

Sept. 28, 1983.

Dear brother Philip and Brother Epaphras:

Greetings in our Master's name.

Time passes quickly, and I know that you are anxiously awaiting a reply regarding the response of the Berean Brotherhood pertaining to the matter of what to do in regards to the few Kenyans who come to the Truth with more than one wife.

As you no doubt already realize, there is no easy "thus saith the Lord" answer to the problem. All have their opinions or convictions which each feel are adequately supported by scripture. Therefore, when we placed the matter before the brethren and sisters of the Berean Fellowship in the last Kenya Report, we did so with some feeling of anxiousness and trepidation, expecting a variety of opinions in reply. We were well aware that it was a matter that had the potential of erupting in trouble and division.

Being mindful of these potential problems, we stated the issue to the Berean brethren and sisters in the following terms: "The Kenyan government does not require the registration of marriages. The majority of marriages therefore are unregistered "home marriages", and, because they are unregistered, they are not regulated by the laws of the country concerning marriage. In Kenya, as in other parts of Africa and the Middle East, it is not uncommon to see a man with more than one wife. While polygamy is not allowed in registered marriages, it is quite within the law in "home marriages". The point of all this is that some of those in Kenya who are brethren and sisters are involved in a polygamous union that began before they came to a knowledge of the Truth and accepted it in baptism. We were alerted just before we left for Kenya that we may be confronted with this problem. Our response to such individuals in this position that were seeking our fellowship was that they should "stand aside", at least temporarily until we could consult with others and arrive at the correct and scriptural method of handling the situation. We feel that time is running out and a decision must be made soon as it is not right to leave these brethren too long without a definite reply."

"We urge brethren and sisters to very carefully consider the problem from all angles and perspectives. Above all, we must be very clear about just what it is that is at issue. ALL the brethren and sisters in Kenya are of one mind with us that polygamy is in opposition to the principles taught by Christ and Paul. This fact became very apparent in the interviews they believe, without question or reservation, the Biblical principle of

"one man, one wife, for life". This was also the expressed belief of the brethren who had come to the Truth with more than one wife."

"Whether polygamy is right or wrong is not the issue; and, unfortunately, in most of the comments of the pioneer brethren on the subject, to which we normally look for guidance, this is the only issue that appears to be dealt with by them. We are, in any case, enclosing some of these comments for consideration by the brethren and sisters. The content of these writings is essentially what is believed and taught in the Berean Brotherhood today, both here and in Africa, in principle and in practice, that anyone having come to a knowledge of the Truth, and being baptized, must conform to the requirements of the Gospel upon this matter and not contract more than one partner in marriage."

"The real issue to which we must address ourselves at the present time is to decide upon a practical, workable, scriptural course to be followed in the case of the few brethren who find themselves in the unfortunate and awkward situation of having taken more than one wife previous to their enlightenment by the Truth. In most cases a family by both partners is involved and must also be taken into consideration. Often one, sometimes both of the partners may be in the Truth also, or are interested in the Truth."

"If you should arrive at the conclusion that a brother in this situation must continue to stand aside, then we need answers to additional questions. Are we then implying that, in order to be in fellowship, he must put away the second wife? Is that a scriptural implication to make? What happens to the family of the wife that is put away? Do they remain with the father and lose their mother, or do they remain with their mother and lose their father? What happens to the wife herself? Where is she to go? In Kenya there are many circumstances in which the husband can only afford support to those who remain in the "compound". Would returning to a family that is hostile to the Truth create insurmountable problems for the wife if she were a sister? (The common practice in such circumstances is for the father to give her to another man.) How is the decision made as to which wife is to go? Could the Truth by this practice become the means of ridding oneself of an undesirable partner? These are the type of questions that need straightforward answers in harmony with divine principles in such matters."

"Besides the comments of the pioneer brethren, we also have in our possession a comment upon this subject taken from a letter written about

fourteen years ago by brother G.V. Growcott. We found it to be very helpful and enclose a copy of it for your consideration."

