

THE CHRISTIAN POLYGAMIST

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The Christian Polygamist Samuel Nkulila

Bishop Yohana had just concluded a two-week crusade in the city of Moshi, Tanzania, and 350 persons had committed their lives to Jesus in the last evening alone. One of those was a man by the name of Musa. Because of the conversion of this man, the pastor and committee of one of the smaller churches in the city had a rather large problem—Musa had too many wives.

Musa was a man of some means. He owned 200 cows, a big farm, and had 10,000 shillings in the bank. His farm lay a few miles from the edge of the city where the small church was located. Musa had a friend in the city who belonged to the church, and he had attended services several times with his friend. They had some long discussions about the Christian faith. On one occasion his friend had introduced him to the pastor of the church.

On the morning after his conversion, Musa knocked on the door of the pastor. After greeting him, Musa told him with unmistakable joy that he had become a Christian. A slight shadow came over his face, however, when he confided to the pastor that he now had a problem that he didn't have before his conversion.

"Pastor," he said, "I praise God for saving me from sin. But according to your teaching, I am supposed to have only one wife. I have seven wives and twenty-five children! What shall I do?"

The pastor was taken aback. In his rather small and poor congregation, they had not yet faced this dilemma. With little time to consider, the pastor fell back on the missionary teaching in the Bible Institute where he had received his training. "Of course, the Bible, which is God's Holy Word, demands that you remain with your first

wife only. The rest can go. If you stay with them, you will be committing adultery. Also, if you stay with them, you cannot take Holy Communion in the church. So, go quickly. Get yourself organized. Keep the first wife with her five children and send the others and their twenty children away."

The new convert went away from the pastor's home with a heavy heart. "What kind of religion is this?" he asked himself. "When one person is saved, does it mean that others must be lost? I thought that coming to Jesus was supposed to take away my burdens. Now it seems that a much heavier one has fallen on me."

The next day, Musa decided to travel by bus some hundred miles from his home to see Bishop Yohana. He explained his situation to the bishop, who listened thoughtfully and was very sympathetic. He asked Musa if he truly would follow Jesus if something could be done to care for his seven wives and twenty-five children.

"Of course, Bishop," Musa replied. "That is all I request."

"Go home now, Musa," the bishop said kindly but firmly. "I am going to discuss your case with the church committee next week, and we shall let you know what has been decided."

The following week, Bishop Yohana called the committee together. It was the first time they had faced the issue of polygamy in their congregation. It was quite a challenge to them, and they talked for hours.

The bishop said, "Gentlemen, the crucial issue here is the welfare of the family. If Musa keeps only his first wife and her children, who will care for the other six wives and their children? Since Musa is well able to care for them all, can we not find a more humane approach to the problem?"

One of the deacons said, "Musa can do one thing. He can build another house, where he will live with his first wife, at least one mile from the grouped houses of the former family. He can still be responsible for seeing that his other wives and children are getting food, clothes, and medical care. But he should not sleep in their houses anymore."

Musa's friend, who was also on the committee, lamented, "This is inhuman. Musa's family has been together for over twenty years, and now, simply because he has become a Christian, must the family fall apart?"

But another committee member shouted angrily, "That is how the Way is—a hard and lonely journey. We are to forsake all else if we want to follow Jesus."

The meeting was a tough one. Scripture after Scripture was quoted on both sides of the issue. One side quoted Scriptures to support the

idea that Musa should have nothing to do with any except his first wife. The other side quoted Scriptures about Christian love and compassion for all people. To them, there was also an issue of fairness and justice. They maintained that Musa was a rich man, and he had an obligation to support his whole family. Musa, they pointed out, was fully prepared to do this.

The bishop went home without the case having been settled, but the church committee dedicated itself to a week of prayer and Bible study. At the end of the week they came to a conclusion. The committee decided that Musa could not continue in polygamy and still have fellowship with their church, for that would be a stumbling block to the whole community. They would allow him, however, to visit his former wives and their twenty children. He should also support them financially and see that their needs were met.

Musa seemed quite relieved by their decision, and expressed his agreement. He began attending Sunday school, and after six months he was baptized.

Another six months went by. Then one Sunday afternoon at the close of the service, there was a meeting of the church elders. Musa interrupted the meeting with these words, "Forgive me, Elders, but I want to inform you that my third wife, Wandi, has been blessed with a baby girl. Now, praise God, we have twenty-six children!"

A dead silence greeted Musa's words. Obviously Musa had not followed their advice. Now how should they deal with him? They would have to confront him the following Sunday, but what should they say?

Postscript

When the elders met the following Sunday, they decided on a different approach. They would tell Musa that he could stay with his wives, trusting that the Holy Spirit would speak to the "illegitimate" wives and convict them to leave Musa. In this way, it was hoped that those who felt free to go should do so, and eventually, the "true" wife would remain.

Musa's friend left the meeting still wondering if they could not have found a better solution.