital counselling and conducting comprehensive premarital checks before the wedding. Other elements of the SPPC model discussed in chapter five are: notifying the church about the intended marriage, mobilizing material support for the couple, the need for referral in premarital counselling, and recruiting competent and gender sensitive premarital counselling personnel.

This concluding chapter gives a summary and conclusions of the findings of the study by juxtaposing them with the objectives of the study. These include: i) to investigate the major sources of the challenges faced by marriages resulting in domestic violence and divorce in Nigeria amongst the Alago people; ii) to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the current premarital counselling offered by the ERCC to the Alago Christians; iii) to examine the aspects of premarital counselling from the Alago indigenous knowledge systems that can be used or transformed by the church to improve stability in Alago marriage in Nigeria; and iv) to develop a new approach to premarital counselling that ERCC pastors will use to promote stable marriages among the Alago people. The summaries and conclusions given in this chapter are based on the findings of the different chapters of this dissertation, taking into cognizance the fact that the ERCC should do premarital counselling among the Alago people within the ambit of their context. Recommendations for further study are also given in this last chapter.

6.2 Summary of findings

6.2.1 The reality of marital instability

The responses of Alago Christians of the ERCC who have been experiencing instability in their marriages point to the fact that the current premarital counselling that ERCC ministers are giving among the Alago people is inadequate. It is inadequate because the study has shown that ERCC pastors do premarital counselling without recourse to insights from the Alago indigenous world view of marriage preparation, as their emphasis is too much on the doctrine of the church. Msomi argues that counselling can only be meaningful to a people when it is done contextually, especially when counsellors understand the dynamics of sympathy, empathy and interpathy in ministering to persons who need their services (2008:206; see also Lartey (2006:42).

6.2.2 Redefining marriage

The findings from the literature point to the fact that although some schools of thought argue for a redefining of marriage as the consensual union of any two persons (including same sex marriage) rather than the age long view of marriage as the union of a man and woman (Jakawa 2014:28; Morris ND), this thesis upholds the ERCC view of marriage which teaches that marriage was instituted by God as a lifelong relationship between a man and a woman who are both equal before God for the primary purpose of mutual companionship and for procreation. The ERCC understands marriage as a heterosexual, monogamous, and a lifelong relationship. Literature has further shown that premarital counselling plays a significant role in helping the intending couple cultivate the right mindset about marriage and to develop coping mechanisms ahead of time against potential marital challenges, so that Christian marriage may reflect the standards God has designed for it right from creation.

6.2.3 Divorce as failed marriage

This study has shown that divorce is an indication that a marriage has failed. Findings reveal that despite God's unequivocal pronouncement that he hates divorce, it still persists not only among

non-Christians, but even among committed Christians, due to the violation of principles that usually sustain marital relationships such as extraordinary care for each other, sexual exclusivity, and a lifelong commitment (Harley 2005:15). I have argued that though there may be marriages that were joined together according to God's will and others that were joined together against the will of God, though some divorce cases may be based on good reasons and others based on wrong reasons, divorce causes psychological trauma and it breaks hearts, which, in my opinion, are some of the reasons why God says, "I hate divorce." Insights drawn from the literature and views from respondents have indicated that factors that lead to instability in marriages or divorce among the Alago people can be categorized under sexual, economic, social, ecclesiastical, and external factors. Others are communication, psychological, cultural, biological, hygienic, and spiritual factors. These factors are issues that premarital counselling seeks to address so that intending couples may be forearmed as they enter into married life. It is in the light of this plethora of factors inhibiting stable marriages that the framework of prevention theory is shown to be relevant to this study. It has, therefore, been demonstrated that the earlier premarital counseling is given to intending couples, the better the results in their future marriage; as the saying goes, "prevention is better than cure".

6.2.4 Premarital counselling

This study has argued that pastors have an obligation to care for and counsel an intending couple before they get married. Literature has shown that often, the task of effective pastoral care and counselling is being neglected by pastors in favor of preaching, forgetting the fact that a word of counsel given to a person may achieve what many sermons fail to do (Baxter 1994:24). The pastor's position among the people of God by reason of their calling and training gives people the confidence that they are the most appropriate persons to consult and confide in for help when the need for guidance and direction arises. It has also been pointed out in this study that to effectively meet the pastoral needs of the people, attention must be paid to their historical, socio-economic, cultural and political contexts in relation to the Christian teaching (Lartey 2006:42). I must add that the need for a functional pre and post marital counselling training is sacrosanct towards meeting the pastoral needs of the people. Despite the rich ideas drawn from literature in

relation to the topic of this study, it was pointed out that the literature did not cover the need for the church to explore indigenous cultural norms of the Alago people for the enhancement of stable marriages among the Alago Christians. The research gap which I have identified is the absence of literature that harnesses the Alago indigenous knowledge systems in premarital counselling. In this study, I have sought to make a contribution to the literature by unearthing the interface between Christian counselling and indigenous Alago premarital counselling and the benefits of the interaction between the two cultures.

6.2.4.1 Alago indigenous premarital counselling

It has also come out strongly in this research that premarital counselling among the indigenous Alago people was a communal affair in what was known as the *Epawoza*, as every responsible member of the community was expected to contribute in one way or the other towards the actualization of a stable marriage once the process was initiated. The Alago people believed that to ensure adequate stability in marriage, early preparation was sacrosanct (Omake 2014:64). As a community, the indigenous Alago people shared in the responsibility of raising children who are of sound character with the view that they would turn out to be responsible wives and husbands in the future, hence there was no hiding place for any lazy or immoral child within the Alago community (2014:64). The responses of elderly Alago people point to the fact that the Alago usually conducted investigations into family histories of lovers before marriage proposals were approved to avoid any regrets after the marriage. The Alago as a community also participated in providing bridal-wealth and dowry requirements so that no intending couple suffered the burden alone. Prior to the wedding, couples were reminded about the good values they must take into marriage and were warned about certain behaviors that can lead to divorce, which they must never exhibit in their marital relationship. The above values, I opine, are aspects of premarital counselling from the Alago indigenous knowledge systems that can be used by the ERCC to improve stability of marriages among the Alago people. This study points out clearly that despite the good things inherent in the Alago indigenous model of marriage preparation, it has its demerits, such as the practice of virginity testing, which, in my thinking, is biased against the woman and dehumanizing to her dignity. The positive and negative aspects of the Alago

indigenous premarital counselling were both examined critically toward the development of the comprehensive model of premarital counselling that the ERCC can adopt in preparing Alago Christians for marriage. The responses of elderly Alago Christians also point to the fact that the early missionaries placed more emphasis on individual salvation during the Christianization of Alago land, which somehow led to the gradual erosion of the *Epawoza* (communal) pattern of marriage preparation that the Alago people were used to.

6.2.4.2 ERCC premarital counselling

In a bid to ascertain the strengths and weaknesses of the current premarital counselling offered by the ERCC among the Alago people, a study on the historical development of the ERCC was conducted. Findings reveal that in terms of practice, teaching on Christian marriage is inadequate in the ERCC, which, I have argued, is one of the major sources of the challenges resulting in marital conflicts among members of the church. In a context where there is confusion in terms of gender roles, the ERCC theology of marriage upholds the understanding of marriage as a union between a male and a female. The findings from ERCC ministers and church elders have shown that the ERCC model of premarital counselling usually begins when a couple makes their intention to get married known to the minister and the timing for the premarital counselling is six months prior to the wedding day. It was pointed out that the ERCC has no rule concerning the location, number of sessions, duration of each session and style of premarital counselling; these are left at the minister's discretion. The methods of the ERCC premarital counselling include educating the couple about the need for spiritual compatibility as well as medical checks, mediating between the bride and groom's families during payment of the bride price, obtaining the consent of the bride and groom's parents on the proposed wedding, notifying the congregation about the wedding, planning the wedding program in collaboration with the couple and their families, and collecting wedding gifts to support the couple. A careful examination of the ERCC model of premarital counselling has revealed its weaknesses, such as lack of synergy between the church and indigenous models of marriage preparation as well as minimal involvement of female counselors in premarital counselling, which for me, arises from gender insensitivity. I have argued in this study that there is no justification for any minister of the

ERCC to continue to blame the missionaries for the current challenges resulting in domestic violence and the alarming rate of divorce among Alago Christians and other members of the church when the church is still using the method of premarital counselling it inherited from the missionaries over a century ago. I have pushed strongly that what the ERCC ministers need in terms of improving its premarital counselling ministry for marriage stability today will have to do with changing the church's methods of doing premarital counselling from the way it was introduced to them by the early missionaries. In line with the objectives of this study, this thesis promises to offer a more comprehensive method of premarital counselling than the method given by the missionaries because it synergizes useful insights from the indigenous Alago and the Christian contexts.

