



NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA

FACULTY OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

COURSE CODE: CRS855

COURSE TITLE: MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

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CREDIT UNIT: 3

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YEAR OF REVIEW: 2021

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COURSE GUIDE

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Introduction

Welcome to CRS855: Marriage and family. Marriage and family is a three credit course offered in MA Christian Theology in National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). The Course comprises three modules with five units each. The course is designed and developed with the appropriate theological accent suitable for Christian notion of marriage and family.

The course guide is planned for students of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in the MA Programme of Christian Theology in National Open University of Nigeria. This guide is conceived as one of the several resource tools available to you to help you successfully complete your course in “Marriage and Family,” and ultimately your programme.

The study guide, therefore, provides you with basic information about the entire course, such as the aims and objectives, course material and structure, available services to support your learning, information on assignment and examination. You will also be guided on how to plan your time for study; the amount of time you should spend on each study unit and your tutor-marked assignments.

Go through this course study guide carefully and complete the feedback form at the end before you begin the study of the course CRS855. You are also expected to return the feedback to your tutorial facilitator along with your first assignment.

It is my hope that this study guide will answer most of your questions. I also advise you to contact your study centre if you have further questions. I wish you all the best in your learning experience and successful completion of this course.

Course Aims

This course aims at helping you gain more knowledge about Christian marriage and family life. The approach adopted in this course *theoretical* and *theological*. It acknowledges the import of the Christian scripture, the Church’s tradition and teaching on marriage and family. It stresses the basic elements of Christian theology of marriage and family. It is hoped that this approach will properly assist you to appreciate the profound theological insight of the Christian understanding and teaching on marriage and family. The thinking also is that after going through this course, the issue of marriage and family can no longer be *anything* but *something* for you. This course then will serve as a source of motivation thus encouraging

you becoming an apostle for Christian marriage and family, defending and protecting all values associated with the institution of marriage and family.

The course takes you back to the origin and purpose of marriage. It disposes you for a true theological definition and meaning of Christian marriage and family. It gives you an insight of the complex nature and yet the different perspectives of marriage and family. It places you in a better position to appreciate the value of marriage and family for you as an individual, and for the society at large. It brings you to a stage of marvel and deep appreciation of God's love and concern for humanity. The course therefore equips you with the necessary *theoretical* and *theological* knowledge to critically evaluate, appreciate and defend the institution of marriage and family. The course tells you that marriage is the greatest gift of God to humanity. It simply says: we 'are' today as humans – thanks to God, and thanks to marriage and family. It makes you an ambassador of pro-marriage-and-family movements.

Course Objectives

You will find out that each unit in this course has stated objectives that it seeks to achieve. Pay close attention to those objectives for good understanding of the course. However, by the time you are through with the course content, especially when you have studied material with some devotion, you will be able to:

1. have a clear vision of Christian notion of marriage and family, and differentiate it from other forms of marriage;
2. distinguish marriage and family from other social institutions, and recognise its primacy in the order of creation and institutions;
3. identify the fundamental values associated with the institution of marriage and family, and thus defend these values against any legislation or attitude contrary to these values;
4. appreciate why marriage and family, though a human reality, is a saving mystery for humanity, a sacrament and a means of holiness;
5. discuss, teach, and advise on the basic elements of Christian theology of marriage and family.

Working through this Course

The 15 units from the 3 modules in this course are designed and presented in strata of a stair-step fashion, erected piece by piece with each unit standing on its own, and with each additional part providing a stabilising effect for the whole. The implication is that you are expected to follow the units step-by-step for effective understanding and appreciation of the issues raised in the course. As a student, you will do yourself a lot of good if you consult the recommended texts and other texts that are relevant for the course. These will help, in no small measure, to broaden your knowledge of the course.

There are self-assessment exercises for each section of the unit, and tutor-marked assignments (TMAs) at the end of each unit.

In designing and writing of the course, I have consciously generated many self-assessment exercises at the end of each section and subsection in order to assist you to test your level of understanding. This is also in agreement with the nature of the course design, which gives you the advantage of approaching the issues of marriage and family from many different perspectives. Thus, the self-assessment exercises and the TMAs are to your own benefits. Do not hesitate to test yourself with them as they will help to sharpen your understanding as you progress in the course. They will also to reinforce your understanding of the material. Together with tutor-marked assignments, I strongly believe, these exercises will assist you in achieving the stated learning objectives of the individual units and of the course in general.

As occasions demand, you will from time to time, have assignments to write. If I were you, I will equally take the assignments serious, knowing that they may constitute a part of my final performance in the course.

Course Materials

There are four major components of the course, excluding this course guide. These are:

1. Study units
2. Textbooks
3. Assignments' file
4. Presentation schedule

The study units

This course contains three modules of fifteen study units. They are divided and classified as follows:

Module I:	The Secular and the Old Testament View of Marriage and Family	
	Unit 1	Common Notion of Marriage
	Unit 2	Marriage as Gift Creation
	Unit 3	Marriage as Covenant Symbol
	Unit 4	Marriage in the Wisdom Literature
	Unit 5	Marriage Ethos in the Old Testament
Module II	Marriage in the New Testament and in the Fathers of the Church	
	Unit 1	Sacrament of Marriage in the Synoptic Gospels
	Unit 2	Paul's Basic Teachings on Marriage and Sexuality
	Unit 3	Expanding the New Testament Theology of Marriage
	Unit 4	Marriage in the Teachings of the Greek Fathers
	Unit 5	Marriage and Family in the Latin Tradition
Module III	Marriage and Family in Contemporary Theology and in the Teachings of the Church	
	Unit 1	Christian Marriage
	Unit 2	Christian Family
	Unit 3	Modern Theologians and Theology of Marriage
	Unit 4	Models of Marriage in Contemporary Theologies
	Unit 5	Christian Family as a Domestic Church

References

At the end of each unit, you will find references and list of books for further reading. It makes easier for you to identify relevant literature relating to each unit. You will gain much if you can read such books and similar ones on the topics treated. Reading the books will help to build your knowledge and thereby enhance your understanding of the course.

Assignment File

Your assessment in this course will come in two forms: the tutor-marked assignments and a written examination. The tutor-marked assignment which will be organised by your tutor carries 30% of the total marks for the course.

Tutor-Marked Assignment

There is a tutor-marked assignment at the end of every unit. You are advised to solve the assignments and submit your solution to your tutor. At the end of the course, the tutor-marked assignments will carry 30% of the total marks of the course.

Final Examination and Grading

Your final examination, which carries 70% of the total marks, comes at the end of the course. This will constitute a two-hour examination, where you will be asked questions on the issues that you have already encountered in the course of your study.

Course Marking Scheme

The total marks accruable to you from this course are broken down as follows:

Assessment	Marks
Assignments	Four assignments of 10% each, out of which the best three is selected to make up 30% of the total marks
Final Examination	70% of the total course marks
Total	100% of course marks

Course Time Schedule

This course is designed to cover 15 weeks outside the first week which is dedicated to the studying of this course guide. You are expected to complete the assignment for the unit at the end of every week (beginning from week 2), and submit the same to your tutorial facilitator. See the table below for the study plan. However, your tutorial facilitator may decide on the number of assignments taken from the assignments at the end of each unit.

Each study unit consists of one week's work and should take you about three hours to complete. It included specific objectives, guidance for study, reading materials, self-assessment exercises, and tutor-marked assignments. All these are to assist you achieve the stated learning objectives of the individual study units of the course.

