

# TANGAZA COLLEGE

CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

TITLE: PROBLEM OF MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE  
AMONG YOUNG COUPLES:  
A PASTORAL ISSUE.

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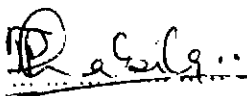


**This is a long essay submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts, Religious Studies.**

**FEBRUARY 2000, NAIROBI -KENYA**

## STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the material used herein has not been submitted for academic credit to any other Institution/University. All sources have been cited in full.

Signed...   
*Labila N. T. Placido sdb.*

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all my family members and all the Salesians of Don Bosco of Eastern Africa Province, who have educated me in many ways. All my friends who are dear to me and have journeyed with me all the time.

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Last but not least I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to the Don Bosco Utume community for their support and encouragement during my stay in Utume and while working on this Long Essay. Thanks to all friends whose names I have not mentioned here but who are always supportive and taught me so much.

May God Bless you all abundantly abundantly.

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Once a Parish priest told me that divorce rate among the Catholics in his parish is alarming. He said, 'the more people wed the more they divorce.' Most of the divorcees are among the young couples. Last year, when I met three of my old friends in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, they told me that they had divorced their wives and remarried.

Every time one opens a newspaper or switches on a television he/she will never miss something on marriage problems. What has gone wrong with marriage institution today? I asked myself.

There are numbers of factors, which have contributed to the increase of divorce cases today among young couples. Young couples this work means those who are married from 0-5 years of marriage. In chapter three, some of the factors that cause divorce are discussed at length. It is a result of some research I did in Magomeni and Manzese Parishes, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Most of the examples given in this work are from East Africa and few from Zambia.

While reading the *Post Synodal Apostostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Africa* of John Paul II, the same concern about marriage is expressed in major Challenges emphasised almost unanimously by the Episcopal Conferences of Africa, is the concern of the Christian marriage and family life.

The future of the world and of the church passes through the family. However, the family is extremely at stake today.<sup>1</sup>

**Purpose of the study:** The purpose of this study is to emphasise that marriage institution is still a vocation, despite different understandings about it and the challenging problems of divinely instituted vocation.

The first chapter of this work presents first the African traditional understanding of marriage then The Catholic Church.

Secondly, this study tries to answer the question: What has gone wrong with marriage institution in African today? There are some factors which have contributed to divorce referring to the problem of divorce cases. These factors have been indicated in chapter three.

Thirdly, this study makes attempt on the pastoral level to suggest some ways which can help to minimise or solve the problem of divorce among young couples today especially in urban areas where this problem is common.

**Application of this study:** The knowledge that emerge from this work is to remind ourselves as parents and pastors about our responsibilities in helping the young people who are married in the church and those who are preparing for marriage. It is our duty to give to young people proper knowledge of the

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<sup>1</sup> John Paul II *Ecclesia in Africa*, Apostolic Exhortation, 1998, p. 30.

sacrament of matrimony and all the responsibilities as husbands and wives. If today we give a proper understanding of marriage life and commitment, I believe the divorce cases will be minimal.

**Research method:** I prepared questionnaires which were given to some parishioners of Magomeni and Manzese parishes, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. I got some resources from the Social Welfare Headquarters Dar es Salaam Region. The other major sources of information are books.

## CHAPTER ONE

# AFRICAN UNDERSTANDING OF MARRIAGE

## 1.0. INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a universal social constitution that defines a mating relationship for founding of the family and is for the procreation and rearing of the progeny. Marriage as an institution is a complex social norm governing relationship of mated pair, their kinsmen, their offspring and their society.<sup>2</sup> Marriage in Africa tradition is first of all a bond that, through the union of the two persons, a man and a woman, seals an alliance between the two families to which the partners belong.<sup>3</sup> In Vatican II, marriage is defined as a partnership of the whole of life and love, while recalling that the children are its crown.<sup>4</sup>

## 1.1 AFRICAN TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE

This is what we call traditional marriage. Traditional marriage customs are those ideas and ideologies, which have been used and developed and generally accepted among members of a given ethnic social group.<sup>5</sup> We call them traditional because they have been long established and hence observed by individual groups. Such customs have won confidence of the people in that they are valuable and contribute for the common good of the society. Within customary marriage some traditions are involved as guidelines to direct the people, to control their external

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<sup>2</sup> Spitzer A. "Marriage" In the New Catholic Encyclopaedia, Vol. 10. Catholic University press New York p. 258.

<sup>3</sup> F. Kabasele Kumbala. *Celebrating Jesus Christ In Africa; Liturgy And Inculturation*, New York Maryknoll, press, 1998, P.71.

<sup>4</sup> *Vatican II, Gaudium et Spes (Pastoral constitution on the church in the modern world) no.48*

actions, their behaviour and practices for the sake of their inner freedom to be what they ought to be. Hence marriage customary law help man and woman take their right path toward their ultimate goal of having stable, fruitful and meaningful conjugal union. These laws vary from place to place. For example, initiation as preparatory stage for marriage.

## **1.2. Types of Customary Marriage**

There are four types of marriages. The commonly recognised is monogamous, which is one man with one wife; and there is polygamous by which one man marries many wives. African customary marriage does not go against this kind of marriage as it is in Christianity. Polyandry, in which one woman marries more than one man. There was also group marriage in which both sexes are represented by more than a single party. Other marriages in existence are arranged marriages whereby the parents chose a girl for their son. Also gift marriages whereby a girl could be given to a chief or a king for marriage.

## **1.3. The Communitarian Aspect of African Marriage**

Marriage is a social bond. It is not a contract concluded once and for all, but is a life long or long term process. "Marriage is never a private matter which can be left to both partners only. In the traditional understanding of it, two families or clans enter into an alliance, and that means that the parents and relatives have the

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<sup>5</sup> *Jomo Kenyatta, Facing Mount Kenya, Nairobi: Heinemann Press, 1938, P.64.*

decisive say.”<sup>6</sup> Therefore, it was not so much individual affairs but rather a social bond between families, clan. It was firmly rooted and grounded in a society whereby the community directed, regulated and enforced sanctions in the establishment of matrimonial relationships in order to safeguard the union, to promote fruitfulness and to maintain peace and harmony in the community.

Marriage in African tradition was much more a public institution than in Western society. There were essential elements or rather stages, which must be ratified by the community right from the preliminary negotiation to when the woman is taken to the house of the man/husband. The preliminary stages can be referred to as pre-engagement: the meeting of the two youngsters, exchange of gifts, meeting of parents.

When the two youngsters meet and break the news to their parents, there follows consultation of the oracle and offering of sacrifice to the ancestor and the guardian spirits (e.g. among the Bakongo). This means that African marriage was always in the realm of the sacred and of religion. In all these stages, as we shall see them, the community was always fully involved.

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<sup>6</sup> *Benezet Bujo, African Christian Morality, At The Age of Inculturation, Nairobi: Daughters of St. Paul, 1990. P. 101.*

## 1.4 Process Toward Marriage

*Initiation:* is the gateway to marriage. The mysteries and secrets of married life are normally revealed to the young people at this point, to prepare them for what is soon to come. Nobody is allowed to get married before going through initiation. Therefore, initiation is the gateway to marriage, and many people get married soon after it, under normal conditions.<sup>7</sup> It is the time of seclusion and instructions for moral and good behaviour.

*Remote Preparation:* At this stage, the young people were taught the value of marriage life, the respect between husband and wife, the importance of “bride wealth”, that was not a price or compensation for the bridegroom, since there was no question of selling or buying a girl. It was a symbol of alliance, and socially it created stability to marriage.

*Immediate Preparation:* Negotiation was done between the two families for the relationship between the two lovers and the actual celebration of the marriage.