6.2.4.3 Hybridity in counselling

Findings from the analysis of the Alago methods of marriage preparation and the ERCC model of premarital counselling show that the underlying reason behind cases of domestic violence and the alarming rate of divorce among the Alago Christians in Nigeria is attributed to the limitations of the existing premarital counselling model of both the Alago indigenous people and the ERCC. The discussion made us aware of the insights the two contexts provide through their approaches to premarital counselling. This is the reason why the contextual and the see-judge-act theories of this thesis are appropriate. This study points out the insights drawn from the analysis of the two existing models of premarital counselling which include notification of marriage, premarital investigations, the composition of premarital counselling personnel, settlement of bride price, and collection/presentation of wedding gifts. Other insights or themes discovered from our detailed study of the literature in general, which show limitations of both the current Alago and ERCC models, are early premarital counselling through godly child upbringing, group premarital counselling with the youth, involving parents/guardians of the intending couple in premarital counselling, the need for referrals in premarital counselling, and the need for recruiting competent/gender sensitive premarital counselling personnel. In this study, hybridity in counselling was demonstrated in the development of a comprehensive model of premarital counselling which I call the Synergistic Premarital Pastoral Counselling (SPPC); the new model

is an amalgam of the Alago and ERCC methods of premarital counselling as well as insights about premarital counselling from existing literature.

6.2.4.4 The proposed synergistic model of premarital counselling

Giving the inadequacy of both the Alago indigenous model and the current ERCC model of premarital counselling as the study has shown, chapter eight of this study proposed the synergistic premarital pastoral counselling (SPPC) model that the ERCC ministers can use in doing premarital counselling among the Alago people. The proposed SPPC model seeks for a mixed approach whereby the ERCC ministers will be able to combine insights from both the ERCC and the Alago indigenous *Epawozam* methods of doing premarital counselling to effectively help an intending couple cultivate the knowledge and skills required for living a stable married life.

6.2 Conclusions

The conclusions are based on the objectives of the study reiterated at the beginning of this chapter. From the narrative of findings in this dissertation, it becomes obvious that domestic violence and divorce in Christian marriages among the Alago of Nigeria is increasing due to the inadequacy of premarital counselling provided by the church. One can, therefore, argue that first, with effective premarital pastoral counselling programs; it is possible for the couple to determine the nature and quality of their relationship before marriage (Renick, Blumberg, & Markman, 1992; Larson & Homan 1994:228). Second, ministers, by reason of their training as pastoral counsellors, can recognize the factors that if addressed can improve stability in future marriages of church members (Renick et al., 1992; Larson & Homan 1994:228). And third, an investment made intentionally in terms of time, finance or human resources towards ensuring that marriage remains intact is worth it because marriage is seen as the primary means by which family relationships are made possible for raising children who would perpetuate the human race on earth (Larson & Homan 1994:228).

The strengths and weaknesses identified in the current ERCC methods of premarital counselling among the Alago people is an indication that the ERCC approach in doing premarital counselling needs improvement so that the church can have a more robust premarital counselling framework that can help in restraining the rising cases of conflicts in marital relationships among Christians. The SPPC model proposed in this study is a step in that direction.

The useful insights that emanated from our detailed study of the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* concept of marriage preparation bear witness to the fact that there are aspects of the Alago culture that should be retrieved by the ERCC through sustainable intercultural engagements, so that the Alago may be able to rediscover their unique identity as a people which the Christian missionaries and the influence of modernity tried to throw out with the bathwater. Findings from the discourse on marriage among the Alago people are a testimony to the fact that the Alago indigenous culture is so rich in its own unique way, especially in terms of marriage preparation. As earlier mentioned in this study, though there are weaknesses as shown in the narratives of Alago marriage, one can argue that even the western culture has a lot to learn from the advantages of the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* concept of marriage preparation as no particular human culture can be said to be perfect or superior to the other. I make bold to submit that both western and African cultures should be allowed to engage in constructive interrogation of each other, especially now that there is a constant quest for answers to bridge the expanding gap among diverse cultures of the world (Besley & Peters 2012:2).

The proposed synergistic premarital pastoral counselling (SPPC) model given in this thesis should serve as a road map for other synergistic approaches required by the ERCC in dealing with pastoral issues confronting its members. The church should always evaluate its policies and practices on regular basis and should be willing to implement reforms in line with its doctrines for positive transformation in the life of its parishioners. Complacency and craving for personal aggrandizement among ERCC ministers are the bane hindering effective counselling in the church. These encumbrances can be surmounted through striving for excellence in the various ministries to which pastors are called. The church should deliberately invest its resources

towards improving the quality of its personnel through the upgrading of its theological institutions, both in terms of infrastructure and academic curriculum, to meet international standards with the view to producing pastors who are competent to face the challenges of the contemporary age. In view of the current paradigm shifts in world views held among the Alago Christians occasioned by westernization, globalization and the rapid advancement in technology, as earlier pointed out in this study, there is the need for more engagement of the ERCC pastors in intercultural studies for the promotion of social interaction and harmony in the society. The need for such intercultural engagements in the ERCC is indispensable as it will help to make the premarital counselling services offered by the church more relevant in bridging gaps among the different ethnic groups within the church, such as the Eggon, Mada, Ninzo, Tiv, Gwadara, and Migili whose sons and daughters are currently crossing cultural boundaries to get married. The synergistic premarital pastoral counselling (SPPC) that I have recommended in this dissertation is a contribution to that perspective.

6.4 Recommendations for further research

This study was conducted based on the assumption that the new comprehensive model of premarital counselling proposed in this study will improve stability of marriages among the Alago people of the ERCC. This postulation can only be authenticated by putting the proposed model to the test. One of the limitations of this study, however, is that there is no adequate time for testing the effectiveness of the SPPC model due to the nature of the topic under review. To come out with concrete evidence regarding the efficacy of the proposed model on marriage stability will require at least five years of experimental study, as earlier mentioned in chapter eight. I, therefore, recommend that further research be conducted on the effectiveness of the proposed SPPC model on marriage stability among the Alago people. The study should seek to do a comparative analysis of marital stability of couples who went through the SPPC model as an experimental group and that of couples who were not given the synergistic premarital pastoral counselling as a control group. Results from such comparative study can then be used to draw conclusions regarding the viability of the SPPC model.

For the goal of the synergistic premarital pastoral counselling (SPPC) to be achieved more successfully, there is the compelling need for research to be conducted on post-marital counselling to ensure a collaborative approach in dealing with marital challenges among the ERCC members. This is important in view of the fact that one cannot take for granted that because couples have been given premarital counselling, the marriage is already immune from problems. Human beings are prone to failures and forgetfulness, and circumstances in married life also do change, therefore, marital problems still exist even among committed Christian couples who were given premarital counselling, because they are still humans. Tensions and conflicts may arise from unexpected changes in financial status of the family, health status of a partner or even childlessness, but through counselling interventions in marriages, such tensions and conflicts can be minimized or resolved (Levy ND: website). The study should address the need for professionalism on the part of ministers who provide post marital counselling because usually, better mediation in marital relationship is achieved through the intervention of a qualified, neutral and experienced counsellor (Kistnasamy 2016).

There is also a need for further research on the impact of the theological training of ERCC ministers on pastoral counselling. Such a study is needful because of the lack of adequate training of Seminarians who turn out to be ministers in the church. The question that would need to be addressed in such a study is what is ERCC doing in terms of improving the impact of its ministers who provide pastoral counselling in its local churches? Effective pre and post marital pastoral counselling training would go a long way in helping to curb the spate of divorce and marital instability among members of the church. The growing interest of the ERCC members in attending and participating in spiritual programs organized by ministries outside ERCC is a wake-up call on the need for the ERCC ministers to update their theological knowledge and skills towards a transformational ministry in the church. Also, the current competition for membership among various church denominations in Nigeria (Green 2014: website) underscores the need for competence and relevance in the pastoral ministries offered by the ERCC pastors. Roberts argues that in whatever the church does, it must give priority to patterns of education that promote new initiatives, exploration and unrelenting learning in leadership (2004:121). In the same vein, research on lay ministry is needed towards expanding the capacity of personnel

who provide counselling within the church; this will help in reducing overdependence on the few people who seem to be doing everything in the church (Jakawa 2014:233) and will enhance satisfaction of the needs of church members for counselling. The study should also deal with the development of structures within the ERCC for pastoral counselling and how these structures can be empowered to handle pastoral issues within a given socio-economic and cultural context (Moyo 2012:322).