Unit	Title of the Study Unit		Week's Activity	Assignment
	Course Guide		1	Course Guide Form
Module I	The Secular and the Old Testament View of Marriage and Family			
	Unit 1	Common Notion of Marriage	2	Assignment
	Unit 2	Marriage as Gift Creation	3	Assignment
	Unit 3	Marriage as Covenant Symbol	4	Assignment
	Unit 4	Marriage in the Wisdom Literature	5	Assignment
	Unit 5	Marriage Ethos in the Old Testament	6	TMA to be submitted
Module II	Marriage in the New Testament and in the Fathers of the Church			
	Unit 1	Sacrament of Marriage in the Synoptic Gospels	7	Assignment
	Unit 2	Paul's Basic Teachings on Marriage and Sexuality	8	Assignment
	Unit 3	Expanding the New Testament Theology of Marriage	9	Assignment
	Unit 4	Marriage in the Teachings of the Greek Fathers	10	Assignment
	Unit 5	Marriage and Family in the Latin Tradition	11	TMA to be Submitted
Module III	Marriage and Family in Contemporary Theology and in the Teachings of the Church			

	Unit 1	Christian Marriage	12	Assignment
	Unit 2	Christian Family	13	Assignment
	Unit 3	Modern Theologians and Theology of Marriage	14	Assignment
	Unit 4	Models of Marriage in Contemporary Theologies	15	Assignment
	Unit 5	Christian Family as a Domestic Church	16	TMA to be submitted

How to Get the Most from this Course

In distance learning, the study units replace the university lectures. You are therefore expected to read through the course on your own and at your own time. Another aspect of this is that you do not read at the prompting of your tutor. You read when you decide to do so. Since there is no lecturer for you in this course, the study unit tells you what to do at each point. It will benefit you immensely if you obey its instructions.

The units are arranged in a common format. The first item of every unit is an introduction to the subject matter of the unit, and how a particular unit is integrated with the other units and the course as a whole. What follows next is a set of learning objectives. These objectives, as already stated, let you know what you should be able to do by the time you have completed the unit. These learning objectives are meant to guide your study. You are advised to go back to the stated objectives at the end of every unit, to know whether you have achieved them in the course of your learning.

The self-assessment exercises at the end of the units are to help you to assess your understanding of the units. Do not neglect them as the way you answer them provides you with a mirror to gauge your performance in learning the course.

Tutors and Tutorials

Your tutor will provide a human guide for you in the course of this work. However, you are to have only Fifteen hours of contact with him in the course of your study of this course. Pay close attention to your tutor. If you have any question to ask as regards the course it is your tutor that will provide the answer. He will also mark your tutor-marked assignments. You should try as much as possible to attend all the tutorials. Doing so will be of benefit to you.

Summary

It is the thinking of the designer/writer of this course that at the end of the course you should have been equipped with basic theoretical and theological knowledge of marriage and family as understood in the Christian context. This course helps you to appreciate more God's love for you, and for humanity. The course challenges you not only with the acquisition of the true knowledge of Christian marriage and family, but also to speak for Christian marriage and family, to defend and project its values.

Good luck, and God bless you!



MAIN COURSE

MODULE 1: The Secular and the Old Testament View of Marriage and Family

UNIT 1: Common Notion of Marriage and Family

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1.0 Introduction

You are welcome to the first lecture on the course on Marriage and Family. The understanding of the structure and modus of operation of this earliest human-divine institution in history is not only importance but also urgent amid the challenges faced by the institution in the contemporary world. The question that many stakeholders ask today is whether marriage and the family will survive the scourge of modern culture? Unfortunately, the news today associated with marriage and the family is not a welcoming one: separation, divorce and remarriage. Marriages of low quality abound while happy marriages are seldom, or even to hear about, though we all know that many such happy marriages exist. The question is why is monogamous marriage under such pressure today? Why are there so many problems connected with marriage in every country of the world? We are told that in most countries today 50% of marriages end in separation and divorce, and more may be expected in the coming century! Must that be so? Is there anything we can do to change this trend? The answer, of course, is yes! There is much we can all do to help couples who marry to stay together (Burke, 2006:9), and happily, hence we are called to a critical appreciation of the goods and merits of marriage.

2.0 Objectives

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- describe marriage and family as understood from the secular perspectives
- identify the boundary markers in marriage as used by sociologists and anthropologists
- discuss the significance of family
- evaluate the influence of religion on the institution of marriage

3.0 Main Content

3.1 The common understanding of marriage

3.1.1 Definition of marriage.

Marriage is one of the oldest human institutions (Osa, 1992), expressed in various different forms (Hayes, 2008) in various traditions and cultures. One sees this not only in the marriage ceremonies but also in the life, the day-to-day experience and relationship of married couples. It has equally been described a mystery, a religious and social institution with legal definition, rights and duties that are regulated by the state, and most often approved by many religious traditions through special rites and ceremonies.

Marriage as a “social institution (legally ratified) unites a man and a woman in special forms of mutual dependence for the purpose of founding and maintaining a family” (The Microsoft Encarta, 2009). Any child resulting from the union is regarded as legitimate offspring of the parents (Williams and Adewale, 2010). Delineating some of the characteristics of marriage, Stephens (1963) argues that marriage is (i) a socially legitimate sexual union, begun with (ii) a public announcement, undertaken with (iii) some idea of performance, and assumed with a more or less explicit (iv) marriage contract, which spells out reciprocal obligations between spouses and between spouses and their children (cf. Selinger, 1910). It is effected by the mutual consent of the couple to give and accept each other for the purpose of propagating the human race, of educating their offspring, of sharing life in common, of supporting each other in undivided conjugal affection by a lasting union.

Marriage, therefore, confers on the male partner the status of, husband, and to the female partner wife. When it is blessed with offspring, the partnership will graduate to parenthood, thus father for the husband and mother for the wife. In this sense, you can see that marriage by its very nature: (i) is the oldest institution (cf. Gen 1:27; 2:7, 18, 24); (ii) generates new and intimate relationship and commitment; (iii) has the character of permanence and conformity to certain societal and religious norms; (iv) presumes and actualises the reality of family; and (v) demonstrates the personal, social, religious, divine and mysterious characters.

Consequently, marriage can be described as a contract between a man and a woman, which existed since ancient time. As a social practice, which a man and a woman enters into through public act, it reflects the purpose, character and customs of the society in which it is fund (Williams and Adewale 2010, p.112).

Self-assessment exercise

1. What do you understand by marriage?
2. What do we mean when we say that marriage is the oldest institution in human history?
3. Draw out some of the implications associated with the claim that marriage is divine?

3.1.2 Boundaries of marriage.

It is very common in modern age to demand from individuals the state their marital status (single, married, separated, widowed, divorced), and in some transactions to state the number of spouses (one, two, etc.). These two major components of marriage boundaries (marital status and number of spouses) affect family members socially and psychologically. This

includes their mode of relating to one another; sleeping arrangements; exclusivity of sexual interactions; the likelihood of and number of children; patterns of support, decision making, and authority; and male/female roles, to mention a few.

But you will discover that sociologists and anthropologists will use a typology of marital systems to qualify such relationship. Thus, marriage can be described in terms of monogamous and polygamous systems. The suffix *-gamy* here refers to marriage or a union for propagation and reproduction. Thus, *monogamy* (single), *bigamy* (two), *polygamy* (several or many), *allogamy* (closely related), *endogamy* (within), and *exogamy* (outside or external) describe the nature of marriage. In other words, monogamy refers to marriage to a single spouse. Polygamy refers to marriage to several or many individuals; bigamy (marriage to two spouses) is a specific type of polygamy. Theoretically, there could be two or more wives (polygyny), two or more husbands (polyandry), or two or more husbands and wives (group marriage). Each of these is a polygamous marriage, as distinguished from a monogamous (one-spouse) marriage.