## 1.5 Ratification and Consummation of African Marriage

The ratification of marriage among Africans was not static, rather a dynamic process. The traditional marriage in Africa was not something left to chance, nor was it the result of haphazard choice. Courtship and romantic love were not considered as of great importance. Marriage was looked upon as a process.<sup>8</sup> As we have seen, different stages were passed through, such as negotiation, exchange

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<sup>7</sup> John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, Nairobi: Heinemann, 1975, p. 94.

of gifts, ritual observances e.g. “ngoima” ceremony among Kikuyu people, and finally the birth of the child, the longed for new member of the family and the society.

Since marriage is a dynamic process, not something that happens in a single moment, it begins with the promises of marriage at engagement and ends with the birth of the first child.<sup>9</sup> In that way then, the African marriage is considered consummated after the birth of a child or a number of children.

In this context then, ratum et consummatum in African traditional marriage was not a single act rather a process. Not by fact of conjugal act the marriage was ratified and consummated but rather through a process to the child bearing.

### **1.6 Dissolving of African Marriage**

In traditional African teaching, marriage is not indissoluble. It is understood that shipwrecks are possible in the course of human life: bad treatment by one of the partners, the unkindness or malevolence of one family, the discovery of sorcery, misconduct and all that is opposed to life can all be causes of dissolution. This dissolution is a physical separation (divorce) which does not touch the care of the bond (alliance). But in case of barrenness, impotence and death of one of the partners were not causes of dissolution of the marriage. In case of barrenness on the part of a woman, polygamy was usually easiest solution.

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* P. 99

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* P. 99.

First, in case of impotence, on the side of man, that he cannot produce children, arrangements were made with full consent of the wife to have children with the brother or closest relative of her infertile husband.

In case of the death of a man, two customs were commonly observed in African traditional societies: First the Levitic marriage, which is also found in the biblical literature. That, if a married man dies and his wife has not yet passed the age of child bearing, it is the duty of the man's brother or a close relative to cohabit with the widow in order to raise the children, who will be counted, not as his, but as children of the deceased. The widow remains the wife of the dead man, for whom the brother is a surrogate, and, thus not strictly her husband.

Second, the widow inheritance, where the brother or a close relative takes over the position of husband to the widow and the father to the children.

These practices help us to understand that marriage in African tradition was a process. As we have seen that a distinguishing characteristic of traditional African teaching on marriage is the perception that marriage is a dynamic process not something that happens in a single moment, but it is a process. The procreation and the good of the spouses are the ends of marriage.

## 1.7 Conclusion

As we have discussed above the African family traditionally, fulfilled its role in preparing one for marriage at all stages of life. As a child, one learnt from parents and other relatives about marriage. As one grew up, he or she identified with the sex and age group to which he or she belonged. In most communities, learning about marriage was carried forward during the crucial period of enrolment into the adult community.<sup>10</sup> Once enrolled, which was sometimes marked by circumcision or other ways of initiation, one was allowed to start thinking of getting married. The negotiations for this undertaking were lengthy and very thorough. Now in the following chapter we shall see what the Scripture and Magisterium speak about marriage. We shall start from the Old Testament with marriage examples from Israel, then New Testament and lastly the Magisterium.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **MARRIAGE IN THE BIBLE**

#### **2.0.INTRODUCTION**

In chapter one we have seen the tradition African understanding of marriage. Now in this chapter we shall see marriage institution in the Catholic Church. We are beginning to focus our attention starting from the Old Testament, New Testament and then the Magisterium and the Canon Law.

#### **2.1.Old Testament**

In the book of Genesis, marriage is placed in the context of creation: “God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created them” (Gen. 1:27). From this text, it is very clear that the two sexes together represent God’s image. The two sexes manifest the conjugal union and covenant of marriage. Marriage is a divine institution.

With creation of man and woman in his own likeness, God crowns and brings to perfection the work of his hands. After creating man and woman, God calls them to share in the responsibility of taking care of the earth, and gives them the gift of transmitting human life.

God blessed them, and God said to them: “Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and conquer it” (Gen. 1:28). The mandate to procreate is from God. Procreation

in marriage is an original blessing from the creator and procreation is a fundamental task for married couples. Procreation is one of the principle purposes of marriage.

Three texts from Genesis (1:27-28) show that there is an incompleteness of either sex. Each sex needs the other in order to be fulfilled and completed. Therefore, these texts take marriage as a symbol of “equality” (i.e. complimentary of one another) man and woman. God gives man and woman, all together, the power to fill the earth and conquer it.

In marriage, husband and wife become one body (Gen. 2:22-24). God on seeing that man had not found a suitable companion (helpmate), created the woman from the rib of the man who became very happy. The fact that the two become one body symbolizes the unity that should exist between husband and wife. This union between woman and man is indissoluble because it is a divine will.

## **2.2.Marriage in Israel**

In Israel, marriage did not require any special religious act in its celebration, but the word used to refer to it is the word: **COVENANT** (Alliance between God and his people). So the union between man and woman becomes quite naturally the sign of the covenant between God and his people in the teaching of the prophets.

At a time when polygamy was still widely practised, the book of Genesis speaks highly about monogamous marriage. “Man shall leave his father and his mother and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” Gen. 2:24. Both man and woman have been created in the image of God who blessed them saying: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it” Gen. 1:28. The prophet Malachi will remind man that his companion is the wife of his covenant, of his alliance:

Why doesn't God accept your offering with favour? Because the Lord was witness to the covenant between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Has not the one God made and sustained for us the spirit of life? And what does he desire? Godly offspring. So take heed to yourselves, and let none be faithless to the wife of his youth. For I hate divorce says the Lord the God of Israel.... (Mal. 2:14-16).

Throughout the Bible, we can find beautiful pages about conjugal love. Such as the love of Elkanah for his wife Hannah who cannot have a child. He asks her: “Hannah why do you weep? Why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?” (1Sam. 1:8).

In the Song of Solomon (Canticle of Canticles), the author sings out the love between husband and wife in very passionate and tender words: “O that you would kiss me with the kisses of your mouth! For your love is better than wine...(1:1). According to Deuteronomy (The 5<sup>th</sup> book of Moses), the happiness of a young couple must not be disturbed. “When a man is newly married, he shall not go out with the army or be charged with any business; he shall be free at home one year, to be happy with his wife whom he has taken.” (Deut. 24:5).

### 2.3. New Testament

The New Testament has also texts, which show the divine origin of marriage and its perpetual stability. In the Gospel of Matthew and Mark, Jesus refers to the original creation story (Gen. 1:27, 2:4). Jesus emphasises that by creating man and woman, God intended them to be joined, to be one and remain together in marriage (Gen. 1:24, Mt. 19:4-6).

In Mt. 5:31-32, 19:6-9, Mk. 10:11, Lk. 16:1, Jesus teaches about marriage as a divine institution and therefore has to be governed by divine law. “What God has joined together, no being must separate.” The law of Christ absolutely excludes divorce and polygamy. Adultery too is condemned even in thought and desire (Mt. 5:27-28).

Concerning the matrimonial institution, Jesus starting from the book of Genesis, as we have seen above asserted the indissolubility of the union between spouses. As it was objected to him that Moses had allowed divorce (Deut. 24:1). He answered them, “for your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creating, God made them male and female...so they are no longer two but one. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.” (Mk. 10:6-9).

When his disciples asked him questions about this matter, Jesus is even more precise: “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.” (Mk. 10:10-12).

The writings of the Apostles show that the idea proposed by the Lord became the rule of life in the early Christian communities. Following the command of Christ, divorce was forbidden (Cor. 7:10).

In Ephesians 5:30ff. St. Paul says that Christ treats the Church as His body, we are parts of his living body, we are united with Christ. Hence, we are one body and Christ is the head. In a similar way, a man must leave his father and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one body (Gen. 1:27, Is. 40:9). In Ephesians 5:21ff. St. Paul sees marriage as a symbol representing the relationship of Christ and the Christians (the church).