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Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

A. Interviews

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Oyigbenu, E. A. 2016. Interview with the author on 3rd July, 2016, Agwatashi, Obi LGA. [Recorded data in possession of author].

Wedded Alago Christian Couples

Efu, Y. 2016. Interview with author on 12th July, 2016, Keana, Keana LGA. [Recorded data in possession of author].

Okugya, S. 2016. Interview with the author on 13th June, 2016, Obi, Obi LGA. [Recorded data in possession of author].

Sangari, R. 2016. Interview with the author on 13th June, 2016, Agwatashi, Obi LGA. [Recorded data in possession of author].

Timothy, D. 2016. Interview with the author on 13th June, Agaza, Keana LGA. [Recorded data in possession of author].

Yusuf, M. 2016. Interview with the author on 13th July, 2016, Alosi, Keana LGA. [Recorded data in possession of author].

Alago Divorced Persons

Afo, L. 2016. Interview with the author on 13th June, 2016, Agaza, Keana LGA. [Recorded data in possession of author].

Amos, N. 2016. Interview with author on 26th May, 2016, Obi, Obi LGA. [Recorded data in possession of author].

Ashiki, B. 2016. Interview with the author on 13th June, 2016, Agwatashi, Obi LGA. [Recorded data in possession of author].

Ebenya, B. 2016. Interview with the author on 24th May, 2016, Alosi, Keana LGA. [Recorded data in possession of author].

Oshi, A. 2016. Interview with the author on 12th July 2016, Keana, Keana LGA. [Recorded data in possession of author].

B. Focus Group Discussions

ERCC ministers/church elders ERCC LCC No. 1 Obi Town 2016. Interview with the author on 26th May, 2016, Obi, [Recorded data in possession of author].

Indigenous Alago elderly persons ERCC LCC No. 1 Agwatashi 2016. Interview with the author on 26th May, 2016, Agwatashi, [Recorded data in possession of author].


Alago Divorced persons ERCC No 1 Obi Town 2016. Interview with the author on 26th May, 2016, Obi, [Recorded data in possession of author].

Appendices

Appendix 1 TURNITIN ORIGINAL REPORT

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Research | Project - DUE 10-Jul-2017 | Roadmap | Paper 2 of 2

Originality | GradeMark | PeerMark | **The Role of** | turnitin  | **4%** SIMILAR

BY BITRUS YUSUF

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1.2.1 Historical background

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present Igala and Idoma land
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Match Overview ☐☐

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2	Submitted to South Afri... Student paper	<1%
3	Submitted to Saint Pau... Student paper	<1%
4	Submitted to Liberty Un... Student paper	<1%
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9	Submitted to CVC Nige... Student paper	<1%
10	Submitted to Bridgepoi... Student paper	<1%

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Text-Only Report

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Research | Project - DUE 10-Jul-2017 | Roadmap | Paper 2 of 2

Originality | GradeMark | PeerMark | **The Role of** | turnitin | **4%**
BY BITRUS YUSUF | SIMILAR

Match Overview

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1.1 Introduction

This study focuses on the role do a pastoral examination of tl (the ERCC)¹ and the Alago Ind to developing a Synergistic comprehensive in addressing m


Marriage is one of the oldest women (Geneses 2: 18-25) as al the past and in the present (Dar venture they consider to be im start with adequate preparation who fails to plan, plans to fail' human relationship, little inves Christians of the ERCC today. the Alago community (Oyigbe



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BY BITRUS YUSUF

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Match Overview

each group was conscious of i
pre-colonial period witnessed
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of the quality of marriage prepa
as Onuegbu (2013) rightly pu
cherished and viewed as the
examination of pre-colonial ma
would suggest that women we
contend for their emancipation
1961:92). Hence in such a cont
the indigenous Alago people v
marital challenges.

The Alago indigenous way of
due to the influence of Christia
tribes in Nigeria during the pre
contemplate marriage after he
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Research | Project - DUE 10-Jul-2017
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Paper 1 of 1

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The Role of
BY BITRUS YUSUF



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formulation of a comprehensive
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¹
This chapter provides an ove
subheadings: introduction, bac
research question, sub-research
overview of theoretical frame
significance of the study, defin
structure of the study and concl

1.2 Background and moti

1.2.1 Historical background

Aspects to be covered under th
political structure, religious be
helps us understand the backgr

1.2.1.1 Origin of the Alago pe

The Alago people are believed
groups like the Yoruba, Jukun,
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Match Overview

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PAGE: 3 OF 315
🔍

Text-Only Report



Figure 3: From Left, Lucy and Karl Kumm⁴⁵



46



47

Figure 4: Mr. Vincent H. Hosking

Figure 5: Clinic in memory of Vincent Hosking at Keana



48

⁴⁵ The photo was obtained from Emmah Sunday's PhD dissertation (2011).

⁴⁶ Photo obtained from the ERCC Centenary Celebration Programme of Events (11th – 20th November, 2016).

⁴⁷ Photo was taken by the researcher on 24th April, 2016.

Figure 6: ERCC NO. 1 Agwatashi (Keana Conference Headquarters Church).



Figure 7: Newly wedded couple seated in church after receiving prayers of blessings on their marriage.



Figure 8: An ERCC minister about to issue a marriage certificate to a couple at their wedding

⁴⁸Photo was taken by the researcher on 24th April, 2016.

⁴⁹ The couple whose images appear on this picture gave their full consent for the picture to be used for this purpose.

⁵⁰ The minister and couple whose images appear on this picture gave their full consent for the picture to be used for this purpose.

Appendix 3a

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics
University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg,
Private Bag X01, Scottsville 3209,
Republic of South Africa.

Dear Sir/Madam

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

I (Rev. Bitrus Bawa YUSUF; Cell phone: +2348065688868; +2776027273183; Email: bitrusybawa@gmail.com; Residence: ERCC Theological Seminary, F/Ayu Gwantu, Kaduna, Nigeria) am a student at the above institution doing a PhD in Theology. I am doing research on premarital counselling among the Alago people in the ERCC in a quest to find ways of improving marriage stability which currently is being affected by domestic violence and divorce.

The title of my research is “The Role of Premarital Counselling for Marriage Stability: A Pastoral Examination of the Interface Between the Christian and Alago Indigenous Epawoza Concept of Marriage Preparation.” The choice of this topic is informed by the observation of the challenges facing marriages among the Alago people that results in domestic violence and divorce. These marriage challenges are affecting both Christians and non-Christians.

I am asking you to be an interviewee and participate in a focus group discussion in this research. Participation is voluntary. Your responses will be treated in a confidential manner. The results of the interviews will be used in writing a thesis. In the thesis you will not be identifiable as I will keep anonymity through the use of pseudonyms.

I wish that you respond to all the questions that I have but you are free to choose not to respond to some of the questions as you may see fit. You are also free to withdraw from the research at any time without any negative or undesirable consequences. The focus group discussions will take place in a place and time convenient to you. The interview will last for 35-40 minutes unless need arises for additional time. The focus group discussions will take about 40-50 minutes. The interviews and focus group discussions will take place between April and September 2016.

There are no material or financial benefits from participating in this research. However I will visit each participant with the results of the study and discuss the outcome with them. In addition you will be part of the success story of this project. In case of you being traumatised by the questions, I have organised 5 pastoral counsellors from the LCCs who are experienced in counselling and have been contacted to assist. The 5 pastoral counsellors have consented to a shared confidentiality in case of interviewees who end up in need of their counselling services. I will personally take the participants to the counsellors if need arises. I will also provide you with contact details of the counsellors in case you do not want me to accompany you to the counsellors.

If need be, for further information about this study please contact my supervisor who is the project leader: Dr H Moyoh; Contact number: 033 2605574; email: moyoh@ukzn.ac.za

And the HSSREC RO - Mrs Phumelele Ximba, Contact number: 031 260 3587; Email: ximbap@ukzn.ac.za.

I hope the above information will help you make an informed decision about participation in this research project. If you are willing to participate please sign the informed consent form.

Thank you.