There is in some society, what we may describe as *child marriage*. A child of about nine or ten years is taken to her prospective husband, who may in some situation be counting on his fifties. The prospective husband is expected to take care of the child until she comes up to a marriageable age. The main concern is the child's safety and familiarisation with the family she is coming into as a wife. Marriage can also be described as *levirate*, that is, a custom by which a man might marry the wife of his deceased brother for the purpose of raising a family for the deceased. The system is designed to actualise for the deceased a family, which the deceased had already laid the foundation. You must have also heard about *sororate* marriage, where a man marries one or more of his wife's sisters, usually if the first wife has died or cannot have children. It is more or less the opposite of levirate marriage.

It is important for you to note that these terms are constructed by social scientists to classify marriage systems under various specific cultural conditions.

Self-assessment exercise

1. Do you think that group marriage is practicable? Give reasons to support your position.
2. In tabular form state the advantages and disadvantages of the different forms of marriage mentioned in this section. To which of them would you subscribe, and why?

3.2 Some views on family

3.2.1 Definition

Family (from Latin: *familia*) can be considered purely from human perspective as a group of people affiliated by consanguinity (by birth), affinity (by marriage), or co-residence/shared consumption (nurtured kinship). It can also be viewed sociologically from the structural, functional and relational dimensions. Structurally, family refers to two or more persons related by birth, marriage, or adoption who reside together in a household or geographically living apart.

Functionally, it is a primary institution ordained for *responsible* procreation, enculturation and socialization (cf. Russon, 2003). It serves for the formation of an economic productive household (Wolf, 1982; Harner, 1975). Family also defines and regulates sexual relations among the members.

Another perspective of understanding family is relational. There are always unique relational characteristics associated with family (i.e., how the members interact with each other). So, family will refer to any social group in which the members love each other, and the members are highly interdependent, and have a commitment to each other and a strong sense of loyalty. The emphasis here is on mutual relationship which could involve the sharing of material substances (such as food); the giving and receiving of care and nurture (nurture kinship); jural rights and obligations; and moral and sentimental ties. (Schneider, 1984).

"Family" is also used metaphorically to create more inclusive categories such as community, nationhood, global village and humanism. The danger of such usage is to include non-family human relations such as political, economic, medical, educational, military, artistic etc. as

part of the understanding of family. Reacting against such move, Beutler, Burr, Bahr, and Herrin (1989) propose that the term *family realm* be used to describe those pseudo-family relations. This has resultantly generated the concept of *family transcendence* (Bahr and Bahr, 1996). The family transcendence calls for a holistic inquiry into connections and dimensions of location and meaning of the concept as appropriate for scientific inquiry (cf. Understanding Marriage). In the bid of responding to the appeal, the obvious idea is that the concept of family should include the act of two men or two women who cohabit, and even a man or a woman with his/her pet(s) as an aspect of family. Is this not going too far? Think about it!

While we appreciate some value projected by the proposition of the *family realm* to save the concept of family from non-family, we believe it is possible to identify aspects of family groups or systems that distinguish them from other types of groups or systems without necessarily endorsing one form of family group (i.e., family institution) over another.

It is important for you to keep in mind that the above definitions and approaches are not fundamental to the very essence of family. The metaphysics of family is not captured in its entirety in those descriptions and definitions. The absolutisation of the sociological and anthropological concepts and constructs is detrimental to the 'metaphysical' nature of family (and marriage). Thus, the family is a part of human social realities, yet transcends these realities. Family expands beyond the reflected adaptation to environmental circumstances and previous societal conditions; family is more than a product of cultural innovation and ideology or even power-play (contra. Stacey, 1996). Family is a mystery.

Self-assessment exercise

1. Is it possible for two or more persons to live in the same house without belonging to the same family?
2. Do you see any difference between family and household?
3. What are the different perspectives associated with the concept of family?
4. Examine some of the implications emanating from the metaphoric usage of the term family.
5. How did scholars arrive to the term y "family transcendence"
6. Evaluate some of the claims of the 'family realm' and underline some of the extremism of the theory.

3.2.2 Significance of family

Family (and marriage) forms the cornerstone of any society (Weren 2014). It fulfils universal fundamental needs for the survival of a society, hence no society can dispense herself of family. Some of these need-functions include:

- i. Economic production,
- ii. Socialization of children,
- iii. Care of the sick and aged,
- iv. Recreation,
- v. Sexual control, and
- vi. Reproduction.

You may also find out that family tree is of significance in retracing our history of origin; determining how we relate to one another, and above all, with our decisions on who marries whom? Family tree serves as veritable hedge to the institution of marriage and family, and very often assigns role to each member of the family both in terms of communication and behaviour. For this reason, we may discuss briefly membership and kinship in a family.

The two major relationships associated with nuclear and extended family systems are lineal and collateral respectively. The lineal structure includes grandparent, grandfather, grandmother, grandchild, grandson, granddaughter etc. The collateral are uncle, aunt, nephew, niece, and cousin. When additional generations intervene (in other words, when one's collateral relatives belong to the same generation as one's grandparents or grandchildren), the prefixes "great-" or "grand-" modifies these terms. Also, as with

grandparents and grandchildren, as more generations intervene the prefix becomes "great-grand-," adding an additional "great-" for each additional generation. You may also notice that most collateral relatives have never had membership of the nuclear family of the members of one's own nuclear family.

We can also further distinguish cousins by degrees of collaterality and by generation. Two persons of the same generation who share a grandparent count as "first cousins" (one degree of collaterality); if they share a great-grandparent they count as "second cousins" (two degrees of collaterality) and so on. But the relationship is not infinite. The role and status combinations as conferred by the family structure implies a set of mutual role, expectations, obligations, and rights that are worked out by members of the families in order to accommodate the needs and interest of the families as well as the individual members (cf. Understanding Marriage).

The maintenance of the family tree will reinvigorate the extended family system kinship, and lend more support to the effectiveness of incest taboo. The taboo in turn helps families to avoid *role confusion*, and consecutively facilitates the socialization of children and the maintenance of healthy and unsuspected conjugal relationship. Furthermore, the incest taboo inspires people to seek for marriage partners outside the family (*exogamy*), which has in no small measure encouraged people to forge alliances between tribes that could have otherwise turned into real or potential enemies. It extends also the bride's and the groom's social networks by adding and building relationships with their spouse's family and friends.

Because extended families are enmeshed in large kinship networks, their members can count on many people for material and emotional support. In contrast, the stresses in nuclear families that come with crises are spread among fewer people. This places greater strain on each family member, creating *emotional overload*. In addition, the relative isolation of the nuclear family makes it vulnerable to a "dark side" — incest and various other forms of abuse.

It is also important for you to note that by virtue of the intergenerational connection between family of orientation and conjugal family, there is an inherent role organization and structure of rights and obligations stemming from the members' capabilities and dependencies on the social organisation within the marriage through the transmission of culture, the conditions of support outside the system, and the intrusiveness of outsiders in the marital system. These are structural conditions unlike those found in other social systems.

Family is unique in their functionality at both the emotional and instrumental levels, and its dominance as primary and secondary groups. You will find this in the communication patterns where certain set of beliefs within the family reflects how its members should communicate and interact both within and outside the family circle. Thus McCornack (2010) observes that two communication patterns arise from the underlying sets of beliefs: (i) conversation orientation (the degree to which the importance of communication is valued), and (ii) conformity orientation (the degree to which families should emphasize similarities or differences regarding attitudes, beliefs, and values). These are necessary if members of the families must accomplish tasks efficiently as well as be attentive to the emotional needs of their members.

Family has also certain relational qualities that distinguishes it from other types of groups. Besides loyalty, love, and affection, high levels of interdependence across a variety of domains (emotional, psychological, physical, behavioural, economic, social, etc.) and *permanence* are among the hallmarks. The idea of permanence will go a long way to influence and condition the exchange of valued resources and the interdependence of identities.

Self-assessment exercise

1. What do you understand by lineal and collateral relationship in family arrangement?
2. Discuss the importance of family.
3. Has the incest taboo any significance in family relation?
4. Describe some of the rational qualities of family.