### **2.3.1. The Sign of The New Covenant:**

Christ is the spouse and the Church is the body of Christ. This gives us an idea of the very high image the Christian believers have on marriage. Marriage is the sign of the union between Christ and the church; and this union of Christ with his Church will be the model of Christian conjugal life.<sup>11</sup> In his letter to the Ephesians Saint Paul mixes the two images: the one of the union between husband and wife, and the one of the union between Christ and his Church. “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her...Husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the Church, because we are members of His body. (Eph. 5:25ff).

Then Paul quotes the passage of Genesis, “And the two shall become one” and he adds: “This is a great mystery and I mean in reference to Christ and the Church” (Eph. 5:28-33).

Starting from the image of the body, Paul speaks of the submission of the wife to her husband, as it was said at that time, as the Church is subject to Christ. But most of all he insists on the way the husband must be a model of love and of self-denial: Christ gave himself up for the Church that he might sanctify her, that she might be holy and without blemish. That's the way a husband should love his wife.

The Christian spouses must find their union a vocation to sanctity. That is to say that the spouses must glorify God in their bodies, which are members of Christ. (1Cor. 6:15-20). In marriage, each one of the spouses gives to the other the ownership of his own body<sup>12</sup>: "The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does. Do not refuse one another except perhaps by agreement for a season, that you may devote yourselves to prayer... (1Cor. 7:3-5).

Obviously in such a vision of marriage, divorce is out of question. "To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord, that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, let her remain single or else be reconciled to her husband) – and the husband should not divorce his wife." (1Cor. 7:10-11).

Saint Peter, who had a personal experience of marriage, also outlines the respective duties of husbands and wives. He invites the wives to be submissive to their husbands as once the holy women used to do, and not to cling to outside decorations or adornments, but to keep deep in their hearts the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit. (1Peter 2:3-6). Then he asks men to live considerately

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<sup>11</sup> Kitembo B. Magasa L. Shorter A. *African Christian Marriage*. Nairobi: Paulines Publication, 1999, p.62.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid* p. 66.

with their wives, bestowing honour on the woman as the weaker sex, since they are joint heirs of the grace of life. (1Peter 3:7). As Paul did, Peter stressed the dignity of the woman, who is fully equal to her husband in the couple.<sup>13</sup>

The earliest Christians generally continued to follow the basic patterns and structures of the societies in which they lived prior to their acceptance of the Christian “ways”. The first Christians have lived their marriage in the light of the teaching of Jesus and of the apostles. For its celebration they just followed the customs of their own areas, but they were careful not to follow explicitly pagan practices. They knew they were getting married in Christ, and their faith gave them a different vision of marriage. They (Christians) wanted to remain faithful to the indissolubility of marriage and to its fecundity.<sup>14</sup>

#### **2.4. Marriage and the Magisterium**

The understanding and the meaning of marriage in the Church has been a path of development from the Scriptures, Traditions of the Church and the Magisterium. There are important personalities in the Church and Church Councils who have helped to deepen the Christian understanding of marriage.

The teaching of **St. Augustine** about the meaning of marriage is intended to defend marriage against those who hold that marriage is essentially evil and so

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* P. 15

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* P. 15

they condemned it.<sup>15</sup> Augustine defended marriage by teaching that marriage is originally intended by God, and he defends the fundamental goodness of marriage. Marriage is God's creation. St. Augustine teaches about the three "goods" that are found in marriage: fidelity, offspring and the sacrament. These are all the aspects on the account of which marriage is good.<sup>16</sup> Therefore marriage as willed by God is essentially good.

Fidelity means that one avoids all sexual activity outside marriage. Offspring means that a child is begotten and accepted in love, nurtured in affection and brought up in religion. Sacrament means that the marriage is not severed nor the spouse abandoned...<sup>17</sup>

Augustine looks at the husband wife relationship as a natural bond, or tie of human association. The heterosexual attraction and union is created by God. However, Augustine calls this value of friendship in marriage as a "secondary good" of marriage because it yields from the natural bond of two sexes joined together.<sup>18</sup> **St. Augustine** emphasises that the marriage bonds, marriage should not be broken.

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<sup>15</sup> *Theodore Mckin, S. J., Marriage in the Catholic Church: What is marriage, p. 127*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid. p. 129*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid. p. 129.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid. p. 140.*

Also **St. Thomas Aquinas'** teaching on marriage is a response to some strong views which emphasised that marriage and sexuality are by nature evil.<sup>19</sup> In response to the condemnation that marriage is evil, he begins with a pre-supposition that anything natural to human beings is the effect of creation by a good God. He insists that marriage is indeed natural. The marital relationship is in itself naturally good because it has the good of procreation and nurturing of children. This procreation is not possible outside the union of father and mother. Since sexual intercourse is one of the most important aspects which keep marriage in existence, this too (sexual union) must be good by its nature.<sup>20</sup> St. Thomas also recognised other helpful features of marriage such as the friendship and mutual help of the spouses. He says that the vocation of marriage is meant to preserve the human race.

After the **Council of Trent** (1545 – 1563), Pope Pius V published the Catechism of the Council of Trent. The sacrament of matrimony is defined as : “the conjugal and legitimate union of man and woman, which is to last during life”.<sup>21</sup> During the Council of Trent, the Church of Fathers emphasised that God is the author of the perpetual stability of marriage bond, it's unity and its firmness.

Before the **Vatican II** (1962-1965) procreation was considered the primary goal of marriage. The emphasis was on begetting children based on Gen. 1:28 (God commanded them to multiply and fill the earth)

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* p. 179.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* p. 180.

Inspire of the fact that marriage is by its nature divinely instituted, the Magisterium teaches that, the human person, that is, the human will and co-operation took enter this divine institution in order to perform a most noble part. Marriage arises from the free and personal consent of each of the two partners. Marriage is a free act of the will. Each partner accepts those rights proper to the state of marriage.<sup>22</sup> Pope Leo XIII said: “To take away from the human person the natural right of marriage, is beyond the power of any human law”.<sup>23</sup>

There have been difficult times but also development in trying to comprehend the “conjugal act” in marriage and to understand the “sacramentality of marriage”. The purpose of marriage is not only for biological function or for procreation of children only. The recognition of marital love and the reciprocal giving of one another, takes first place in marriage. Pius XII said:

The conjugal act in its natural structure, is a personal action, a simultaneous and immediate co-operation of the spouses... and the right character of the act is the expressing of the mutual gift, that according to the words of the scripture, effect the union, in one flesh only. The conjugal act is more than the union of the sperm and the ovum, which can also be brought about artificially i.e. without the natural action of the spouses. The conjugal act, ordained (ordered) and wished by nature, is a personal co-operation in which the spouses in the marriage contract exchange rights.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* p. 198.

<sup>22</sup> *Code of the Catholic Canon Law 1081.*

<sup>23</sup> *Pope Leo XIII, Rerum Novarum (1899).*

<sup>24</sup> *Fr. Ambrose Upendo Sacramentology Class Notes “Church Fathers on Marriage”, Tangaza College, and Nairobi. 1997.*

**The Vatican Council II** contributed a lot towards the understanding and the place of love in marriage. “For God, in the wisdom of his love, designed marriage not only for procreation, nurturing and for husband’s and wife’s mutual helping earthly matters, but also for mutual sanctification and shared glorifying of God...”<sup>25</sup>

Marriage is not a mere instrument of procreation. Rather the nature itself of the indissoluble covenant between the persons, and for the good of the children, demand that the spouses truly love one another. Even if the marriage has no children, it is in no way deprived of its fundamental value or its indissolubility. The character of marital love is oriented towards the procreation and nurturing of children. The conjugal love is as such placed first before the procreation of children. Therefore, it should not be put on the same level as procreation. In a marriage where conjugal love is not cared for, that marriage is not good even for the children.