Appendix 3b

WASIKAR NEMAN YARDA CEWA ZA'A BADA RA'AYI

School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics
University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg,
Private Bag X01, Scottsville 3209,
Republic of South Africa.

Zuwa gare Ka/Ki.

WASIKAR NEMAN YARDA CEWA ZA'A BADA RA'AYI

Ni (Rev. Bitrus Bawa YUSUF; mai nomban waya +2348065688868; +2776027273183; Email: bitrusybawa@gmail.com; wanda ina da zama a: ERCC Theological Seminary, F/Ayu Gwantu, Kaduna, Nigeria) dallibi ne a makarantar da adreshin ke bisa, ina karutun Digiri na Uku cikin Tauhidi. Ina gudanar da bincike akan Shawartar da maniyatan aure cikin al'uman Alago da suke a Ikilisiyar ERCC, wanan kokari ne na neman hanyoyin inganta zaman lafiya cikin aure a yanayin da akwai yawan fadace-fadace a gidajen ma'aurata har ma da sakin aure.

Kan maganar bincike na it ace, "Shawartar da Maniyatan Aure don Samun Zaman Lafiya: Tatancewa iri ta Pastoci tsakanin yadda Kirita da Al'adanEpawoz na Alago ke Shirya maniyantan Aure." Na zaɓi in gudanar da bincike akan wanan kan Magana ne domin na lura da cewa akwai matsaloli da yawa da ke hadasa yawan fadace-fadace a gidajen ma'aurata har ma da sakin aure cikin mutanen Alago. Matsololin auren nan kuma sun shafi kirisia har ma da wadanda ba kirista ba.

Ina roko cewa ko zaka/ki yarda in yi maka/ki tamboyoyi, da kuma kasance cikin totonawa tare da wadansu mutane game da kan maganar wanan bincike. Bazan bayana wa mani/wata ra'ayoyin da zaka/ki bayar ba. Zan yi amfani da ra'ayoyin da na samu cikin rubutun wanan takadar bincike, amma zan canja sunayen wadanda suka bada wadanan ra'ayoyi yadda mai karutu ba zai gane ko wanene ba.

Zan so ka/ki amsa dukan tamboyoyi da nake dauke da su, amma ka/ki na da yanci kin amsa wata tambayar da bai yi maka/ki ba. Kana kuma iya janye daga kassnce cikin wana tamboyoyi da amsoshi duk lokacin da ka/kin so ba tare da wani damuwan da zata biyo baya ba. Totonawa da za mu yi da wadansu mutane zai kasance a wuri da kuma lokacin sun dace maka/ki .Tamboyoyin da zan yi zasu dauki tsakanin mintoci 35-40 sai dai ko in akwai bukatar Karin lokaci. Totonawa tare da wadansu mutane kuma zai dauki mintoci 40-50. Zan gudanar da wadanan tamboyoyi tsakanin watan Afrailu zuwa Satumba na shekara ta 2016.

Babu wata ladan kudi ko na kaya da ke tafe da kasancewar ka/ki a wanan bincike ba. Amma zan ziyarci wadanda suka kasance cikin wanan bincike in kumu totona rohoton ra'ayoyin da na tattaro tare da su. Biye da haka zaka/ki zama daya daga cikin wadanda suka bada gudumawa don samun nasarar wanan bincike. Idan kuma tambayoyin da wani a cikin ku zai amsa zai jawo mashi/mata tashin hankali, na shirya da wadansu kwararun pastoci biyar daga LCCs da zasu taimaka wajen bada shawarwari. Sun kuma yarda a tsakanin su cewa ba zasu fada wa kowa damuwan da wani ya kawo masu don neman shawara ba. Idan akwai irin wanan bukata, ni da kai na zan ka shi/ta wurin paston da zai yi taimako. Idan kuma wani/wata ba zai so in tafi tare da shi/ita ba zan bada adreshin paston da zai iya taimaka.

Idan da bukatar Karin bayani game da wanan bincike zaka/ki iya tuntubi Supervisor nawa wanda shine shugaban wanan bincike: Dr H. Moyo; Nomban waya: 033 2605574; email: moyoh@ukzn.ac.za

Da kuma: HSSREC RO - Mrs Phumelele Ximba, Nomban Waya: 031 260 3587; Email: ximbap@ukzn.ac.za.

Ina mai fata bayanin da na yi zai taimake ka/ki wajen bada yardar kasance cikin gudanar da wanan bincike. Idan ka/ki yarda da wanan sai ka/ki sa hanu a shafin amincewa.

Na gode.

Appendix 4a

COPY OF A LETTER OF CONSENT FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

I..... (Full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview	YES	NO
Audio-record focus group discussion	YES	NO

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT..... DATE.....

Appendix 4b

SHAFIN AMINCEWA DON KASANCE CIKIN GUDANAR DA WANAN BINCIKE.

Ni.....(Rubuta Suna cikake) na tabatar da cewa na fahimci bayanin da aka yi a wana rubutun da kuma irin gudanar da bincikenda za'a yi, na kuma yarda zan bada ra'ayi na ga wanan aikin bincike. Na kuma fahinci cewa zan iya janye daga kasancewa cikin yin wanan bincike idan naso.

Don haka na yarda:

A yi rekodin muryar amsoshin tamboyoyi da za 'a yi mani	I	A'A
A yi rekodin muryar totonawa da zan yi tare da wasu mutane	I	A'A

SA HANU..... KWANAN WATA.....

Appendix 5a

School of Religion, Philosophy and
Classics,

University of Kwazulu-Natal,

Pietermaritzburgh Main Campus,

Private Bag X01 Scottsville 3209,

Republic of South Africa,

10th September, 2015.

The General Secretary,
RRERCC Headquarters,
Alushi, Akwanga,
Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

Dear Sir,

REQUEST FOR A LETTER OF PERMISSION

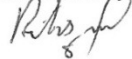
I am Rev. Bitrus Bawa Yusuf, a student at the above institution doing a PhD in Pastoral Theology. I am doing research on premarital counselling among the Alago people in the ERCC in a quest to find ways of improving marriage stability which currently is being affected by domestic violence and divorce.

The title of my research is "The Role of Premarital Counselling for Marriage Stability: A Pastoral Examination of the Interface between the Christian and Alago Indigenous Epawoza Concept of Marriage Preparation." As part of my research, I will be going to the field to interview ERCC ministers as well as church members. This will enable obtain data that will assist me in doing this research.

I am requesting you to give me a letter of permission which will authorise me to conduct interviews and focus group discussions and have access to persons and premises under your oversight from gate keepers.

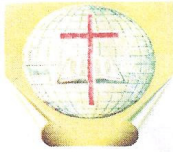
Thank you.

Yours faithfully,



Rev Bitrus Bawa Yusuf.

Appendix 5b



EVANGELICAL REFORMED CHURCH OF CHRIST (ERCC)

(A Member Of TEKAN Churches)

FORMERLY CHURCH OF CHRIST IN CENTRAL NIGERIA.

Founded by Sudan United Mission (South Africa Branch) 1916

Headquarters,
P.O.Box 104, Akwanga,
Nasarawa State-Nigeria.

Motto: Go ye into World and Preach the Gospel (Mark 16vs 15)

11TH Sept, 2015

Our Ref: _____

Your Ref: _____

Date: _____

Dear Sir,

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I write to introduce one of our Reverends by name Bitrus Bawa Yusuf who is doing his doctoral studies with the university of Kwazulu-Natal Republic of South Africa. The study Programme requires that he does a field Research. In view of this, I have been directed to write in order to inform you that the Church headquarters has granted his request for permission to have access to premises and persons as it may concern to conduct Interviews and focus group discussions.

This Letter serves as grant of permission of access. All gatekeepers of relevant premises and persons concern should please take note and grant the candidate all the necessary assistance he may require from you throughout the period of his field study.

Thank you.

V.Rev. Peter Y. Aya

ERCC General Secretary

Phone: +2348035889601

Email: erccheaddquarter@yahoo.com / peteraya60@yahoo.com

General Secretary
EVANGELICAL REFORMED CHURCH OF CHRIST
(ERCC)
Headquarters Alushi
Akwanga Nasarawa State.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES:-

Very Rev. S. Adamu Mari, Very Rev. Samson D. Agidi, Very Rev. Usaini Oduh (Rtd),
Very Rev. Dr. Koni A. Dakong, Very Rev. Dr. Nehemiah V. Swende, Very Rev. Dio Adamu & Hon. Gbaja J. Makeri

Appendix 6a

School of Religion, Philosophy and
Classics,

University of Kwazulu-Natal,

Pietermaritzburgh Main Campus,

Private Bag X01 Scottsville 3209,

Republic of South Africa.