5. What are those relational characteristics that distinguish family from other groupings?
6. Discuss some of the advantages of extended family system.

3.3 Influence of religion on the institution of marriage and family

You should note here that religion and culture affect human concept of marriage and family, and also human relationship with other members of the family and the larger society; and that most religions prescribe rights and duties, obligations and responsibilities for their members, who are involved in marriage and family life (cf. Williams and Adewale, 2010:119). In this discussion, you will notice the enormous influence of religion on marriage: on whom to marry, when and where, and on the structure and life style of a family. You will also find out that religion has both beneficial and challenging effects on marriage and family.

3.3.1 Marital stability and satisfaction

Emily Sigalow, one of the graduate students of Brandeis University in USA makes a case study. In her analysis of the study, she demonstrates that conjugal union between individuals with similar religion creates a more stable, satisfying and successful marriage, hence people will first search for companion within the same faith (Scribner Oct. 2, 2013). The observation agrees with other studies on long-term marriages, which indicate that similarity in religious orientation (Robinson, and Blanton 1993), religious faith (Robinson 1994), and religious belief (Kaslow, and Robinson, 1996) are among, if not the most important, key factors in marital success.

Also, Bronson and Merryman (June 30, 2006) write: “This is a don't kill the messenger post, but it's true: the family that prays together stays together. But for much different reasons than you might think.” According to them, religious harmony has some positive impact on marital stability and satisfaction, while interfaith marriages tend to have a higher divorce rate and be less satisfying than religiously homogenous marriages. Their faith-based beliefs, argues Mark (Aug. 2003) give rise to strong aversion to divorce because the doctrine of their faith influences their thoughts, words and actions, thus presenting marriage as a timeless covenant, an everlasting affair. The result is that:

- i. Increased religiosity increases marital stability; and those without any religious affiliation have a higher divorce rate than those who are religious, no matter what religion it is. In other words, religious affiliation also seems to be a general indicator of increased marital stability and satisfaction.
- ii. Jewish and Catholics have the lowest divorce rates (switching back and forth between the two, depending on the study) than Protestants. Protestant sects vary in their divorce rates: conservative and fundamentalist Protestants actually have *higher* rates of divorce than others. And a 2001 study even discovers that born-again Christians have the same divorce rate as those who with *no* religious affiliation.
- iii. A study of Christian married couples shows that couples are more satisfied in their marriages if they both shared the same doctrinal views on religion, participated in religious activities, are able to communicate about religion, and if they didn't have to worry so much about their spouse being saved. Or as Scribner (Oct. 2, 2013) reports: differences on core values in a religion can often lead to divergence and divorce. When you are in the same faith, it allows for smoother sailing.” The point you should note is that the most important aspect of religion in marriage is religious communication. The ability to discuss one's faith, share one's experiences, and be able to listen to those experiences of a partner (cf. Marks, Aug. 2003).
- iv. Another important observation is made by Merryman (June 30, 2006). According to him, a member of any religious group living within a concentration of those sharing his/her faith is generally less likely to be divorced.
- viii. Researchers further observe that there is also correlation between religious shared beliefs in marriage and marital satisfaction, although the *nature* of the relationship cannot easily

be defined (Koenig, McCollough, and Larson, 2001). Marital satisfaction on the other hand tends to increase religiosity.

Self-assessment exercise

1. Do you agree that religion has some positive influence in marriage stability?
2. Explain the relation relationship between religion and the choice of partner to marriage.

3.3.2 Decisions on marriage and family size

It is important for you to note the following points:

i. Expert studies have proved those who find religion important in their lives are especially likely to make decisions based on their religious beliefs (cf. Scribner Oct. 2, 2013). This includes decisions on who marries whom (Marks August, 2003), the number of children. When such decision is based on religion, then more happiness is achieved in home (cf. Portraits of American Life Study [PALS]).

ii. A research shows that religions with strong doctrines around childbearing offer social rewards for those who follow the traditions. Women in these religions tend to have high fertility rates, which Sigalow's research identified as an incentive-based response. Here the study demonstrates that Catholics are more likely to say religious factors influence their decision on the number of children to have than mainline Protestants. This is due to their deep interest in the theology and spirituality of marriage and family found within the Catholic circle.

But more revealing, and probably contrary to popular opinions, is that marriages and relationships have been more successful and stable when partners consider their religious beliefs, and that the more educated people are, the more they base their decisions more rationally on religion.

Self-assessment exercise

1. Evaluate the statement that religion is an important factor in family planning.
2. How do you mean that the more educated and rational people are to their religion, the more stable is their marriage?

3.3.3. Marital and family relationships and responsibilities

Studies by Marks (2003) shows that:

i. Most highly religious parents strive for a personal connection with God, and this connection and related sacred beliefs are powerfully linked with marital and family relationships. The connection is clearly manifested in the parent-child relationships. Here children are perceived as great gifts and blessings from God, which impact positively in the socialisation of the children, in spite of the many challenges.

ii. It shows also that faith and beliefs are not only spiritual. They also serve as family framework and as foundations for culture and subculture. Indeed, for those who are deeply committed and connected to their faith, carry the same influence literally into work, jokes, foods, holidays, rituals, word and action, in short into all aspects of life.

Self-assessment exercise

Evaluate the statement that faith and beliefs are not only spiritual but also serve as family framework and foundations for culture and subculture.

3.3.4 The challenge ahead

You have seen that religious faith is a salient and inextricable thread and fabric in the quilt of family life, especially for the highly religious families. These families cannot be adequately understood independent of their faith. Their openness to communicate, to dialogue and to share the riches of their religious traditions among the members of the family, and also with

other people of various faith generates the feelings of universal brother/sisterhood. Although these people could be of different denominations, all have souls that are similarly seeking a sacred connection and communion with a real and relational God. So, Bronson, & Merryman (2006) advise: take religion and communication very serious as matrix in marriage and family because it is the matrix for happiness and stability. They can easily cement cracks and fill up holes in marriages. Communication is therefore very, if not the important, anti-dose for unhappiness and irreconcilable marriage divorce. It is more important than commonality, and can assist to overcome some of the difficulties posed by other heterogamous aspects of a marriage.

We equally acknowledge that faith and family connection has been grossly salient and positive. , yet the connection also carried pain for some. Thus, the joy of faith can become a virtual line of divide between generations, and even among married couples and members of the same family, especially where religious communication is lacking. Consequently, true religious communication seeks to understand and even appreciate the struggle of families to answer life's most taxing and profound questions through their individual and familial walks of faith. It is always informing, always sensitive and more aware of what others value and how they live. The value and importance religious communication extends beyond heightened awareness. It a lived and living experience.

Self-assessment exercise

1. Do you agree that faith has some positive impact in marriage? Give reasons to support your position.
2. What is the reason given to explain the fact that fundamentalist religionists experience high divorce rate more than orthodox and liberal religionists?
3. Do you think that religion has any positive contribution to make in marital challenges?
4. Explain the role of communication in married life.

4.0 Conclusion

Marriage and family is the foundation of any society. It is an organic unit, though rooted in human, still transcends human reality to find its perfection in the eschatological reality. Marriage has divine origin. Its nature is both human and divine; it is real and mysterious. It is an anthropological, sociological and religious reality, whose foundation is rooted in theology. Consequently, its theological foundation and meaning are considered not only indispensable but urgent. It is for the same reason that we committing ourselves in the rest of the course to the theology of marriage and family in relation to human operations and salvation.

5.0 Summary

We are gradually coming to the end of this unit. It is left for us to pull the thread together and state briefly what we have learnt.