In his apostolic exhortation, “**Ecclesia in Africa**”, Pope John Paul II has the following to say about the dignity and role of Marriage: The dignity of man and woman derives from the fact that when God created man, “In the image of God he created him, male and female he created them (Gen. 1:27). “Having both been created in the image of God, man and woman, although different, are essentially equal from the point of view of their humanity. The woman is another “I” in a common humanity,<sup>26</sup> and each is a helper for the other (Gen. 2:18-25). There is a

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* Cf. Also Vatican II Document: *Gaudium et Spes* nos 48ff.

<sup>26</sup> John Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortation: Ecclesia in Africa* (1995), p. 64

plan, which God has imprinted on the humanity of man and woman since their creation(Eph. 5:32-33).

The mutual love of baptised spouses makes present the love of Christ for His Church, marriage is a sacrament of the new covenant. “Spouses are therefore the permanent reminder to the Church of what happened on the Cross. Therefore marriage gives witness to salvation.”<sup>27</sup> Marriage is a way of Christian holiness. Marriage demands an indissoluble love, stability and by its nature marriage has the special mission of perpetuating humanity.

## **2.5. Marriage and Canon Law**

Marriage is an important sacrament in the life of the Church. Throughout history, the Church’s Magisterium has made a lot of effort in trying to teach the faithful the significance and meaning of marriage. The Magisterium also saw the necessity to formulate marriage guidelines (Canon Laws).<sup>28</sup> In this following section, a few of the Church laws that show the important elements of marriage are shared (presented).

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* p. 65

<sup>28</sup> James A. Coriden, et al. *The Code of Canon Law: A Text and Commentary*, pp. 737-828.  
Cf. Also Theodore M. SJ., *What is Marriage?*, pp. 207-212.

### **2.5.1. The fundamental nature of marriage (Can. 1055)**

The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole life, is by its nature ordered towards the good of the spouses, procreation and education of offspring. This covenant between baptised persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament. For this reason a matrimonial contract cannot validly exist between baptised persons unless it is also a sacrament by that act.

The spouses commit themselves to each other by means of a covenant. The relationship does not cease even if the consent to the covenant is withdrawn by one or both of the parties. The covenant that exists between spouses, is a profound type of covenant symbolising the covenant that exists between God and his people.

The covenant, based on the free choice of spouses, involves an interpersonal relationship, which is total, that is, involving their spiritual, emotional and physical joining. Aided by grace, the two are able to give themselves to one another, thus bringing the object of the covenant into reality.

### **2.5.2. The essential properties of marriage (Can. 1056)**

The essential properties of marriage are unity and indissolubility, which in Christian marriage obtain a special firmness in virtue of the sacrament. In Christian marriage the conjugal relationship has an intrinsic value especially the

one of unity between the two partners. This unity in marriage allows total self-giving which is essential in marriage. Fidelity is not possible without unity. Fidelity requires one partner with whom to share one's life.

Indissolubility is an essential property and necessary for the marriage. This indissolubility is based on the gospel teaching. The bond of marriage which comes into existence with a valid, sacramental marriage is not simply a moral obligation but it is also an ontological reality (reality of nature). Therefore, a valid marriage covenant, consummated by sexual intercourse is absolutely indissoluble.

### **2.5.3. Marital consent is the beginning of the covenant (Can. 1057)**

Marriage is brought about through the consent of the spouses, legitimately manifested between persons who are capable according to law of giving consent, no human power can replace this consent.<sup>29</sup> Matrimonial consent is an act of the will by which a man and a woman, through an irrevocable covenant, mutually give and accept each other in order to establish marriage.

The marital covenant begins with the exchange of consent between the spouses. Since marriage is a specific way of life which demands a total gift of self, the mutual exchange of consent must be a free act of the will on the part of each party.

## 2.6. Reflection on the Theology of the Sacrament of Marriage

Marriage is a vocation. Marriage is a state of Christian life. God is the principal author of every state of life. Any state of life, vocation, is divine.<sup>30</sup> Marriage is the vocation of a baptised man and woman, consecrated by the sacrament of matrimony.

Marriage is a way of mutual spiritual perfection. Marriage is not confined to mutual help only, but also to the objective of shaping and perfecting the interior life of husband and wife. Each person who carries out faithfully the obligations of his/her own status of life, is pleasing in the eyes of God. As children of God, he calls each one, not only to religious life or ministerial priesthood, but also he calls each one to the perfection of different vocations(e.g. marriage).

The Council Fathers of Vatican II said that Christian spouses, in virtue of the sacrament of matrimony, signify and partake in the mystery of that unity and fruitful love which exists between Christ and the Church. Spouses help each other to attain the holiness in their married life and in the upbringing and education of their children. Married people, in their state of life, they have their own special gift among the people of God.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* Cf. Also *The Catechism also see of the Catholic Church*. pp. 399-400

<sup>30</sup> Document: *Sedes Sapientia*. A.A.S. 48 (1956) P. 351.

<sup>31</sup> *Vatican II Document: Lumen Gentium*. nos. 11 ff.

## **2.7. Conclusion**

After looking at marriage through the scripture and the Magisterium, we are now moving to another step. We shall see what the young people understand about marriage today, focussing our attention to the problem of divorce among young couples.

## CHAPTER THREE

### CAUSES OF DIVORCE TODAY.

#### 3.0.INTRODUCTION

In chapter two we have seen what the Scripture, Magisterium and canon law speak about marriage institution. Now in this chapter we shall see the understanding of marriage today among the youth. Due to wrong understanding of marriage, we face **the problem of divorce**. It is also in this chapter we shall discuss at length the major causes of divorce among young couples.

#### 3.1.Understanding of Marriage among Young People.

Today, many young people have a different way of understanding the marriage institution as we have seen in chapter two. They do not have a clear knowledge of what marriage is all about. In our research we found that some young people say that marriage is just staying together as husband and wife. If things do not work the way they expected, they just separate or divorce.

Others, especially women, say that marriage is like a prison where you do not exercise your freedom. For the women, it seems they are controlled by their husbands. So for them to get into marriage is to put oneself into prison/ to be under somebody.

There are several factors which have contributed to the wrong way of

understanding marriage institution among young people today. For instance, media, decline of traditional values on marriage, no proper instructions given on marriage in our church and society in general As a result, we are facing this new “culture” of marriage.

Now with such understanding about marriage, we find that the institute of marriage is today in crisis. And the major problem which we are facing as church and society, is **the problem of divorce**. In our society right now, the number of divorcees is increasing daily. This is what we are going to discuss now in details and see what are the major causes of divorce in Africa today and also to see what can be done by the church in order to help our young people to understand better the marriage, institution. This can help minimise the rate of divorce cases, which is increasing daily.

Before discussing the causes of divorce, we first look at the tables presenting marriage and divorce cases which we gathered from the research.

### 3.2. The statistics which indicate the rate of the divorce cases.

**Table 1.** Distribution of all correspondents (male/female)

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	18	45
Female	22	55
Total	40	100

The difference between male and female is 4 which is 10% of total respondents.

Table 2 General distribution of respondents by marital status regardless of gender

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
Single	5	12.5
Married	6	15
Divorced	18	45
Divorced & Remarried	11	27.5
Total	40	100

Table 2 shows that the general distribution regardless marital status out of 40 respondents 18 people were divorced. Which represents 45% of those who were divorced.

Table 3. Distribution of divorced respondents according to Gender.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	11	61
Female	7	39
Total	18	100

Table 3 shows that 61% of the divorced respondents were male and 39% were female.