28th August, 2015.

Rev Monday Engom Affiku,

Chairman,

ERCC Bukuru.

Dear Sir,

LETTER OF REQUEST TO OFFER COUNSELLING SERVICE S

I (Rev. Bitrus Bawa YUSUF; Cell phone: +2348065688868; +2776027273183; Email: bitrusybawa@gmail.com; Residence: ERCC Theological Seminary, F/Ayu Gwantu, Kaduna, Nigeria) is a student at the above institution doing a PhD in Theology. I am doing research on the topic, "The Role of Premarital Counselling for Marriage Stability: A Pastoral Examination of the Interface between the Christian and Alago Indigenous Epawoza Concept of Marriage Preparation." As part of the research, I will be going to the field to interview and conduct focus group discussions with persons including divorcees so as to grant them the opportunity to share from their experiences factors that have led to their divorce.

I am asking for your consent to kindly assist in doing pastoral counselling in case of any emotional eruption arising from my research population in the course of individual in-depth interviews or focus group discussions.

Thanks for your anticipated cooperation.

Yours faithfully



Rev. Bitrus Bawa Yusuf

Appendix 6b

Evangelical Reformed Church of Christ (ERCC)
P. O. Box 596, Bukuru
Jos,
Plateau state
Nigeria.
8th September, 2015.

Dear Rev. Bitrus Bawa Yusuf,

Sir,

RE-REQUEST TO OFFER PASTORAL COUNSELLING SERVICES

With reference to your letter dated 28th August, 2015 on the above subject matter request to offer counselling services. I humbly write to confirm that I Rev. Monday Engom Affiku agree to provide pastoral counselling during your interviews and focus group discussion sessions in the event of any emotional eruption during the interview and focus group discussion sessions. This is very important so as to support them and to curtail any further grievance complications in addition to the one they had already suffered as a result of the divorce.

Yours in His vineyard,



Rev. Monday Engom Affiku.
+2348069682178; +2348069530016.
eaffiku@yahoo.com; affiengom@gmail.com

Appendix 7a

School of Religion, Philosophy and
Classics,

University of Kwazulu-Natal,

Pietermaritzburgh Main Campus,

Private Bag X01 Scottsville 3209,

Republic of South Africa,

28th August, 2015.

Very Rev Philemon Amaha

Chairman,

ERCC LCC Obi.

Dear Sir,

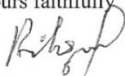
LETTER OF REQUEST TO OFFER COUNSELLING SERVICES

I (Rev. Bitrus Bawa YUSUF; Cell phone: +2348065688868; +2776027273183; Email: bitrusybawa@gmail.com; Residence: ERCC Theological Seminary, F/Ayu Gwantu, Kaduna, Nigeria) is a student at the above institution doing a PhD in Theology. I am doing research on the topic, "The Role of Premarital Counselling for Marriage Stability: A Pastoral Examination of the Interface between the Christian and Alago Indigenous Epawoza Concept of Marriage Preparation." As part of the research, I will be going to the field to interview and conduct focus group discussions with persons including divorcees so as to grant them the opportunity to share from their experiences factors that have led to their divorce.

I am asking for your consent to kindly assist in doing pastoral counselling in case of any emotional eruption arising from my research population in the course of individual in-depth interviews or focus group discussions.

Thanks for your anticipated cooperation.

Yours faithfully



Rev. Bitrus Bawa Yusuf

Appendix 7b

Evangelical Reformed Church of
Christ (ERCC),

LCC No. 1 Obi,

P. O. Box 07

Obi Local Government Area,

Nasarawa State,

Nigeria,

30th August, 2015.

Rev Bitrus B. Yusuf

University of Kwazulu-Natal

South Africa.

Sir,

**RE: LETTER OF REQUEST TO OFFER PASTORAL COUNSELLING
SERVICES**

Greetings to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

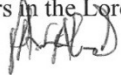
Your letter dated 28th August, 2015 was received and the content was understood.

I, therefore write to say that I accept to help in offering pastoral counseling to divorcees who may be emotionally traumatized in the process of your in-depth interview or focus group discussion.

I pray that God will guide you in your studies.

Thank you.

Yours in the Lord



Very Rev. Philemon Amaha

(08069661289).

Appendix 8a

School of Religion, Philosophy and
Classics,

University of Kwazulu-Natal,

Pietermaritzburgh Main Campus,

Private Bag X01 Scottsville 3209,

Republic of South Africa,

28th August, 2015.

Rev. Danlami Tukura,

Chairman,

ERCC LCC Yarkedai.

Dear Sir,

LETTER OF REQUEST TO OFFER COUNSELLING SERVICE S

I (Rev. Bitrus Bawa YUSUF; Cell phone:- +2348065688868; +2776027273183; Email: bitrusybawa@gmail.com; Residence: ERCC Théological Seminary, F/Ayu Gwantu, Kaduna, Nigeria) is a student at the above institution doing a PhD in Theology. I am doing research on the topic, "The Role of Premarital Counselling for Marriage Stability: A Pastoral Examination of the Interface between the Christian and Alago Indigenous Epawoza Concept of Marriage Preparation." As part of the research, I will be going to the field to interview and conduct focus group discussions with persons including divorcees so as to grant them the opportunity to share from their experiences factors that have led to their divorce.

I am asking for your consent to kindly assist in doing pastoral counselling in case of any emotional eruption arising from my research population in the course of individual in-depth interviews or focus group discussions.

Thanks for your anticipated cooperation.

Yours faithfully



Rev. Bitrus Bawa Yusuf

Appendix 8b

Evangelical Reformed Church of Christ (ERCC),
LCC Yarkede,
Keffi Local Government Area,
Nasarawa State- Nigeria
15TH September, 2015.

Rev. Bitrus Yusuf Bawa,
University of Kwazulu-Natal,
Pietermaritzburgh,
South Africa.
Sir,

RE-LETTER OF REQUEST TO OFFER PASTORAL COUNSELLING

Greetings in the name of our Saviour and Master Jesus Christ, trusting that the grace of God is keeping you.

I was glad to hear from you in the letter you wrote to me on 28th August, 2015 requesting me to offer pastoral counseling to divorcees who may be emotionally traumatized in the course of the in-depth interview and focus group discussion which you intend to conduct as part of your research work.

I wish to state that I do accept to assist accordingly.

Thank you for the honor to serve.

Yours in His Vineyard



Rev. Danlami Tukura

Appendix 9a

School of Religion, Philosophy and
Classics,

University of Kwazulu-Natal,

Pietermaritzburgh Main Campus,

Private Bag X01 Scottsville 3209,

Republic of South Africa,

28th August, 2015.

Very Rev Yakubu Osakede,

ERCC U/ Gindiri- Obi.

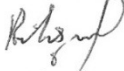
LETTER OF REQUEST TO OFFER COUNSELLING SERVICES

I (Rev. Bitrus Bawa YUSUF; Cell phone: +2348065688868; +2776027273183; Email: bitrusybawa@gmail.com; Residence: ERCC Theological Seminary, F/Ayu Gwantu, Kaduna, Nigeria) is a student at the above institution doing a PhD in Theology. I am doing research on the topic, "The Role of Premarital Counselling for Marriage Stability: A Pastoral Examination of the Interface between the Christian and Alago Indigenous Epawoza Concept of Marriage Preparation." As part of the research, I will be going to the field to interview and conduct focus group discussions with persons including divorcees so as to grant them the opportunity to share from their experiences factors that have led to their divorce.

I am asking for your consent to kindly assist in doing pastoral counselling in case of any emotional eruption arising from my research population in the course of individual in-depth interviews or focus group discussions.

Thanks for your anticipated cooperation.

Yours faithfully



Rev. Bitrus Bawa Yusuf

Appendix 9b

Evangelical Reformed Church of
Christ (ERCC)

LCC U/Gindiri,

Keana Conference,

11th September, 2015.

Dear Rev. Birus B. Yusuf.

RE: REQUEST TO OFFER PASTORAL COUNSELLING

I am writing to say that I received the letter you sent to me on the 28th August 2015.

I also want to inform you that I am ready to provide pastoral counseling to divorcees who may need my help as you do your interview with them if there is need for that.