- i. We considered the secular notion of marriage, taking into consideration the various views people have about marriage. We learnt that the institution of marriage is divine in origin but human in its operation, and that it presumes and actualises the reality of family. We further argued that marriage has the inherent character of commitment and permanence. We discussed the two major components of marriage boundaries and its sociological and psychological effects on the individuals as status maker and marker.
- ii. We observed that family is a dynamic, structural, functional and relational reality. Family can equally be understood in a metaphoric sense. We pointed out the various family systems and the functional advantage of family tree.
- iii. We stressed the importance of religion. We argued that religion exert enormous influence on marriage and family. We equally underlined the indispensable role of religious communication in

maintaining marital stability, peace and happiness. It could also serve as cushion to the challenges of marriage and family.

6.0 Tutor marked assignment

1. Discuss the societal and religious characters of marriage.
2. What are the possible classifications of marriage?
3. Discuss the typology of marriage.
4. What are the different perspectives associated with the concept of family?
5. What is the significance of “family tree”?
6. What are the positive contributions of religion to marriage and family?

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1.0 Introduction

The Old Testament merits a special place in the consideration of the saving reality of marriage and the family. Of course, it is true that it is only when seen from the perspective of the complete revelation of Christ that marriage and family can be perceived in its full light. Nevertheless, one of the most important elements which Christianity has inherited from Israel is the Old Testament’s living, almost passionate, and certainly joyous confession of everyday secular values. It is understood not as self-contained. It is dynamic and proceeds directly from God. Incidentally, marriage and family are among these secular values. They are secular values that enter into salvation history. They are equally anthropological realities. So, what may border us more in this section is the question: How does Israel, as the people of God, experience the realities of marriage and family?

The approach will be biblical and theological. Taken from the biblical perspective, we shall contextualise the discussion within ancient Near East cultural milieu. These are the people with whom Israel has intimate links, specifically the Mesopotamian, Syrian, and Canaanite. The appreciation of their cultural milieu, which I presumed you will come across other lectures in OT, prepares you to see how syncretistic the people of ancient Near East are. While the Israelites operate in the same cultural context, they will radically revolutionise their understanding of marriage, sexuality and family.

2.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Appreciate the struggle of Israel to explain the reality of marriage and the family
- Assess the contributions of Israel to the Christian notion of marriage and family
- Comprehend the status and role of womanhood in the family
- Highlight the importance of children in the family, and understand why children should be respected and loved
- Have a good understanding on how the people of ancient Israel understand and explain the origin of the challenges of contemporary marriage and family.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 The myth of marriage in Ancient Near East culture.

Sexuality, fertility, and marriage are seen in the ancient Near East cultures in the context of myths and rituals (Lawler, 1985). They are associated with the gods and deities, and inserted in the world of myth and rituals. So, you can see that sexuality, fertility, and marriage are part

of myth, and celebrated within the world of religion. The understanding of the people about marriage and family are consequently rooted in cultures which are the archetypal figures of the god-father and the goddess-mother, the sources of universal life in the divine, in the natural, and in the human spheres. Myths celebrate the marriage, the sexual intercourse, and the fertility of this divine pair, legitimating the marriage, the intercourse, and the fertility of every earthly pair.

On the other hand, rituals act out the myths, thus establishing a concrete link between the divine and the earthly worlds and enabling men and women to share not only in the divine action but also in the efficacy of that action. This is especially true of sexual rituals, which bless sexual intercourse and ensure that the unfailing divine fertility is shared by man's plants and animals and wives, all important elements in his struggle for survival in those cultures (Eliade, 1979 and James, 1959). In Mesopotamia, the divine couple is Ishtar and Tammuz; in Egypt, Isis and Osiris; in Canaan, Ashtarte (or Asherah) and, sometimes, Eshnun. After the Hellenization of Canaan, Eshmun is given the title of Adonis.

Self-assessment exercise

1. What are some of the implications of setting marriage and family in a culture that holds the dominance of the model figures of the god-father and the goddess-mother, whose sexual acts must be shared and effected by humans on earth?
2. Do you think that the mythologization of sexuality, fecundity and marriage in Ancient Near East could have encouraged temple prostitution?

3.2 Demythologization and desacralisation of marriage

If we examine the Old Testament text on marriage in the creation account (Gen. 1:27-28; 2:18-24; 5:1-2), we may immediately observe some surprises. Contrary to the prevalent view of marriage in the ancient Near East, especially in Canaan with its Phoenician civilisation, marriage in Israel is desacralized and secularised. This is consequent upon Israel's belief and faith in Yahweh. It is Israel that takes married life totally out from the religious domain and sets it squarely in human and secular province.

Thus, in social life the difference in married life between Israel and her neighbours may not appear so much different. Yet there lies some distinction, which, be it as little as it may seem, makes the distinction (Schillebeeckx 1965). For the Canaanite, it is the cult of the fertility gods (Num. 25:3-8; Ex 24:15-16; Jer. 2:20; 3:1-2; 8:27) that modulates the married life. Sexuality and procreation are considered as something mysterious belonging to the sphere of the divine. And whatever human does, so to speak in Platonic terms, is only a reflection of the activities of the gods in the real world. In other words, the fertility gods are deities of the forces of nature and of the cycle of fertility in human and the natural world. The gods are both male and female and their intercourse is a prototype of everything that happens on earth. Those who worshipped them endeavour to ensure by means of magic rites that both their land and their wives are fertile. It is upon these gods that all fertility and the entire force of life is believed to depend. The belief leads to orgies of prostitution in the temples in which the deities are worshipped. In other words, temple prostitution is a pious and religious act that not only elevates humans to share and participate in the divine act of sexual intercourse, but also to effect same as a process of divinising the profane.

However, the idea expressed in the book of Genesis, in contrast to the understanding prevalent among Israel's neighbours, is a thorough demythologization and secularisation of the myth of marriage. We must note that the attempt in Genesis is not to destroy the sacredness or religious character of married life. For Israel and her neighbours, sexuality and everything that it involves is mysterious gift of God. The new element is Israel's view of God. It is *something* totally *new*. It is about the *new* God, Yahweh, who cannot be restricted to nature or to the cycle of fertility in nature and in human. This places marriage in a different religious compass, that of the creation by Yahweh's free and sovereign love. This may equally be regarded as the first fruit of revelation because it is Israel's association of marriage (and fertility) with the God Yahweh that Israel's conception of the creation is purified,

becoming a faith in a Creator who is in no way restricted and who is generous and free, elective and loving in the sharing of his abundant riches.

So, for Israel, marriage is a good gift of the creation, coming from Yahweh, the God of the covenant. What is called into existence by God's creation is sanctified by the fact of creation itself and subject to God's holy laws. It is not the sacred rites which surrounded marriage that make it a holy thing. The great rite which sanctifies marriage is God's act of creation itself. The blessing promised to married couples in the oriental world is seen by Israel as Yahweh's blessing. It is Yahweh and none other who, as the founder of marriage, blesses the union of man and wife. This blessing is the very blessing of God's act of creation. This divine blessing made the first marriage of history the prototype of all married life (Schillebeeckx 1965).

Israel's belief in the divine institution of marriage is expressed in Genesis. It is God himself who, in the first marriage and thus in every marriage in Israel, gives the woman to the man (cf. Gen. 2:22). One of the implications we can draw from this is that marriage is a good and holy undertaking, bearing God's blessing in the structure that God intends it to have (Gen. 1:28). That children leave their parents and home, with their father's blessing to join together in marriage (Mk 10:6-8; cf. Gen. 1 & 2), is a fact verifiable in everyday experience, and one which forms part of the good and divinely instituted plan of creation. Israel must explain this in relation to her *new* God.

Self-assessment exercise

1. What is so special about Israel's account of marriage in Genesis that may be lacking in the religions of Israelites neighbours?
2. How do you mean that marriage in Israel is desacralized and secularised?
3. Describe your understanding of the *new* God of the Israelites.