"This matter has been discussed with a few brethren and sisters already but we feel that the responsibility for finding a solution ought not to be left up to a few. Others must share some of the responsibility and assist in arriving at a workable, scriptural answer. We would also like to take this opportunity to urge brethren and sisters to maintain balance and perspective in considering this matter. Experience of the past has taught us that subjects of this nature are prone to obsession, crochets and extremes. This must be avoided, and an effort made by every one of us not to place upon this matter an arbitrary importance out of proportion to its incidence and its place relative to the fundamentals of the Truth. It is not a first principle. No one believes polygamy is right or advocates its practice. It is not a problem among the majority of Kenyans. Speaking for ourselves, we already find our minds dwelling too much on solving the problem rather than looking at the greater percentage of Kenyans where this does not present a problem. But we cannot ignore the fact that the problem does exist among a few, and for them we must have an answer that applies the wisdom of scripture to the matter; and it is to accomplish this that we invite your thoughts and comments and opinions." (End of quote from Kenya Report.)

That was the manner in which we presented the matter to the brotherhood. We have now waited a considerable length of time in order to give the brethren and sisters ample opportunity to think it over and express themselves. We have been very pleased with the quality of the replies. In general, it appears that the members of each ecclesia have attended a special meeting of their ecclesia to discuss the matter, after which the recording brother has expressed by letter to brother Bob or myself the collective opinion of that ecclesia. In addition, most brethren and sisters in isolation have replied also. We therefore feel that we are now at a point where we can reasonably say that the Berean Fellowship has expressed its opinion.

The replies displayed in almost all cases a very calm, mature, and spiritual attitude in approaching the matter; and we were especially relieved to note that the response presented a united front--that is, the replies were, in general, very consistent, and almost unanimous.

In summary, the expression of the Brotherhood is that the Berean

Fellowship does not agree with or condone polygamy. It is without question contrary to the teaching of Christ. However, in the particular circumstance where an individual comes to the knowledge of the Truth already married to more than one wife, the brethren and sisters have almost unanimously expressed that in such a situation we have no scriptural authority to request of that person that he must put away all but one wife either before or after baptism. Whatsoever marital state he be found to be in as to plurality of wives when coming to the Truth must continue to be his marital state, with particular and emphatic emphasis that after putting on Christ he MUST NOT take any more wives. It must be very carefully explained and understood that if a man marry more than one wife after putting on Christ in baptism, there is no alternative but that he be disfellowshipped.

That is how the Berean Fellowship as a whole feel about this issue upon which you brethren in Kenya must make decisions with regard to several brethren who have been involved in polygamy before coming to the Truth.

It is encouraging to know that what we have outlined as the mind of the Berean Fellowship agrees with what you have stated in your correspondence as your understanding of the issue. We are therefore of one mind on the matter. All cases that present themselves should be answered by applying the scriptural principles expressed in this letter and the guidance of the Constitution and the Ecclesial Guide.

The related problem that follows is in regard to the brethren, who having more than one wife before being accepted into fellowship, as to what duties in ecclesial affairs they should be allowed to perform.

In the light of what is written in 1 Tim.3:1-8, and Titus 1: 5-10 which concerns the attributes of bishops, elders and deacons we look to these writings for guidance. The Christadelphian Treasury pp 191 states:

"Respecting 1Tim 3:1-8. The Greek word (Episkopos) rendered Bishop signifies overseer, onlooker, or caretaker; hence it is rendered "looking diligently in Heb.12:15 and "overseers" in Acts 20:28 while as a participle it is rendered "oversight" in 1 Peter 5:2. In the apostolic age this was a spirit-gifted function. For that reason there is nothing entirely parallel to it in our twentieth century experience. With us the nearest approach to it is the brother or brethren who both minister the word of exhortation and exercise a managing control over ecclesial matters"

It is interesting to note what Bro. Roberts said on this in 1881

"We have recovered th apostolic faith from the apostolic and prophetic writings, but God has not seen fit to revive the apostolic privilege of spirit ministraton. What are we to do?