Table 4 Divorced and Re-married respondents according to their gender.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	8	72.5
Female	3	27.5
Total	11	100

The above Table reveals that 72.5% of male respondents are divorced and re-married and 27.5% of respondents are female.

Table 5 Marriage duration / Time before divorce

Marriage Duration(years)	Frequency	Percentage
0-1	9	31.03
2-3	15	51.72
4-5	5	17.24
Total	29	100

The above Table indicates that the highest number of divorces take place after two to three years of marriage, which is 51.72%

Table 6 Number of cases presented to Social Welfare Headquarters Dar es Salam region, from 1995 to 1999 seeking divorce.

Year	Number of cases	Cases taken to court seeking divorce
1995	145	90
1996	210	146
1997	239	311
1998	356	158
1999	1303	1246

The above table indicates that the number of marriage case is increasing every year at a high speed. The difference of cases between 1995 and 1999 is 1101.

### 3.2.1. Explanation of the data

Table 1 shows the general distribution of all respondents, male and female with a total of 40 respondents. Table 2 indicates the general distribution by marital status. Divorced respondents were the highest number of 18 which is 45% of the respondents. Table 3 indicates that the higher percentage of the divorced respondents were male with 61% and female 39%.

Table 4 shows that 72.5% of male respondents are divorced and remarried and 27.5% of respondents are female. This reveals that many male young people when they divorce, get remarried. While for female do not. The problem is that male young people after divorce find difficult to remain single. The easier solution is to remarry. For female many prefer to remain single.

Table 5 presents marriage duration. That means the time the couples have stayed together before divorce. According to the table presented we find that the highest number of divorces take place between two to three years of marriage, which is 51.72% of the respondents.

Table 6 gives us statistics from the ministry of Work and Youth Development, Social Welfare Department Dar es Salaam. These are cases which were taken to the Social Welfare hoping they could solve the problem. But most of the cases ended up being taken to court to seek divorce.

**NB.** From table 1 to table 5 the respondents are Catholics, Table 6 the statistics include cases from people with different Religious belief.

After looking at the tables we can now discuss the causes of marriage and divorce. There are so many causes, but we shall restrict ourselves to those we found in our research.

### 3.3. Major causes of divorce today.

Divorce is a legal term of the marriage contract. Until recently, the word divorce was foreign to the African Christian vocabulary. In African traditional concept, marriage is a life long union, which has religious connotations. Unfortunately, divorce has become like an epidemic in Africa today. The question is: What has gone wrong with the marriage institution in Africa?

Various factors have been identified as the causes of divorce in Africa today. As we have said in this chapter we shall try to look at some of these factors. But before we look at them, “it is alleged that in Kenya 26.5% of divorces take place in the first year <sup>32</sup>of marriage, 51.3% within five years. In Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in 1998 there were 358 marriage cases seeking divorce, and in 1999, 1303 cases. Ninety percent of these cases were young couples. <sup>33</sup> It is also alleged that 35% of boys in Zambia who get married at the age of 20 will have divorced twice by the time they are twenty five. <sup>34</sup>

These figures are very alarming and they show that something has gone wrong with our society. Now let us see what are the major causes for divorce in Africa today.

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<sup>32</sup> The seed Magazine. Vol. 9. No .3. 1997 p.25

<sup>33</sup> Social Welfare Headquarters, Dar es Salaam Region, Tanzania, Dec.1999.

<sup>34</sup> “Speak out” – Youth magazine Zambia 1996.

### **3.3.1 Poor or No proper Preparation for Marriage.**

From the research findings, we see that there is lack of adequate preparation for marriage. Many of the traditional values and rituals like puberty rites, virginity, sexual morality, parents' role in choosing the marriage partner, betrothal and marriage negotiations, are not observed by many people today.

Looking at the present situation, we see that many families of those who are preparing for marriage are more concerned with the "wedding day", than with preparing the young people who are about to enter the marriage covenant. Instead of proper marriage preparations, families spend a lot of time and money searching for the best bridal gown, the best groom's suit, the best place for the wedding reception, the best choir to sing on the wedding day, and where the best invitation cards can be printed.

There is continuing decline in traditional marriage preparation and Christian (Catholic Church) preparation. Some pastors in our churches (parishes) too have not given enough time to prepare the young people for marriage. In the parishes we did the research (and also many in other parishes), we discovered that the instructions given for marriage are only for three days. Surprisingly still, some pastors leave this responsibility of giving instructions to catechists only. Unfortunately, these instructions too will focus mainly on the liturgical celebrations of the wedding day.

For someone to become a priest for instance, it takes not less than six years, now why a man and woman who want to commit to each other for all their lives are given two to three lessons only?

In many parishes, the time for marriage preparation is not enough to teach the core values of marriage, for example: the meaning of marriage itself, complimentary to each other, the place of love and children in marriage, different roles of husband and wife in marriage. There is no time to reflect upon responsible parenthood, marriage as a cell to Christian holiness, problems covering birth control and the need of dialogue in marriage.

Now because of lack of proper preparation, when marriage life becomes difficult, maybe misunderstandings between husband and wife, some young couples find it difficult to persevere. So the easy solution is divorce.

### **3.3.2. Breakdown of the traditional values for instance initiation**

According to Mbiti, the purpose of initiation was to prepare young people for marriage. Initiation gave young people the opportunity to learn the secrets and mysteries of marriage life. This was a period spent in seclusion and young people were taught many things concerning the life of their people, history and tradition. Before initiation, a person was never allowed to marry because he or she was still considered young.

Generally, today, the “modern culture” has greatly influenced the African Traditional society. The values of the traditional society are affected by the “permissive society”, where people are allowed to do whatever they want regardless of its effects on other people or effects on the values and morality of the traditional society.<sup>35</sup> Young people overlook traditional customs, for example they consider traditional marriage preparation as outdated. Many young people treasure very much and embrace any Western style, concepts and culture on marriage regardless of its impact or effect on their marriage lives.

Most of the young people today get information about marriage lives from friends who are not even sure of what they are talking about, and as such they enter into marriage life without being prepared. Some parents no longer fulfil their responsibilities. They have given too much freedom to their children. As a result, young people seek “peer groupings” and isolate themselves from older people. In short, we can say that our society has stopped preparing young people for life and this is one of the causes of divorce.

### **3.3.3. Forced Marriages**

“About 70% of marriages in Zambia, begin with pregnancies”. Young people are forced to enter into marriage “contract” because of pregnancy.<sup>36</sup> But the fact is, when they were engaging in sexual activities, they were only “playing” and there

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. Mary Getui, “The evolution of the Family in Africa”, in. *Theology of the Church as family of God*. Nairobi, St. Paul publications, 1997. Vol. No.3. p39-47

<sup>36</sup> “Palava Time”. Television programme, Zambia, 1995.

was no commitment at all. My observation in Zambia is that a number of parents, once they hear that their daughter is pregnant, simply take her to the parents of the boy and leave her there, and that marks the beginning of their marriage life". Sometimes if the boy and the girl have been committed members of the church, and they realise that something has gone wrong, then the pregnancy marks the beginning of the marriage "contract". To save themselves from embarrassment, they quickly go to the church authority to register their marriage. They do this before their parents can realise it. As a result, marriages take place before the two families get to know each other. In such marriages, courtship does not even exist, although it is a vital part of preparation for marriage because it gives a chance to young people to know each other well before making a life long commitment.

In this case, marriage becomes the business of two people rather than the community. Instead of genuine love, sex comes first in such marriages. For me, this is very unfortunate because such marriages easily break up as soon as they get into trouble. Such marriages may last only if the two intended to marry before. What we say is that marriage without commitment ends up in divorce.

#### **3.3.4. Women's Economic Independence**

These days, more and more women are becoming economically powerful. In the past, most women were more dependent on their husbands. Since our society has been male-dominated for a long time, men feel threatened if the wife becomes economically powerful in the home.