3.3 Eve as helpmate

You will not be laboured here with the etymology and the subtle linguistic hair-splitting arguments of scholars on the terms: *adham*, *is* and *issah*. But note that woman (*issah*) is primarily conceived within the Genesis creation account as man's helpmate. In the same account, the glorification of animals rather than human is also strongly opposed and attacked. In this case, woman is identified as the principal agent. Thus, "the man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner only woman is man's equal" (Gen. 2:20). In other words, woman is given to man by God as partner, in the sense of playing the role of helper, which is a privileged position strongly reserved for God (cf. Ps. 33:20; 56:5). Woman is the pillar of support to the man (Sir. 36:24-26). So, woman is never conceived at the beginning more or less than man. She is man's partner and helper. You find out that the same view is implicated in the very statement of the man at the state of 'innocence': "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken." (cf. Gen 2:23).

The idea of "bone" and "flesh" as expressed in Gen 2:23 is beyond biological account. It is not only anthropological, but more fundamentally theological. We are well informed by Schillebeeckx (1965) of the three elements that are fused together in the expression: (i) Blood relationship, seen as an extension of the idea of peace (*salom*) in the life of the clan and the solidarity of the family, the extended family, the clan and the tribe; (ii) the idea of woman as complementary to man, woman as man's life companion – man is not complete without woman, and both complement each other in their humanity; (iii) there is the idea of physical, marital union – man and woman forming one person. "Flesh" denoted here the whole person, the *ego* in physical form. It is also mythical. It embodies the fact that man's wife is his *alter ego*, nothing more or short of that.

So, what cannot be justified from the texts of Genesis on marriage and family is that the texts refer merely to the creation of woman and man, and not directly to marriage. The intention of

the whole text is to restore the social fact of marriage to a divine institution (Schillebeeckx 1965) and thus guide the sacred institution of marriage.

Self-assessment exercise

1. What do you understand by the statement that woman is a helpmate to man?
2. Does the idea of partnership in any way support the idea of assigning definite role for man and another for woman in a family?

3.4 Children in marriage.

For Israel, children are not simply Yahweh's gift to parents; they are also Yahweh's inheritance, and the parents are bound to treat them as such, and give them to God. That a child is a divine blessing on marriage cannot, however, be regarded as peculiar to Israel. Here, too, what is distinctively Israelite is faith in true God, Yahweh, who is not restricted to the laws of nature and biological cycles, but who is able to act in free and sovereign power in giving a child to parents – even to infertile parents. The birth of Seth is seen as the fulfilment of God's blessing on the first two human beings (Gen. 5:1-3). Therefore, children in Israel remain Yahweh's gift (Gen. 4:1; 24:60; Ruth 4:11; Ps. 113:9 cf. Mal. 2:14-16) and not Baal. They are also Yahweh's inheritance (Ps. 127:3). The Child is the fruit of 'one flesh' or the loving communion of marriage as a gift of God, so that it must of necessity belong to Yahweh.

Self-assessment exercise

1. What contributions do you think that Israel's idea of Children as gift and inheritance of Yahweh could make to the protection of child's rights?
2. How does the gift of children to families demonstrate freedom and sovereignty of Yahweh?

3.5 The challenge in marriage

You may not be surprised to hear that the 'fall' in Genesis account is a theological reflection of human daily experience of marriage, and life in general. Thus, Israel is well informed about the tragic aspect of marriage and human life. Israel knows that sin is a fundamental fact of everyday human existence. The actual disastrous situation in which marriage is placed penetrates so deep in Israel's consciousness to a point of changing the faith in the goodness of God's creation and placing it in doubt. The radical deep-seated impotence experienced in achieving a happy and successful married life is explained in the OT by transferring the "the constitution" of the weakness of marriage to the beginning of the fact of marriage, to the life of the first man and woman in history. The man has sinned together with his helpmate. It is important for you to note that unlike the Mesopotamian parallels, this story develops a sharp sense of human responsibility, in which both the man and the woman take their turns, God's good creation is then disrupted (Fretheim, 2002; also 1969). The word of God is placed in question, and creation is disrupted (White, 1991).

Drawing from the implication of the fall, Fretheim (2002) argues on a fourfold result: Their eyes are opened; they know that they are naked; they make loincloths for themselves (an inter-human act); and they hide from God's presence. With eyes opened, they see the world differently, *from a theological perspective*. The situation attests to a breakdown in inter-human relationships as well as in the relationship with God, whom human no longer engages in a straightforward manner. In short, every conceivable relationship has been disrupted: among the animals; between animals and humans; between the ground and humans; between human beings and God; between an animal and God; within the individual self (for instance, shame). More abstractly, one could speak of humiliation, domination and subordination, conflict, suffering, and struggle. The sentences touch every aspect of human life: marriage and sexuality; birth and death; work and food; human and nonhuman. In all of these areas, one could speak of death encroaching on life. Disharmony reigns supreme. It is within this context that marriage as human reality is being experienced.

The implication of the fall is also seen on the fact that the woman from being man's wife and partner (Gen 2:18), man has turned to be her tyrant (Gen 3:16b). In the same way the wife who has been assigned to him as a help in good (happiness and fulfilment) becomes a help in evil. This idea is encountered again and again in the OT (cf. Gen. 3:6, 12; 14:30-38; 39:1-23; Judg. 16:4-22; and the Wisdom literature).

Another point that may be of interest to you is this: that in describing the temptation and the fall, the authors of Genesis have in mind the idea of God prevalent among Israel's neighbours. They have made God dependent upon nature and the natural cycles, and therefore, associate fertility with magic rites. The Israelite women are naturally considered first in these rites. They participate in the rites with the full knowledge and the approval of their husbands. Thus, when Jeremiah protests against these practices, the women proudly reply that their husbands have given them their consent to act in such a manner: "Was it without our husbands' approval?" In other words, their husbands have full knowledge of what is happening and have equally given their consent (Jer. 44:19). So, the serpent, which is intimately connected with the fertility rites of the ancient world will address the woman, who in turn persuades Adam. Instead of trusting in God's blessing on marriage, Eve, the wife and mother, turns, with Adam's consent, to magic fertility rites. In this way human dissociates marriage from the *huqqoth*, the divinely appointed limits of creation.

What happened here, in the case of the first man and woman, is repeated again and again throughout the history of humankind, in new and different situations. The *trust* in God is lost. Both man and woman enter on a history of sin. *This* has its effect upon all their relationships. Their "community" is impaired, so that the husband will turn out to dominate the wife, to treat her as a slave, and woman becomes man's temptress. But marriage remains a good gift of creation even when it is affected by sin; even when the pure and undefiled state of trust in God and familiar association with him is lost in married life. As the "image of God," human is God's representative for all that is in the world. In the world he is God's minister and "ambassador." When he breaks off relations with God, whose envoy he is, his mission in the world inevitably takes its own stubborn and high-handed course, the consequences of which human self has to bear.

You can imagine the far-reaching consequence of one single act. It is far more than the tragedy of one single married life that is involved in the disability shown up in marriage. The whole of human existence is affected. You also find here that "principle" and "beginning" coincide. What happens in the beginning both expounds and at the same time elucidates what you can see happening all around us every day – the tragedy of marriage. The description of this beginning shows that what has been happening in married life throughout the centuries crosses the frontiers of each individual marriage. The powerlessness of marriage due to the entry of sin into God's good creation is withdrawn from each new intervention made by a particular married couple. The human self becomes powerless.

Self-assessment exercise.

1. What is so peculiar about the Genesis account of the fall and human responsibility vis-à-vis the accounts from other ancient Near East literature?
2. What are the fourfold consequences of the fall as reflected by Fretheim (2002)?
3. Do you think that the fall has any effect on marriage and family?
4. Reflect on Jer. 44:19 in the context of the fall.
5. What do you understand by the statement that "principle" and "beginning" coincides in the Genesis account of the tragedy of marriage and family?