I wish you success in your studies please.

Thank you so much.

Yours in the Lord



Very Rev Yakubu Osakede

(07031067136).

Appendix 10a

School of Religion, Philosophy and
Classics,

University of Kwazulu-Natal,

Pietermaritzburgh Main Campus,

Private Bag X01 Scottsville 3209,

Republic of South Africa,

28th August, 2015.

Very Rev James Abeku

ERCC, LCC NO.1 Agwatashi.

Dear Sir,

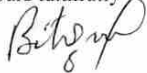
LETTER OF REQUEST TO OFFER COUNSELLING SERVICE S

I (Rev. Bitrus Bawa YUSUF; Cell phone: +2348065688868; +2776027273183; Email: bitrusybawa@gmail.com; Residence: ERCC Theological Seminary, F/Ayu Gwantu, Kaduna, Nigeria) is a student at the above institution doing a PhD in Theology. I am doing research on the topic, "The Role of Premarital Counselling for Marriage Stability: A Pastoral Examination of the Interface between the Christian and Alago Indigenous Epawoza Concept of Marriage Preparation." As part of the research, I will be going to the field to interview and conduct focus group discussions with persons including divorcees so as to grant them the opportunity to share from their experiences factors that have led to their divorce.

I am asking for your consent to kindly assist in doing pastoral counselling in case of any emotional eruption arising from my research population in the course of individual in-depth interviews or focus group discussions.

Thanks for your anticipated cooperation.

Yours faithfully



Rev. Bitrus Bawa Yusuf

Appendix 10b

Evangelical Reformed Church of
Christ (ERCC),

LCC NO. 1 Agwatashi,

P. O. Box

Obi, Local Government Area'

Nasarawa State, Nigeria

5th September, 2015.

Rev. Bitrus Yusuf Bawa

South Africa.

Dear Sir,

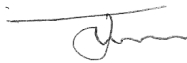
RE- REQUEST TO OFFER PASTORAL COUNSELLING

Calvary greetings to you in the precious name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, hoping you are doing well over there in South Africa.

In response to your request in a letter dated 28th August, 2015 I wish to write and convey my willingness to give pastoral counseling to any of the participants that may need my support in case of emotional stress as you carry out your research interviews and focus group discussions.

God bless you.

Yours faithfully



Very Rev James Abeku.

Appendix 11



19 November 2015

Rev Bitrus Bawa Yusuf (215073354)
School of Religion, Philosophy & Classics
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Rev Bawa Yusuf,

Protocol reference number: HSS/1654/015D

Project title: The role of Premarital Counselling for Marriage Stability: A Pastoral examination of the interface between the Christian and Alago Indigenous Epawoza concept of marriage preparation

Full Approval – Expedited Application

In response to your application received on 06 November 2015, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol have been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

.....
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

/ms

Cc Supervisor: Rev Dr Herbert Moyo
Cc Academic Leader Research: Professor P Denis
Cc School Administrator: Ms Catherine Murugan

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000

Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3587/8350/4557 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 4609 Email: ximbap@ukzn.ac.za / snvmanm@ukzn.ac.za / mohunp@ukzn.ac.za

Website: www.ukzn.ac.za



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Appendix 12a

Interview questions for ERCC ministers

1. What is your understanding of premarital counseling?
2. What are the things ERCC is emphasizing in terms of providing premarital counseling services to intending couples for stability in their future marriages?
3. From your experience in working among the Alago people, can you mention the ways in which the community share in preparing their young people for stable future marriages?
4. Do you think ERCC pastors are providing adequate premarital counselling among the Alago people? If your answer is No, what can you say are the factors behind this?
5. What can you say are the effects of lack of premarital counselling on Christian marriage if any?
6. Are there aspects of the Alago *Epawoza* (communal) life style that you sometimes find useful to adopt in providing premarital counseling services among the Alago people? If yes, what aspects of their culture do you sometimes adopt?
7. Are there any similarities in the ERCC methods of premarital counseling with the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* (communal) concept of marriage preparation?

Appendix 12b

Tamboyoyi domin pastoci na ERCC

1. Menene ganewar ka/ki game da shawartarda masu shirin aure?
2. Ina abubuwan da ERCC ke karfafa akai wajen bada shawara ga masu shirin aure don tabatar da zuananen aure a gaba?
3. Daga cikin abubuwan da ka/ki sani a matsayin wanda ya yi aiki cikin mutanen Alago, me da me suku yi ko karfafa kamar al'uma ga masu shirin aure don tabatar da zaman lafiya cikin aurayan su?
4. Kana/kina tsamani pastocin ERCC suna bada isashe shawarwari ga masu shirin aure cikin al'umman Alago? Idan amsar ka/ki a'a ce, me da me a tunaninka/ki ke hadasa wanan?
5. Me da me sukan iya zama illolin rashin bada isashen shawarwari ga auren kirista?

6. Ko akwai abubuwan da mutanen Alago ke yi tare a matayin *Epawoza* (hadin kai) da ka/ki kan mora wajen bada shawara ga matsa da ke shirin aure? In a akwai, wadane irin al'adunsu ne ka/ki kan mora?
7. Ko akwai kama tsakanin irin shawarwari da ERCC ke ba wa masu shirin aure da irin shiri da mutanen Alago ke yi wa maniyanta aure a matsayin epawoza, wato tare da juna kamar al'uma ga masu shirin aure?
8. Ko akwai babanci tsakanin irin shawarwari da ERCC ke ba wa masu shirin aure da irin shiri da mutanen Alago ke yi a matsayin epawoza, wato tare da juna kamar al'uma ga masu shirin aure?

Appendix 13a

Interview questions for elderly Alago persons

1. What is your understanding of *Epawoza* in terms of preparing intending couples for marriage?
2. Can you mention some of the things the Alago people do in preparing their young ones for marriage before the coming of Western missionaries to Alago land?
3. Are there any changes now which you have noticed from the way it used to be?
4. What do you think are the reasons responsible for these changes?
5. As an Alago Christian, what aspects of the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* concept of marriage preparation do you think are still relevant today that the church can explore?
6. Can you briefly explain the methods of premarital counseling that ERCC pastors give among the Alago people?

Appendix 13b

Tamboyoji domin dattijai a kasar Alago da ke kirista

1. Menene ganewar ka/ki game da Kalmar *Epawoza* a fanin shirya matasa da ke niyan yin aure?

2. Ko zaka/ki iya lisafta irin abubuwan da mutanen Alago ke yi a matsayin al'ada na shirya matasa kamin su yi aure kamin zuwan turawa da sun kawo mana bishara?
3. Ko akwai canji yanzu da yanda da suke shirya matasan su a shekarun baya kamin aure?
4. Me da me ka/ki ke tsamani sun jawo canji yanzu?
5. A matsayin ka/ki na kirista, wane irin al'adun shirin aure na mutanen Alago ne suna da amfani da Ikilisiya yau zata iya mora don tabatar da zaman lafiyan auren matasan da ke shirin aure?
6. Ko zaka/ki iya bayana ire-iren shawarwari/shiri da pastocin ERCC ke bada ga kirista masu shirin aure a kasar Alago?

Appendix 14a

Interview questions for wedded Alago Christian couples

1. What is your understanding of the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* concept in terms of promoting stability in marriage?
2. What kind of help did you receive from your parent, family and the community when you were preparing for your wedding?
3. Can you briefly describe the nature of premarital counseling you went through with your pastor from ERCC when you were preparing for your marriage?
4. Are there any similarities or differences about the kind of help the Alago community and the ERCC give during marriage preparation?
5. What advice can you give to either the church or Alago people on the kind of help or services to be given to intending couple that would promote stability in their future marriages?

Appendix 14b

Tamboyoyi ga mutanen Alago wadanda aka daura masu aure a Ikilisiya

1. Menene ganewar ka/ki game da abin da mutanen Alago ke nufi da epawoza idan an dagantashi da zaman lafiya cikin aure?

2. Wane irin shawara/taimako ne ka/kin samu daga iyaye, zuriya, ko ungwa a lokacin da ka/ki shirin aure?
3. Ko zaka/ki iya bayana a taikace yadda paston ka/ki na ERCC ya shirya ka/ki kamin an daura maku aure?
4. Ko akwai kama ko babanci tsakanin yadda Mutanen Alago ke shirya matasa kamin aure da yadda ERCC ke yi da membobin ta?
5. Wane shawara zaka/ki bayar ga ERCC ko mutanen Alago game da yadda ya kamata su shirya maniyantan aure don tabatar da zaunanen aure bayan an daura shi?