Men feel that they should be the breadwinners of the family, not women. In many African societies, most of the people say, “A man marries, while a woman gets married”, therefore the one who marries should provide for the family.

In such a situation, when a woman feels that she is being victimised, she easily leaves the husband since she can support herself.

About 60% of nurses working in Zambia’s hospitals, are divorced, says Fr. Mukamu , John, parish priest of Kabwe parish in Zambia .During his pastoral visitation in the parish, he visited Kabwe General Hospital, which is part of his parish. Something happened in one of the small Christian communities, which annoyed all the nurses. All of them stopped attending the meetings. Because he knew some of them, he decided to talk to them. They had stopped attending the meetings because one married woman in their community condemned “single mothers”. They told him that about 60% of nurses working in the hospital were divorced, they even made it clear that they were not happy that they were divorced, but it was impossible to give up their work for the sake of marriage. The problems which they all faced in their marriages were that as soon as they were on the night shift, they had more marital problems than before. Some of their husbands would not accept to remain with the children for a night, and some would either go to sleep out with another woman or bring in another woman for the night.

Here, the problem is that men do not accept that their wives should work at night. To me, it seems women in the minds of such men are like sex objects, or workers in the home. For these reasons, women feel that they are just being used by men and they prefer to be divorced since they are able to support themselves economically.

### **3.3.5 Bride Price**

Bride price is meant to bind the two families together. However, today there is a lot of manipulation by the girl's family. Bride price has become real business. The girl's parents charge a lot. This causes some unreasonable husbands to look at their wives like their "property". Mistreatments and abuses of men's "authority" forces wives to divorce them.

High bride price also has a strong hand in cohabitation. If the man cannot afford to pay the bride price, they simply get together and live like husband and wife, but without proper marriage. As we can imagine, this kind of marriages does not last. Sooner or later, the man will go his own way and so will the woman.

### **3.3.6 Physical Battering of Wives**

In many marriages, some husbands resolve the conflicts by beating their wives. This problem is common in marriages where the men are alcoholics. Such men spend their money on alcohol at the expense of their families. Women could be beaten for minor mistakes like not spicing food well enough, etc. This beating

could be fatal. While in other cases, women are left with permanent physical injuries. Here we have a shocking case of wife torture presented by FIDA Kenya.

The case of Wilmina Achieng, a mother of three who lives in the Kayole slums has once again signalled the need for a re-examination of the criminal justice system and the way it deals with cases of domestic assault which go to certain extremes.

In this case, a man reportedly tortured his wife by lacerating her private parts in a most brutal attack. He was punishing her for coming home late and for failing to account for her whereabouts between 1.00pm and 8.00pm on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1997. FIDA(K) staff, Jacqueline Anam, Atsango Chesoni and Anthony Mugo made a fact-finding trip to Kayole on 9<sup>th</sup> December to try and gather more facts surrounding the case and also visited the victim who remained in a coma at Kayole Hospital. They spoke with the doctor in charge. They later went to her home and interviewed the neighbours before visiting Buru Buru Police station where the matter was reported. The beating, which reportedly took place for the most part of the night, was so bad that the woman is thought to have been unconscious by the time husband executed the gruesome torture.

Neighbours eventually came to the rescue only to find the woman bleeding and unconscious. They unsuccessfully tried to raise funds to take her to hospital. A team of journalists who had been called to the scene by sympathetic neighbour took the woman to Kayole Hospital where she remained in a coma for nine days and needed two brain scans.<sup>37</sup>

The woman's husband, Dan Ndeda Wamamba, has since been brought to court for the offence where he admitted to it but remained unrepentant. He argued that his action was consistent with his community's way of dealing with such behaviour. Now a case like this where you find a man who is so brutal to his wife, they may end in divorce. Because the wife may not tolerate for such brutal behaviour of the husband. Such a man, sees a woman as an object.

### **3.3.7 Infidelity In Marriage**

Our society today has also been rocked by sex scandals such that even married people have become victims. Why? What causes this is a breakdown in communication in marriages. In the society, just like in many other African societies, people rarely speak about their sexual problems. For most of them, it is a silent act and this results in not satisfying one another sexually. As a result, the couples start going somewhere else to satisfy their sexual desires.

From this moment, they start to become suspicious of each other. Once the wife or the husband gets to know of such activities, then the marriage starts to shake. With the problem of AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases, this easily leads to divorce.

### **3.3.8. “ NYUMBA NDOGO CULTURE”**

In the research I did in Dar es Salaam (the two Parishes Magomeni and Manzese) it was discovered that there are many young people (husbands) who are married in the church at the same time they have what they call “nyumba ndogo” or “kibustani” outside.<sup>38</sup> They have mistresses outside where they are really committed and they take care of this “nyumba ndogo” family. Now when the wife gets to know about this, many end up in divorce.

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<sup>37</sup> News letter, FIDA, Kenya. Nov- Dec 1997, p. 15.

Here below there is another case from my research:

When Ann was in her secondary school, form II, she became pregnant. It was Tlamelo her boyfriend who impregnated her. She went out of school, to her parents and took care of the baby after birth. One year later, she resumed school and completed her secondary education. Her parents found another school-“planning and management”, for Ann. It was a three years course. She completed this course without much difficulty. It should be remembered that all this time of training, she was till close friend to the father of the child.

Tlamelo was working. His place of work is about 300km away from the place where Ann lives. After searching for a job for sometime, she got one in a “Panning and Advertisement Company”. Having secured a job, Ann decided to move to her own apartment. Then Ann and Tlamelo got married.

“I had to get married to Tlamelo, for he is the only man I have known since my childhood”, Ann shared with me, when I told her why they have divorced. This is what happened, she went on. One day the father of my children came home from his usual working place, his clothes were dirty, and I asked him that I would like to wash them up. In the process I found in his shirt pockets an open letter, I am his only wife, I said to myself, why can't I see what is inside. Gooosh! “**DAARLING**”, was the word that hit my eyes, “please do not forget to bring the

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<sup>38</sup> “Nyumba Ndogo” (Swahili) Means small house and “Kibustani” (Swahili) Means small garden.

things we have agreed upon for our little baby, it is a long way and things are expensive here, I will really miss you, come back soon.”

I told my father who was a traditionalist, and who loved me so much, and immediately, “get to hell out of this burger”, was his response. I was always faithful to my husband. My father knows about this too. We cannot take anymore of this nonsense. Although we were Catholics, we had to divorce.”

### **3.3.9 Alcoholism and Irresponsibility**

In the category of irresponsibility, we find the problem of excessive drinking, quarrelling and wife beating. These problems are caused by not knowing how to use funds and by selfishness. Men spend lots of money on women and drinking. Their wives at home are struggling to feed the children. With all the economic hardships, she even thinks that it is better to start family planning and she would do that secretly without the knowledge of the husband who still wants to have more children. But as soon as the husband realises that his wife cannot give him children anymore, they start fighting. Finally the woman cannot bear it anymore, and the only solution for her is to seek divorce.

### **3.3.10. Marriage For The Sake Of Wealth**

We also have women who get married to a man for the sake of his wealth. Such women are not bound in marriage by love, but by their desire for wealth. This means that, in many cases, there is no commitment to marriage. In this case, I see a strong need for a good period of courtship and for proper instructions from the

local church before such marriages can take place. Such marriages based on wealth do not last because the two are not one in mind and heart. In this regard, the intention of the woman will be to get as much wealth as she can from the marriage without enough contribution on her part. In the case the man loses his wealth, that will be the end of that marriage, unless there was an authentic commitment.