4.0 Conclusion

You must have found out from our discussion, especially from the Book of Genesis, that hope is not lost. In contrast to the image of marriage which those who are living at the time of the Book of Genesis can see all around them, an image of faithfulness to Yahweh which has been defaced, the original ideal of marriage is set up – marriage as it has come into the world from God's hands, untouched by human sinfulness. Indeed, it is possible to say that the

Genesis text contains no more than this, but, seen against the sombre backcloth of marriage as it is experienced in those times. It is certainly more than enough. Genesis stares in contrast to the broken and tarnished image of marriage, that “in the beginning it was not like this.” The divine institution of marriage is not to be put aside for purely human considerations. Only later does it become apparent that it is not enough simply to go back beyond human’s initiative in sin and point to the perfect beginning of creation, but that a recreation will be necessary. Only the provision from above of a completely new beginning can change the actual situation. What is necessary, in other words, is the redeeming power of God, who can provide this new beginning in the history of humanity in Christ (Schillebeeckx 1965:27).

5.0 Summary

You must have discovered in this lecture that:

- i. The ancient Near East cultures rooted sexuality, fertility and marriage in the myth of the god-father and goddess-mother, and allow the belief to play out in sexual ritual.
- ii. It was Israel's belief and faith in Yahweh that brought about a type of revolution in the understanding of marriage and family, and made Israel different from her ancient Near East neighbours. Marriage was desacralized and secularised but without destroying the sacredness and religious character of marriage.
- iii. Israel came up with the idea of a *new* God. Their new understanding of the *new God* influenced their worldview, their philosophy and theology about the sacred and the secular.
- iv. One of the implications of Israel’s understanding of the *new God* plays out well in the use of the term “helpmate” in the creation story. The use is theologically rich with respect to womanhood. A woman in the beginning was given to man as a precocious gift, as a partner and with the privilege designation "helper", which is a title reserved to God. Man, also understood this truth at the early moment of innocence.
- v. Children are conceived as gift from Yahweh to parents, and also as Yahweh's inheritance.
- vi. It is Israel's effort to explain the weakness and failures experienced in marriage in particular and life in general that leads to the fall narrative. In other words, marriage is a reality lived in the day-to-day affairs with joy and sorrow. Human (male and female) is responsible for the fall, hence the truncation of the divine institution of marriage.

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignment

1. Explain the role of myth and ritual in ancient Near East perspective of marriage?
2. What is so special about Israel’s account of marriage in Genesis that may be lacking in the religions of Israelites neighbours?
3. Explain briefly the idea of “bone” and “flesh” in the Genesis account.
4. How do you mean that children are not simply Yahweh’s gift to parents but also Yahweh’s inheritance?
5. Describe the symbolic meaning of the snake and woman in the account of the fall.
6. What is the effect of the fall on man-woman relationship as portrayed in the account of Genesis?

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1.0 Introduction

You must have observed in the immediate previous lecture how the Israelites operated in the same cultural context but radically revolutionise their understanding of marriage, sexuality and family. Our intention in this unit is to examine the role and contribution of Israelite prophets to theology of marriage by their furtherance of the theology of the covenant. They deployed marriage symbols to explain the covenant relationship and implications. Consequently, we shall stress the relationship between Yahweh’s covenantal relationship with Israel and human marriage. The argument is that each of the two concepts helps for the understanding of the other. The issue of divorce will also be seen as alien to the original intention of Yahweh. Above all, the continuity between creation and covenant theology will be stressed in this unit.

2.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand the relationship between human marriage and God’s covenant relationship to Israel.
- Differentiate covenantal love from interpersonal love, and see their respective implications for human marriage.
- Convince others and yourself why divorce in human marriage must at every level be discouraged.
- Observe the common marriage symbol running through the prophetic tradition
- See how the same God is acting in human history as God the Creator, God of the Covenant and God the Saviour

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Hosea

Hosea is a person who shares the pain and despair which Yahweh experiences because of the infidelity of Israel. To bring the gravity of the situation into focus Hosea uses the symbol of marriage. Yahweh is the husband and Israel his unfaithful wife. The vibrancy of this matrimonial relationship between God and Israel is evidenced in Hosea’s prophetic symbolic married life understood as “message-by-action.” There are two principal elements in the action:

i. Yahweh asks Hosea to marry Gomer, a temple "prostitute," that is, an Israelite girl initiated into the fertility rites of the Canaanite Baal worship. The emotions of Yahweh towards Israel are clearly brought out in the deal. a) Through this very act Yahweh demonstrates that he still loves Israel despite her faithlessness. b) You can equally see the action of Hosea as reflecting the hopeless religious situation in Israel. Thus, Israel has become so faithless that only initiated girls can be found in Israel. c) Hosea has three children from the marriage with Gomer: two sons and a daughter – "Jezreel - God-Sows, Lo-ruhamah - Not Pitied and "Lo-ammi - Not-My-People" (cf. Hos. 1:1-9). The naming of the children has its own prophetic message. The names, especially the last two, portray clearly that the curse of Yahweh is upon Israel as worshipers of Baal.

ii. After a while, Gomer abandoned Hosea, her husband and, goes on committing adultery, which then comes "legally" into the possession of another (2:4-17). Yet Yahweh orders Hosea to take back Gomer as a true wife (3:1). It tells you that in spite of Israel's faithlessness that Yahweh is ready to take back Israel, and make Israel, what he, Yahweh wants Israel to be.

According to Anderson and Freedman, (1980), the text of Hosea is partially poetic. Within the poetic world, there is a legal garb to highlight the infidelity of Israel. But it is very important for you to note the peculiarity of text. It tells you that Israel sinned against herself and her family. The wronged husband, the one deserted by his wife is asking the children to plead against their mother whose infidelity has brought about the unpleasant situation in the family. So, you can see the irony in the text:

i. The wife of Yahweh (Israel) is also the children of Yahweh (Israel), that is to say, mother and children have turned against Yahweh (Chundelikkatt, 2013; Wolff, 1974).

ii. You can also observe that the children are now victims of the infidelity of one of their parents.

iii. In spite of Gomer's infidelity, Hosea still keeps and regard her as her true loving wife. In other words, the infidelity of the partner, which should have resulted to legal divorce and nullification of the marriage (cf. Deut. 24:1ff; Lev. 21:7) did not take place. Hosea could not cut off the bond, not because he does not want but it transcends his power as human. Even when divorce is sought (2:2), the situation is rather reversed, and even Hosea has to love Gomer more and care more for her (2:18-25 & 3:1-5). Hosea *only* threatens to punish Gomer, but at the end of the day takes her back.

Thus Lawler (2001; 1985) observes Hosea's action towards Gomer reveals and makes real the action of Yahweh's unflinching love for Israel. Both the symbolism of the human marriage and of the divine covenant symbolically present the one body relationship that has been disfigured and placed in jeopardy. But Hosea's prophetic life and teaching is modelled on that of Yahweh's. Just as Hosea has pity on Gomer, so Yahweh "will have pity on Not Pitied," and will "say to Not My People 'you are my people,'" and they will say to him, "Thou art my God" (2:23). The 'marriage covenant' between Hosea and Gomer is consequently restored. It tells you that there is always the possibility and reality of the restoration of the covenant between Yahweh and Israel, between you and your God. Again, a sundering of the marital covenant relationship is not possible for Hosea because he recognizes that his God is not a God who can abide the dissolution of covenant, no matter what the provocation. He believes what the prophet Malachi would later proclaim: "I hate divorce, says Yahweh, the God of Israel ... so take heed to yourselves and do not be faithless" (Mal. 2:16).