Shall we appoint brethren by selection to exercise authority among us?

"How can we impart an authority that we do not ourselves possess? If God were to speak again before the Lord's return and give us a divinely-appointed rulership, our difficulty would be at an end, and our position much more privileged every way, but in our peculiar position, the most we can do is to do our best by mutual consent and co-operation"

The guidance we have from the apostle Paul indicates the attributes of an overseer or serving brother, in order that he stands before the ecclesia as an example to the flock, showing forth in his own walk and conduct that which is pleasing to our Heavenly Father.

In our day, the outline of the qualifications of an "overseer" could exempt or disqualify many of us from holding office in the ecclesia. Even if we had but one wife we could fail in meeting other of the stipulations that equally are required.

We must therefore be discreet and avoid laying down hard and fast rules in view of the fact that appointments in the apostles day were guided by the Holy Spirit ("Acts 20:28. "over the ecclesia, the Holy Spirit hath appointed you overseers"). In the absence of the Spirit we can only be guided by the Word spoken which gives us the essence of what direction we should take.

In light of this, it would appear then that in ^{an} ecclesia where there were many members and enough brethren capable of looking after the affairs of the ecclesia that it would be preferable that a polygamous brother would not be set before the ecclesia to serve. However, in the absence of capable brethren in a small ecclesia, or where there is no other brother in the ecclesia, then there is no alternative but that he perform what is necessary in order that the Truth may be served.

A brother with two wives need never be ashamed of his state which he incurred while in darkness. He must never seek "to be loosed from a wife" for "the Lord hateth putting away." He must be faithful to the wives that he took in good faith and as a brother in Christ his acceptance of the Truth enhances his responsibilities towards his wives and his children. The opportunity is there to teach his wives and bring up the children in the fear and admonition of the Lord. We all must teach and preach the word. The good news and glad tidings must be shown to all men and he must do likewise.

We hope that this will put your minds at ease on this matter in order that the Truth may continue to progress and prosper in Kenya and also, very importantly, that the individuals concerned may not be kept waiting any longer for baptism or fellowship.

Sincerely, your Brethren in Christ.

Bro. Ed Truelove Bro. Bob Philip

THE PIONEERS STATEMENTS ON POLYGAMY

1866 - 'Ambassador'. "A saint regulated by the word, would have only one wife at a time."

- J. Thomas.

1870 - 'Christadelphian'. "As to your question, we have submitted it to Dr. Thomas, who sits near at the time of writing. He says a believer in polygamy is not qualified for association with those who unite to carry out the apostles' doctrine, however much he may know of the Truth. There is in polygamy, he says, too much of the flesh and too little of the spirit for those who seek to walk in the spirit and not to fulfil the lusts of the flesh". - R. Roberts p. 127 (Australia) 378

1874 - 'Christadelphian' "Polygamy was permitted but not appointed by the Law of Moses. It was a custom dating from pre-Mosaic times. The Law found it in existence and made it subject to regulation. But we are not, therefore, to infer for it a divine character. The law sanctioned divorce: but Jesus told the Jews it was because of the hardness of their hearts that they were suffered to put away their wives (Matt. 19:8) that "from the beginning it was not so". Adam had but one Eve: Noah, but one wife. "And wherefore one?" enquires the prophet on this subject "That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth". (Mal. 2:15) Paul distinctly recognises "one wife" in his general allusions to marriage and in his comparison of the Church to the spouse of Christ (Titus 1:6; Eph. 5:31,33; I Cor. 7:2, 12:27). Now as the law of the future age will be the law proceeding from Zion (Isa. 2:3) we may be sure that a provisional, accidental, abnormal and hurtful institution like polygamy will find no place." - R. Roberts