Appendix 15a

Interview questions for Alago divorcees

1. Can you explain the meaning of premarital counseling?
2. What is your understanding of the Alago traditional word, *Epawoza* in relation to marriage?
3. Can you briefly mention those things, either from you or your spouse that led to your divorce?
4. In your opinion, what do you think the church or the Alago community could have done to prevent your divorce?

Appendix 15b

Tamboyoyi ga ma'aurata Alago da suka yi saki

1. Ko zaka/ki iya bayana ma'anana shawartar da maniyatan aure?
2. Menene fahimtar ka/ki game da abin da mutanen Alago ke mufi da epawoza dangane da zaman aure?
3. Ko zaka/ki iya lisafta abubuwan da suka zama sanadodin sakin auren ku?
4. A naka/ki ra'ayi, me da me ka/kina gani da ake mutanen Alago ko Ikilisiya sun yi da auren ku bai rabu ba?

Appendix 16a

Guidelines for focus group discussion with ERCC ministers and church elders

1. What do you understand by premarital counseling?
2. Can you explain the nature of premarital counseling ERCC uses?
3. Which methods do you use in counseling intending couples among the Alago people?

Appendix 16b

Tamboyoyi domin totonawa tsakanin pastoci da dattawan ikilisiya

1. Menene ganewan ku game da shawartar da maniyatan aure?
2. Wadane mata kai ne ERCC ke amfani da su wajen shawartar da maniyatan aure?
3. Wadane mata kai na shawartar da maniyatan aure ne ku ke amfani da su cikin mutanen Alago?

Appendix 17a

Guidelines for focus group discussion with Alago divorcees

1. What is your understanding of the Alago traditional word, *Epawoza* in relation to marriage?
2. Can you briefly mention those things, either from you or your spouse that led to your divorce?
3. In your opinion, what do you think the church or the Alago community could have done to prevent your divorce?

Appendix 17b

Tamboyoyi domin totonawa tare da ma'auratan Alago da suka yi saki

1. Menene fahimtar ku game da abin da mutanen Alago ke mufi da *Epawoza* dangane da zaman aure?

2. Ko za ku lisafta abubuwan da suka zama sanadodin sakin auren ku?
3. A naku ra'ayi, me da me kuna gani da ace mutanen Alago ko Ikilisiya sun yi da auren ku bai rabu ba?

Appendix 18a

Guidelines for focus group discussion with indigenous Alago elders

1. What is your understanding of the Alago indigenous word Epawoza in relation to marriage preparation?
2. Can you mention some of the things the Alago people do in preparing their young ones for marriage traditionally?

Appendix 18b

Tamboyoyi domin totonawa tare da datijai Alago da ba Kirista ba.

1. Menene fahimtar ku game da kalma da mutanen Alago ke kira epawoza dangane da shawartar da matasa maniyatan aure?
2. Ko zui iya lisafta irin abubuwan da mutanen Alago ke yi a matsayin al'ada na shirya matasa kamin su yi aure?

Appendix 19

Tables showing distribution of the participants

Table 1: ERCC Ministers and church elders

S/N	Pseudonyms	Academic qualification	Gender	Age
1	Yohanna, Joel	DTh	Male	58-60
2	Mutashi, Isuwa	DTh	Male	47-50
3	Dodo, Kasa	DTh	Male	50-55
4	Hosea, Adam	DTh	Male	60-62
5	Goge, Luka	DTh	Male	46-48
6	James, Habu	DTh	Male	73-75
7	Monday, Kawas	BTh	Male	64-66
8	Akawu, Filibus	DTh	Male	50-52
9	Vincent, Martha	NCE	Female	43-45
10	Joshua, Simon	BA(Ed.)	Male	45-47

Table 2: Elderly Alago persons

S/N	Pseudonyms	Academic qualification	Gender	Age
1	Oname, Ozotu	Adult education	Female	65-70
2	Amokpa, Oshida	Professor	Male	62-65
3	Ozegya, Abayun	Adult education	Female	78-80
4	Adeka, Amowuin	Adult education	Female	73-75
5	Atoshi, Era	Diploma	Male	58-60
6	Egwa, Dangana	Adult education	Male	60-62
7	Idasho, Oboshi	Adult education	Male	50-55
8	Osana, Asadu	Diploma	Male	70-75
9	Osarewa, Azumi	Adult education	Female	60-65
10	Esekweyi, Otasala	Adult education	Female	68-70

Table 3: Wedded Alago Christian couples

S/N	Pseudonyms	Academic qualification	Gender	Age
1	Ogiri, Anya	NCE	Male	43-45
2	Sunday, Omunari	JCHEW	Female	30-32
3	Agya, Vincent	CHEW	Male	40-42
4	Alakayi, Andrew	SSCE	Male	44-45
5	Timothy, Grace	NCE	Female	38-40

Table 4: Alago Divorced persons

S/N	Pseudonyms	Academic qualification	Gender	Age
1	Ebenya, Bulus	PSLC	Male	48-50
2	Amos, Naomi	SSCE	Female	45-47
3	Ashiki, Benjamin	NCE	Male	50-52
4	Oshi, Asabe	Adult education	Female	45-50
5	Afo, Litini	PSLC	Female	42-45
6	Daniel, Mercy	PSLC	Female	45-47
7	Igabo, Efohi	Diploma	Female	52-54
8	Osuko, Iliya	PSLC	Male	50-55
9	Ari, Ester	PSLC	Female	38-40
10	Ipashi, Ose	Adult education	Male	52-55

Table 5: Focus group discussions

S/N	Name of group	Number of participants	Number of male	Number of female	Age
1	ERCC ministers/church elders	5 participants	4	1	45-75
2	Elderly indigenous Alago persons	5 participants	2	3	50-80
3	Divorced persons	5 participants	2	3	35-55

Appendix 20

Sample of transcribed interviews

A. Transcribed interview with ERCC ministers

1. What is your understanding of premarital counselling?

It has to do with educating intending couples about potential problem areas in marriage, and teaching them how to cope with such problems should they arise in their marriage.

2. What are the things ERCC is emphasizing in terms of providing premarital counselling services to intending couples for stability in their future marriages?

Personally, I often teach them to be well prepared for marriage by being hard working. I counsel intending couple to know their health status. I warn them against sex before marriage. Some who thought they were healthy later found out that they have HIV or hepatitis after going through medical checks. That helped them to start taking care of their health condition early enough, and some of them have come back to appreciate me.

3 From your experience in working among the Alago people, can you mention the ways in which the community share in preparing their young people for stable future marriages?

The Alago people are good at preparing their young ones for marriage as a community. For example, those of them who are Christians demonstrate this on the eve of a wedding by accompanying the bride on foot through the streets with songs and dancing to the pastor's house. But they need to do so earlier enough so that it doesn't have to last far into the night.

4 Do you think ERCC pastors are providing adequate premarital counselling among the Alago people? If your answer is No, what can you say are the factors behind this?

ERCC pastors often give little time for premarital counselling which is not good enough. The church should come out with a firm policy that would mandate both pastors and intending couples to take premarital counselling very seriously. There should be a manual for every pastor to use in providing premarital counselling to their members, because you know that we don't even have a premarital counselling manual as a church.

5 What can you say are the effects of lack of premarital counselling on Christian marriage if any?

I wouldn't know what other pastors are doing in their churches concerning premarital counselling since every pastor is in charge of his own congregation. But let me add by saying that without premarital counselling, it will be like building a house on the mud.

6 Are there aspects of the Alago *Epawoza* (communal) life style that you sometimes find useful to adopt in providing premarital counselling services among the Alago people? If yes, what aspects of their culture do you sometimes adopt?

Yes, for example in terms of wedding feast, you hardly understand who is actually organizing it because the relations of the bride and groom all join their hands together to ensure that the wedding ceremony is successful. As a sign of togetherness, the relations also dress in uniform attire on the wedding day, the men separately and the women separately. This culture of the Alago people challenges me to mobilize members of the church to also support the couple spiritually and materially.

7 Are there any similarities in the ERCC methods of premarital counselling with the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* (communal) concept of marriage preparation?

I can see a similarity in the area of investigation before consent is given for a marriage and material support given to the intending couple.

8 Can you identify any differences between the ERCC methods of premarital counselling and the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* concept of marriage preparation?