### **3.3.11 Labour Migration**

The system of migrant labour contributes a lot to marriage breakdown in many parts of Africa. The system does contribute to marital instability. The problem is deeply rooted in contemporary social processes. When the men go to urban centres and mines for work, very few wives manage to accompany their husbands. The man leaves after about a month of marriage and returns every year for a month thereafter. Wives visit their husbands in town for short periods also, usually to get a baby.<sup>39</sup> Men who are away at work are not faithful to their wives, and much of their wages may be spent on lovers in the city. The usual reason given by some women who divorce or separate from their husbands is that they receive little or no support at all. There are also women who leave because of love affairs with other men while their husbands are away.

There is even a further development created by migrant labour, which certainly undermines the Christian ideal of marriage. In a normal situation, with the

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<sup>39</sup> . Kisenbo B. Magesa L. *Shorter A: African Christian marriage: P.66*

husbands present, the interpersonal links between married women in their husband's village are through his relatives. With the man absent and while still young in marriage life, the wives don't experience the love relationship of their husbands. Thus common lovers tend to replace the husband as a focal point for the relationships. As a result, the real marriage ends in divorce.

### **3.3.12 The Problem Of Barrenness**

This problem, even in the olden days led to divorce, especially when it was the woman who had a problem. In some other cultures if the man was barren, his brother or cousin or a very close friend of his came in to help him get children. This was done in a secret way. This was possible if the couple were from the same tribe where this custom was accepted by the people. But today with inter tribal marriages, this is not possible, because customs differ from place to place. Also our Christian beliefs do not allow this.

In Africa, marriage without children is not complete. Children are the bond of marriage and the pride of the couple.

### **3.3.13 The Feminist Revolution.**

There are a number of groups of women fighting for women's rights. What had happened in Tanzania, and many other African countries was that as they were trying to conscientise women of their rights, they left out men. This was a big mistake the women had made. They forgot that our society is male-dominated.

and immediately women talked about this in their homes, marital problems started. Our women did not know how to handle this issue and this led to a number of divorces. Today, women are trying to correct this problem caused by the feminist revolution by trying to involve men, too. In this case, the cause of divorce is the wrong approach employed by women in fighting for their rights.

### **3.4 EFFECTS OF DIVORCE TO THE FAMILY**

We can ask ourselves, what happens to the children when the parents divorce? Where are the children to go to and where will they live? Do parents consider the children when they decide to divorce? Rarely. In many cases the children are left to the mother to rear and the father tries to escape paying any money towards their upkeep.

The children are likely to suffer even more than their parents are. Adults can try to make sense of what has happened, to find explanations. Children only know that their world has suddenly come to an end, when the two people who mean security and love to them decide that they no longer love one another. There is no way that a young child can possibly grasp the issues involved in marital breakdown. All he or she knows is that happiness has been destroyed.<sup>40</sup>

Child psychologists have discovered that children often blame themselves when their parents split up. And the effects on a child can be lifelong.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *Mulley Maureen; Law and the Family. PII.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid. P. 12.*

Divorce trauma for children involves far more than the removal of one parent from the house. Many children suffer a sudden and disturbing remoteness from the parent who stays behind. As one mother reported, "I am depressed, I am anxious, I am overwhelmed. It never lets up. And Leah, my daughter, gets short end of it".<sup>42</sup>

As the primary parent struggles to keep emotional balance and still manage the home, children receive less attention from the parents. During a time when they need more support and nurturing they often do without it. We learn also from psychology today that many children of divorced parents suffer from various abnormalities, both mental and physical for the rest of their lives.<sup>43</sup>

In addition to that, children who grow up with divorced parents have little practical knowledge of marriage and thus are two to three times more likely to divorce than their generation peers who grew up in married parent relationship households. Often they may not want to get married completely.<sup>44</sup>

Following divorce, many women feel compelled whether to train for new careers or to assume an old one (in case she had stopped working). The effect on children is that the mother is suddenly much less available. For instance, she is not there after school. And all the important and nourishing interactions get lost.

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* P. 12.

<sup>43</sup> . Mc Kay Matthew, Tagers Peter, Blades Joan and Gosse Richard; *The Divorce Book*. Marykoll press New York 1998 P. 67.

We have also seen that in African traditional marriage is not only between the two, husband and wife, but it involves also the two families or clans. When divorce occurs, the relationship between the two families also shakes.

### **3.5..Conclusion**

In this part we have discussed the causes of divorcee among young couples. We have discovered that it is really a challenge to the church and society in general. The following chapter we are going to give some pastoral suggestions, hoping that they can help to reduce the number of divorces in our Church and society.

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<sup>44</sup>. *Ibid.* P.68

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **PASTORAL SUGGESTIONS**

#### **4.0. INTRODUCTION**

After discussing the problems, which cause divorce and its effects, in this chapter we shall give some pastoral suggestions to the problem. To see what parents, the Church and society can do in order to help the young people understand better the institution of marriage. So that those who get married, may commit totally to each other and to God.

Also this chapter is responds to the problems, which lead to divorce among young couples today, which are presented in the previous chapter.

Many recommendations are suggested to the Church pastors, parents and the individual couples. This does not mean that they have done nothing at all. The suggestions are just a call to do more still in this fundamental institution of life and try to help in reducing the number of divorces taking place today.

#### **4.1 Good Marriage Preparation**

The church has to prepare young people for the challenge of adult life early in their schools. When the time for marriage comes upon them, very few pastors can give an adequate premarital preparation in the short time available, because of their own inexperience in the field of marriage and their limited knowledge of the persons involved. What we need is a preparation in depth, an ongoing preparation, as we have said beginning from schools and colleges. Courses

should be introduced to our school systems, which are designed to educate children in the fundamental values of life relating to the attainment of a happy love relationship.

Young people should be given a thorough understanding not only of the opposite sex but of themselves as well. The problem of self-understanding and self-acceptance should be openly confronted and gradually resolved, before young people even consider marriage.

According to Pope John Paul II, marriage preparation is a gradual process.<sup>45</sup> It includes three main stages: Remote preparation, Proximate preparation and immediate preparation.

#### **4.1.1 Remote Preparation**

This begins in early childhood. The family lends children to discover themselves as beings endowed with particular personalities. This is a period when fundamental human values are instilled in the children especially the values of interpersonal (social) relationship. This is the time when children are helped to notice the differences with people of the opposite sex. The parents educate their children in solid spiritual and catechetical formation.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *Vatican II Document, Gaudium et Spes, no. 1.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid. No.52. Cf also Familiaris Consortia. No. 37.*

In order to be able to give adequate guidance, pastors should help parents to carry out this responsibility with sufficient knowledge. In this regard, the pastors are called upon to organise seminars or workshops for married couples, which will help parents to train and educate their children.

#### 4.1.2 Proximate Preparation.

This stage of catechesis will consider the specific needs of the young people. The catechesis for each sacrament is given during this stage. At this stage, the Christian preparation that is needed for each sacrament is adequately given.

At this stage of spiritual formation, the catechesis of the Sacrament of marriage needs to be given special attention. Some important issues on marriage need to be discussed: Marriage as a divine institution, Responsible Parenthood, Conjugal Love, Unity and Indissolubility of the marriage covenant.<sup>47</sup>

Young people should be encouraged to come together in clubs or movements of young people (e.g. Y.C.S., Youth Alive, etc). This will help them to exchange their views, and also to express their difficulties as regards the understanding of the Sacrament of marriage and marriage life in general.

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<sup>47</sup> *Familiaris Consortia*, No. 37.

### 4.1.3 Immediate Preparation

This is the last stage of preparation that takes place some months before the wedding. This preparation is required and most essential for those who have already agreed to marry and who have asked for a Christian marriage.