1897 - 'Christadelphian'. "Polygamy is opposed to the principles of Paul, who in all his writings, only recognises "one wife" (Titus 1:6; Eph. 5:31, 33; I Cor. 7:2, 12 - 27). This is sufficient for us, without discussing the case of the ancients, who lived under a different order of things. We are subject to Paul as the appointed teacher of the Gentiles (I Tim. 2:7; I Cor. 11:1; I. Thess 4:1) "If any man think himself to be spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I (Paul) write unto you are the commandments of the Lord". (I. Cor. 14; 37). If polygamy is anti-apostolic, then it is our duty to withdraw from the polygamist, whether he is so in practice or principle only; for Paul has laid down this rule: "Withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the traditions which ye have received of us" (2 Thess. 3:6;) A man's knowledge of the truth goes for nothing, if he is disobedient."

- R. Roberts

1928 Christadelphian p. 518 Deuteronomy 21 and Polygamy. Although the Torah permits polygamy, it nevertheless holds up monogamy as the ideal. When the institution of marriage is first mentioned, man is exhorted to "cleave unto his wife": (Gen. 2:24 "not his wives". The first man is provided by God with only one wife, and in the beautiful pictures of domestic life presented in Psalm 128:3 and Prov. 31-mention is made of "wife" not wives. Moreover, the Bible records many instances where the peace of the home was shattered through there being two wives; and in the present passage it aims at preventing injustice being done to the children of a less favoured wife. The terms "beloved" and "hated" in this verse 15 must be understood in a relative sense, and not absolutely. It does not necessarily mean that all the husband's love is given to one wife and the other is actually hater. The "beloved" wife is merely a favourite. A similar usage of the terms will be found in Gen. 29:30; Ezekiel 16:37; Malachi 1:2. --- Notes on the Sedra.

Christadelphian Treasury Page 177. Polygamy. Apparently from Genesis 4:19 Lamech was the inventor of Polygamy; and a nice hash he made of it. Bro. R. Roberts describe it as "a provisional, accidental, abnormal, and hurtful institution, tolerated without being expressly sanctioned". It was certainly not a divine institution, for God's plan was one man, one wife, and they two one. Gen. 2:24 ----- F.G. Janaway

Christadelphian Answers P. 213. One man, one wife. One woman, one husband. This is Christian doctrine. Polygamy is un-Christian. So says Paul (Titus, 1:6; I Cor. 7:2,12-27; Ephes. 5:31,33). Whatever may have been the reasons for the Patriarchs adopting the practice, polygamy certainly did not result in Peace and Goodwill in the household. That we can see from the divine records. Paul (I. Tim 3:2) endorses the Edenic rule. (Compiled)

Christadelphian Answers P. 211 Alien marriages. Beyond all question for a Christadelphian to marry one who is not, is to commit a sin which no faithful ecclesia will condone in the absence of acknowledgement of the offence, and expressed repentance thereof. But beyond

that, the ecclesia dare not go. A repudiation of the marriage contract, and separation of the parties must not be demanded.

F. G. Janaway

Christadelphian Answers printed 1920. Treasury printed 1921.

Published Articles on Polygamy

Berean Magazine 1927 p. 377. "Polygamy was permitted, but not appointed under the Law of Moses. It was a custom dating from pre-Mosaic chaotic times. The Law found it in existence, and made it subject to regulation. But we are not therefore to infer for it a divine character. The law sanctioned divorce; but Jesus told the Jews it was because of the hardness of their hearts they were suffered to put away their wives. (Matt. 19:8) but that from the beginning it was not so. On the same principle, polygamy was tolerated without being expressly sanctioned, "from the beginning it was not so." Adam had but one Eve, Noah, but one wife. And wherefore one? Enquiries the Prophet on this subject: That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth" (Mal. 2:15) Paul distinctly recognizes "one wife" in his general allusions to marriage and in his comparison of the Church to the spouse of Christ (Titus 1:6, Eph 5:31-33; I Cor. 7:2; 12:27) Now as the Law of the future age will be the divine Law proceeding from Zion (Isa. 2:3) we may be quite sure that a provisional, accidental, abnormal and hurtful institution like polygamy will find no place." (R. Roberts - Christadelphian 1874, p 282).