The rules governing the Alago marriage preparation are mostly tied to the woman. But for the church, the rules apply to both the man and the woman alike.

B. Transcribed interview with Elderly Alago Christians

1. What is your understanding of *Epawoza* in terms of preparing intending couples for marriage?

Epawoza as a concept is advocating for love and unity between two people; being your brother's keeper. There is strength in being two rather than just being isolated as an individual. You need the comfort and protection of a fellow brother to be able to stand on your own. You alone don't have the capacity to be.

2. Can you mention some of the things the Alago people do in preparing their young ones for marriage before the coming of western missionaries to Alago land?

Fathers used to choose marriage partners for their male children at the birth of a baby girl. A father would get a piece of coin that has a hole in the middle and tie a rope to it and then put it on the wrist of the baby girl as a sign that she had been booked for his son. As the girl grows up the people of the community would be teasing her by calling her the wife of this person or that person. Each time the boy and the girl meet together, they would feel shy towards each other with a high sense of respect. When a girl matures as a woman her parents would warn her never to allow any man to touch her. She would also be told never to stand with a man alone when it is dark. The Alago people have a tradition called *Osharische*. During the *osharische* a girl's parents send her to her fiancé's house to sleep with him in his room but without having any carnal knowledge of each other. The young man would have to fasten his manhood with *obente* (indigenous apron) so that the manhood does not over power him. This was for the two of them to prove that they have self-control. Once the lady was able to return home undefiled, her parents would now have the confidence to release her from time to time to visit her fiancé. But if the young man was reported to have attempted to have sex with the girl, he would be regarded by the community as a wicked person who must be avoided and the relationship

would be cut off. Every year the man would take four heavy bundles of corn to his fiancée's parents and this would continue for as long as the engagement lasted. Marriage engagements in those days lasted for between 4 – 5 years, in some cases it lasted for up to 7 years, it all depends on the maturity of the woman for marriage.

3. Are there any changes now which you have noticed from the way it used to be?

I remember in those days you cannot marry a woman against the wishes of your parents because our people believe that a child does not know anything. In fact, there is an adage that says, 'what an elderly person can see while in a sitting position, a child cannot see it even if he climbs a tree'. But today, due to modernity, many children think they know even better than their parents whom they usually term as 'old school,' therefore we usually witness conflict between children and their parents when it comes to deciding whom to marry.

4. What do you think are the reasons responsible for these changes?

Our young ones today are borrowing from the culture of the white men; they no longer show the kind of love and respect we used to share in the past. Although the white men have brought us some good things, their culture has separated us from one another. We do say *Epawoza* but every person ends up being concerned about what happens in their immediate family.

5. As an Alago Christian, what aspects of the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* concept of marriage preparation do you think are still relevant today that the church can explore?

The Alago man frowns at infidelity. The Alago tradition glorifies chastity which is represented in practice during their festivals. You see the maids dressing in white apparel which is a demonstration of purity, undefiled personality in terms of the physical body and the mind. If we are to continue to project that by socializing our youths using this

image, I think it would help because I think that Christianity and Islam borrowed from the Alago tradition.

6. Can you briefly explain the methods of premarital counselling that ERCC pastors give among the Alago people?

They teach the men to love their wives and the women to obey their husbands. They also conduct medical tests on the couple before the wedding day.

C. Transcribed interview with wedded Alago Christian couples

6. What is your understanding of the Alago indigenous *Epawoza* concept in terms of promoting stability in marriage?

It means two are better than one. For example in the spirit of *Epawoza* my wife supplies the need of the family when I am lacking.

7. What kind of help did you receive from your parents, family and the community when you were preparing for your wedding?

Our community assisted us financially and materially when we were preparing for our wedding. Our mothers instructed me to be obedient to my husband.

8. Can you briefly describe the nature of premarital counselling you went through with your pastor from ERCC when you were preparing for your marriage?

He counselled us. He emphasized that we should communicate effectively with each other as we were getting married. He encouraged us to say sorry to each other whenever there is any conflict. He advised us to relate well with our in-laws by accepting them as part of our family.

9. Are there any similarities or differences about the kind of help the Alago community and the ERCC give during marriage preparation?

I think both the Alago and the ERCC try to help intending couple know what marriage is all about before they even get married, but I think marriage preparation among the Alago usually starts earlier than the way it is done in the church.

10. What advice can you give to either the church or Alago people on the kind of help or services to be given to intending couple that would promote stability in their future marriages?

The ERCC pastors must live an exemplary life before their members otherwise the counselling they do would not have impact on their members. For example if the marriage counsellor has a crisis in his own marriage, the intending couples may come to him for premarital counselling just for formality and after that they may not value the advice the pastor may have given them. ERCC pastors should also be vast in knowledge about marriage so that they can help their members with useful advice on different aspects of marital relationship.

D. Transcribed interview with Divorced Alago persons

5. Can you explain the meaning of premarital counselling?

It means advising intending couples about what marriage is so that they may avoid marital problems in future.

6. What is your understanding of the Alago traditional word, *Epawoza* in relation to marriage?

It means two are better than one. It means the man and his wife must advise each other for success in their marital home. But if I advise my husband against going out with other women he would never listen to me, he would make sure I lose my peace that day.

7. Can you briefly mention those things, either from you or your spouse that led to your divorce?

The greatest mistake I made in my entire life was that I got married to my ex-wife just to please my mum. Why because she was the person who chose the lady and arranged the

marriage for me while I was working in Lagos. Another factor was that I think my ex-wife was not truly converted. I remember she only went to church and confessed that she received Christ because she was told that unless she did that she was not a Christian and I could not marry her because I am a Christian.

8. In your opinion, what do you think the church or the Alago community could have done to prevent your divorce?

If the church had counselled us before the wedding the pastor would have advised us to take more time in studying each other before going to the altar to say “I do, I do.” On my part I think I shouldn’t have yielded to the manipulation of my mother to go for the wedding, I should have stood on what I wanted for myself.

E. Transcribed focus group discussion with ERCC ministers and elders

4. What do you understand by premarital counselling?

It means helping the couple to know their stance before marriage and helping them to know the challenges of marriage before they enter into it. It also means furnishing the couple with the right view of marriage as taught in the Holy Bible before they get into it.

5. Can you explain the nature of premarital counselling ERCC uses?

Premarital counselling in ERCC usually involves teaching intending couples about what Christian marriage is and what it is not. ERCC also emphasizes the need for medical test before wedding.

6. Which methods do you use in counselling intending couples among the Alago people?

As an ERCC minister, I educate couples that marriage must be entered into according to the will of God. Couples should not rush in terms of taking decisions on whom to marry. They must not lay too much emphasis on outward beauty alone but also on good character. I do warn the youths against the Pentecostal influence that makes it easy for them to attribute everything to the Holy Spirit saying, “The Spirit tells me that...” and

when you check very well there is nothing spiritual about it. I teach that child bearing should not be taken as the ultimate purpose for getting married rather it should be viewed as one of the blessings of God in a marriage.

F. Transcribed focus group discussion with Alago Divorced persons

4. What is your understanding of the Alago traditional word, *Epawoza* in relation to marriage?

It means that before now, the man was alone but now that he has married me I become his helper because two are better than one.

5. Can you briefly mention those things, either from you or your spouse that led to your divorce?

My husband did not tell me the wrong I have done. But I think his problem is that he doesn't want me to talk about his involvement with other women and his drinking habit.

6. In your opinion, what do you think the church or the Alago community could have done to prevent your divorce?

I am not sure, but maybe if my mother-in-law was talked to by respected people in the community over her attitude towards me the situation wouldn't have reached the level we have found ourselves currently.

G. Transcribed focus group discussion with indigenous Alago Elders

3. What is your understanding of the Alago indigenous word *Epawoza* in relation to marriage preparation?

Epawoza means a lot; it is what defines humanity in this world. It means togetherness. If you are not living in togetherness as a human being, you would not be known, you need another person to talk with, eat with, and take decisions.

4. Can you mention some of the things the Alago people do in preparing their young ones for marriage traditionally?

As a young man you were taught not to beat your wife or insult her. And as a young woman you were instructed not to leave your husband and travel to a far distance to look for money; rather the young girls were encouraged to stay at home and sell *okwokwo* (local gruel) and *omasa* or *akara* (beans cake) to raise money to support themselves and their families. Engaged couples were strictly warned not to know the nakedness of each other until they get married so as not to be ashamed of themselves during the traditional rite of *kwinu* (virginity testing).