Among the elements to be considered in this last preparation, there must be a deeper knowledge of the mystery of Christ and the Church, of the meaning of grace and of the responsibility of Christian marriage. This immediate preparation should also give a clear vision of the ethics about the Christian understandings of human sexuality. Future spouses must understand that marriage is a union of love. The Christian instructions given at this time will help the spouses to understand the significance, dignity and duties of the sacrament of matrimony.<sup>48</sup>

One thing which makes the Church's pastoral and other works so difficult is the shortage of pastors. Besides the pastors, each parish needs to explore the possibilities for some married people to qualify as trained family life teachers and counsellors. Such trained people can be of great help to the young spouses seeking instructions for marriage preparation, and marriage life in general.

In Nairobi we have a good example from South B Parish. In this parish there is a group known as Family Life Ministers. These Ministers offer free services to people who want to prepare themselves for marriage or those with marriage

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<sup>48</sup> *Vatican II Document, Gaudium et Spes No. 48.*

problems. Mrs Kanyi Joyce, one of the group members told me that, since they prepare young couples by giving them their own experience of couple. For that she says, they are better placed than priests or sisters who are not married. She admits that marriage is a difficult young, a serious commitment with its ups and down.

For this preparation they give six sessions (in six weeks), and even people who have been living together and want to formalise their marriage come to these sessions:

Here below is the example of the sessions they give.

Getting to know one another.

Expectations, attitudes, values (for example education of children).

Roles. Who does what? (finances, etc).

Communication. How? Too often absent.

Married sexuality. Where is your love? Line to be drawn between love and lust.

Family life counselling, Marriage as a sacrament, Law of the church, Family

Planning and getting married in church. (Given by a priest).

After the marriage the couples are asked to come back after two years for a feed back (but she says that some come back even before those two years). They come back to see where they have gone wrong, where they can be helped and if the session has been useful.

In most places the faithful receive very little serious instruction about the meaning of Christian (Catholic) marriage, either when they are adolescent or later on. And there is very little simple literature available to help them. It is not surprising that many Catholics do not keep to the ideals of church marriage, when they have learnt so little about them. Each parish, diocese needs to consider how to improve its methods of marriage instruction. And they need to remember that modern teaching method does not consist of laying down the law, but in dialogue and discussion.

Besides instruction, individual counselling is needed for those in difficulty, and lay people should be trained to take part in this work. The Ministry of Counselling has been greatly developed in other parts of the church during the last few years, and the Church in Africa also needs to make a serious effort to form groups of marriage counsellors.

#### **4.2 Loving One Another**

Parents should teach their children how to love. It is not an easy matter, but it must be done. The church should be involved in helping parents to teach their children about love. The first school is the home, and spiritual values must be taught there. But steps should be taken by the church to develop something substantial and meaningful in educating the young about marriage.

Intimacy in marriage means sharing your whole self with your spouse and approaching this closeness with responsibility and respect.

Intimacy is more than sexuality. It is the closeness that permeates a couple's relationship. Intimacy says: "I choose to love you with your virtues and faults". Intimacy comes from mutual interests, activities, and values; from sharing work, play and quiet moments.<sup>49</sup> If there is one golden rule in marriage it is to "love one another" always and forever. Married young people should avoid taking each other for granted putting married life on "automatic pilot".

### **4.3. One Way Ticket**

A happy marriage demands lifelong effort. Psychologist Scott Stanley, co-director for the Center for Marital and Family Studies at the University of Denver, says many young people today are not entering marriage with commitment. They seem ready to bail out, hoping it will be better the second time.

Living together before marriage rarely helps. In our research it was found that couples who cohabited before marriage, divorced more than those who did not.

### **4.4. Expect The Unexpected and Know How to Cope With It.**

A married couple thought back on their four years together. The wife said, "I know you so well. I can look across the room and tell what you are thinking or what you are going to say. There are even times when I finish your sentences". "Yes", her husband replied, "but I know there are some surprises left for our

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<sup>49</sup> Christopher News Notes. "Lifetime Together". Thoughts For Engaged Couples. P.4.

future”. In time many couples seem to know each other inside out. But married couples need to keep a sense of discovery and stay ready to embrace the mystery.

#### **4.5. Turn To God**

All discussions of marriage must recognise that God created marriage. Marriage is God’s gift to us. It is also a couples’ gift to each other. Prayer helps couples overcome trials and temptations. It centres life on God, the source of all joy and acts as a reminder of His love and presence in all times, good and bad.

“The family that prays together stays together”.

#### **4.6. Childless Marriage:**

One of the most widely discussed problems of marriage in Africa is that of the childless marriage. We have seen that this problem has caused divorce especially among young couples. The church must continue to emphasise that true marriage can be childless and still be a happy and fruitful one. All the same, a childless marriage does cause extra strain. One way of relieving this strain which is successful in some other parts of the world and in some parts of Africa, is adoption. Today, there are babies who really are unwanted especially those of unmarried mothers in our towns and cities. If it can be arranged for such babies to be adopted soon after their birth by a childless couple, this can help both the couple and the otherwise unwanted children. The church should do more to encourage adoption societies which can arrange this.

#### **4.7. Bride-wealth**

For most Africa people/societies, bride-wealth is a very important part of the traditional system of marriage, and is still important in many marriages today. But the amount that is now asked in some areas is so high that young couples have to delay their marriage for an unreasonable long time. The result is that many elope. Parents who demand such a high amount that they prevent their children from marrying in Church for many years, are doing something seriously wrong. They (parents) should be encouraged to help their children start off marriage in the best possible way, and not to use the occasion to gain profit for themselves.

#### **4. 8. Expensive Weddings.**

In some places people complain a great deal about the expense of a church wedding. They give this as a reason why they postpone it for years or even avoid it completely. Clearly this is not a matter of church rules, but of the social practices which have become the accepted fashion for wedding in church. Each diocese/local church should look again at this matter, to see how people can be encouraged to carry out weddings in ways which are inexpensive, and yet fully public and honourable.

#### **4. 9. To Change Oppressive Customary Practices.**

Some of the customary practices should be abolished. For instance, criminalising wife beating. There is a need to a fresh look at customary practices as opposed to

statutory law with a view to setting up uniform standards of application of law to ensure that the abuse of women's rights is no longer justifiable by persons claiming to be following the dictates of outdated customary law.

We have seen that there is a decline in Christian values (religious values) taught in the families. The objectives of small Christian communities should be to help the families (parents) to see themselves as "little churches" where spiritual values can be deepened. Families have to be called again to give witness to Christ by their way of living the gospel values.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Michael Foley, *Marriage a Relationship*, p.74  
cf. John Paul II, *Homilies on the Family: Domestic Church, Ireland*, St Paul Publications, 1983.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

In general, why is divorce on the rise in Africa? I would simply say that marriage and sex have lost their sacredness. Young people put sex before marriage. For them, marriage is simply to live together and have sex. The religious connotation which marriage had before has now disappeared in many communities. This is because we now find sex anywhere. Our media is dominated only by sex, since sex is even used for business promotion and this is telling young people that they can go on and enjoy it.

“Also, in our churches we see more people wed, but the more people wed, the more they divorce. Why? This is because our society only prepares young people for weddings, and after the celebration, all the elders leave the young couple alone without advice which they need most at this particular time”. (The Seed, Vol. 9, No. 2, P. 8).

Our society has also become self-centred. In the past, when people knew that a particular couple had a problem, which could lead to divorce, their society tried by all means to save that particular marriage. Today, people say: “it is not our problem”. Sometimes people even rejoice and laugh at the young couple who are struggling. But the underlying factor why we now experience many divorces is the loss of the sacredness of the marriage institution.

In regard to the teaching of the church on the Sacrament of Marriage, we know that sacramental marriage is indissoluble. The question is: How do we tackle the

burning issue of divorce in our community as Christians? The church needs to be fully involved in looking for appropriate ways of instructing our society on the value of marriage, as God intended it to be.

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