Berean Magazine 1927 p. 247.

From a letter justifying polygamy we cull the following extracts which illustrate the muddled thinking which always comes in the wake of departure from simple Truth;

Extract 1. "I have yet to see a definite forbidding of more than one wife in the New Testament."

This reminds us of the brother who was a Freemason who wrote us; "I cannot find a New Testament passage forbidding me to be a Mason". We replied that the whole spirit of the Truth was against it, and no specific passage was required.

Extract 2. "The principles of the Truth ... work out in the acceptance of monogamy. The standard was the beautiful martial relationship of one husband and one wife."

This cancels out Extract 1 surely. But there is an "if".

Extract III "If a Turk with more than one wife came to a knowledge of the Truth .. you should help him into the Truth and let him keep his wives ... tolerating his polygamy."

This means accommodating the principles of the Truth to merely human circumstances, "Making provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof." Our method would be to ask the Turk to alter his mode of life in obedience to the Truth. .. Editors.

God Has Permitted Polygamy and Divorce

Under the Law of Moses, God in His wisdom permitted 2 things which manifest the unsoundness of the view your brother-in-law expresses; they are polygamy and divorce.

It is clear from the long range of scriptural history that in God's sight monogamy (while the ideal and type of the union of Christ and the Bride) is not a vital first principle, and there have been circumstances where polygamy has served God's purpose better. These considerations (when God Himself, for His Own wise purposes, has departed from, and permitted departures from, the Edenic ideal) take all the force out of the rigid, mechanical "one man, one woman, one flesh" interpretation of marriage applied to all times and conditions of light and darkness, knowledge and ignorance.

God freely permitted polygamy in Israel, even giving laws to regulate it, He permitted it to Abraham, and blessed Ishmael. He permitted it to Jacob, and built the whole chosen Seed of the 12 tribes from Jacob's four wives. He permitted it to David, the "man after God's our heart".

The ideal marriage as established by God unquestionably is one man and one woman for life. But God has never specifically forbidden polygamy. We must try to get God's view of the relative importance of things, rather than be influenced by the false morality of a hypocritical civilization that knows not God.

All these things should be deeply meditated upon. We are not wiser than God with our petty self-righteousnesses. God has permitted, as it suited His wisdom and purpose, a range of deviations from the original Edenic ideal.

God commanded Polygamy. In one case (the brother who died without seed) God commanded polygamy. The living brother (who would of course have his own wife to raise up his own seed) was required to also take the dead brother's wife, to raise up seed to him. This was a merciful provision, and those who in selfishness refused to comply were despised in Israel.

God in His wisdom has not created marriage with the cold mechanical rigidity of some among us who misguidedly seek to act a more restrictive pattern that God himself sets. True, the ideal exists. True, the ideal is best. But God has varied it according to circumstances, and in His varying of it, He has proved that the rigid, "one-flesh" application to all mankind for all time, in darkness and light, is not sound.

In apostolic times there would be many in Israel and among the Gentiles who had more than one wife. But there is never an example or command about any having to be put away.

The very regulation covering bishops ("the husband of one wife") shows the permitted existence of polygamy in the brotherhood, if a man were found by the Truth in this condition.

What if a faithful Israelite, in obedience to God, had taken his dead brother's wife in addition to his own? Would he have had to put her away when he was baptised into Christ? Of course not.

So we see that, according to this theory, some in the early ecclesias could have two wives together and be accepted, but if they had divorced the first, they would be considered as living in adultery with the second, though all was done in harmony with the Law of Moses. And here we do not even have ignorant sin, but a completely non-sinful condition of a faithful people arising from permitted (or even commanded) activities of a previous divine dispensation.

G. V. Growcott