It is also important you listen to Lawler (2001) once more in this lecture. According to him, the concept of love found in Hosea is far from being interpersonal affection for the opposite sex as found in our contemporary usage. It is covenant love (cf. Deut. 6:5) "defined in terms of loyalty, service and obedience" (Moran, 1963). So, the love for Gomer and for Israel is understood as loyalty, service and obedience. Hate is also a provocative concept. Thus: "In the circumstances addressed by Malachi, what God hates is the divorce of Jew and Jew; there is silence about the divorce of Jew and non-Jew." (Malina, 1981). Probably, this could have been inspirational to Paul's teaching 1 Cor. 7, and have exerted great influence on the Catholic strategy and some other Christian denominations toward divorce.

You can now see that the message of Hosea is very clear. Yahweh is always faithful and caring. It tells you that human marriage is not only the loving union of a man and a woman, it is a prophetic symbol, proclaiming and making real in representative image the steadfast love of Yahweh for Israel. Hosea's view will be seen reoccurring in the message of the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Ultimately, it yields the view of Christian marriage that we find in the New Testament.

Self-assessment exercise

1. Does the discussion say anything about the indissolubility of marriage bond?
2. What challenge does God's covenant relationship in Hosea pose to contemporary marriage?
3. What can you make out from "the silence about the divorce of Jew and non-Jew" in the Book of Malachi?

3.2 Jeremiah

You may find out that the two main symbols in the book of *Jeremiah* that describe Yahweh's relationship with Israel are the figure of father-son (3:6-10, 19 and 22) and the husband-wife. But our principal interest in this lecture will be on the latter – the imagery of the character of spousal love. Here Jeremiah forcefully portrays Israel's infidelity (unchastity and adultery) to Yahweh which is manifested in two major ways:

i) Worshipping the Baal and other foreign gods. The worship is accompanied by all kinds of sexual debauchery in connection with the cult of the fertility gods. (Jer. 2:20 and 3; cf. Hos. 1-4; 4:13-14; 9:1) and its ugly consequence of children's sacrifice (Jer. 2:34). Woman who has taken part in a religious fertility rite, conceives her first child by Baal, consecrates and sacrifices this child to Baal.

ii) Judah's attempts to secure the political support of Egypt and Assyria (Jer. 2:18), which constitutes lack of trust in Yahweh.

The worry of Jeremiah is that Judah has refused to learn from the experience of her sister Israel (the Northern Kingdom) to whom Yahweh has given a bill of divorce and legally repudiated her (Jer. 3:7-8). Although Jeremiah appeals to the Law as a threat to Judah ((Jer. 3:1; cf. Deut. 24:1-4). But in the tradition of Hosea, Jeremiah's prophecy ultimately results in an affirmation of Yahweh's eternal love (Jer. 31:1) making reference to the desert experience (v.2). The infidelity of the people is ultimately to change into lasting fidelity because of Yahweh's (3:20) graciousness, faithfulness and mercy (33:6ff).

You have seen that the image of marriage has become thoroughly established in the case of Jeremiah, and that Jeremiah borrows from Hosea's human existential marriage experience, not necessarily for the sake of marriage but to express in a more profound manner human experience of Yahweh's activity within the covenant. However, the reality, which is symbolically portrayed in marriage, transcends Israel's experience.

Self-assessment exercise

1. Identify the two major ways the Israelites demonstrate their infidelity to Yahweh.
2. What is the main worry of Jeremiah about Judah?

3.3 Ezekiel

The marriage image of Hosea and Jeremiah is given a striking characteristic in the Book of Ezekiel (cf. chapters 16 and 23). Chapter 16 deals with Jerusalem's marriage with Yahweh and her adultery. The image of infidelity, of the "harlot" and the "adulteress" is once again prominent. Aiming publicly to expose Jerusalem's historical unfaithfulness, Schillebeeckx (1965) argues that Ezekiel uses the device of a matrimonial lawsuit and sets the scene at the gates of the city. Israel's faithfulness in the wilderness is also contrasted with her unfaithfulness in the Promised Land. Ezekiel points here that the City of Jerusalem, which has its first beginnings in the pagan land of Canaan (Ezek. 15), is an inherited burden of Yahweh's chosen city (cf. Chundelikkatt, 2013).

In Yahweh's two initial encounters with Israel, there is underlying state of helplessness on the side of Israel, and loving care on the part of Yahweh. Thus, Yahweh finds Israel in a hopeless state, then takes pity on her (Jer. 16:4-5), marries her (Jer. 16:6-7) and bestows marriage gifts upon her (Jer. 16:8-14). The marriage covenant is confirmed by an oath (Jer. 16:8) and fully consummated through the birth of sons and daughters (Jer. 16:20). In other words, there is a perfect marriage, legally contracted and made in love, between Yahweh and Israel, a covenant relationship which would permit no infidelity and which is indissoluble. Divorce is in this case an outrage against the covenant of God; yet Israel is guilty of being unfaithful and giving Yahweh's marriage gifts and ornaments to those who sin with her rather than the usual practice of collecting money from them. Ezekiel's account of this love is blunt and straightforward, and at the same time constitutes an eschatological perspective of the covenant of grace.

Chapter 23 deals with Yahweh's marriage with two sisters, Oholah and Oholibah, that is, with the Northern Kingdom, which had its own forms of worship ("Oholah" = "she who has her own tent"), and with Judah, the Southern Kingdom with its legitimate temple of Yahweh ("Oholiaba" = "my tent is in her"). Yahweh's marriage with two wives should cause you no surprise here. You may not see it as a legitimisation of polygamy. The point we are making here is that capital cities are often symbolised as female (16; 23). This is an influence from ancient Near Eastern mythology, which understands the capital city as the patron city of the deity (cf. Darr, 2002). But in the context under consideration the capital cities Jerusalem and Samaria are repeatedly depicted as women, loose, wanton, brazen, and shocking in their infidelity (cf. Weems, 2002). It calls to mind the sin of adultery, the abandonment of faith in Yahweh and the reliance on foreign political powers (Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon) for help (Schillebeeckx, 1965; Chundelikkatt, 2013). In this way, Judah destroys the spousal love Yahweh has for her.

Chundelikkatt (2013) equally reminds us that a marriage with one wife and cohabiting with a concubine is admissible at the historical time of the writing. It is also possible that a Canaanite image of a marriage between a god and two women is contained in the prophetic narrative. He then argues that it is an indication that marriage as a revelation of the divine covenant, is thoroughly in accordance with marriage as evidenced in everyday life.

However, Weems (1995) reminds us that can it enable us to see more clearly how we hurt each other. It is about our shame, hurting and being hurt; it is about what it means to live together as women and men. But at the same time, you should not lose sight of the historical situation, which is probably in the mind of chapter 23 and which refers to the time of Manasseh when child sacrifice is practised under the influence of Assyria and in connection with the initiation rite (cf. Ezek. 16:20-21). But more important is Ezekiel's application of the marriage-image to the covenant of grace, to the unreserved trust and a complete faith in Yahweh, which runs along the tradition of Hosea (Schillebeeckx, 1965). You find that a moral conclusion in the shape of the sentence passed on Judah after a matrimonial admonition to all men and women in their relationships (Chundelikkatt, 2013).

Self-assessment exercise

1. Describe the two major encounters of Yahweh with Israel, which show the hopeless state of Israel and the loving care of Yahweh.
2. What are the double sins of Israel with her secret lovers against Yahweh?

3.4 Isaiah

Isaiah's prophetic marriage image (chap. 40-55) assures us of the solemn return of the abandoned partner to Yahweh's house in the prophetic traditions of Hosea, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. You will also remember that Jeremiah has earlier talked about a bill of divorce from Yahweh (Jer. 3:1, 7-8), also insists that the divorce is everything but permanent. Surprisingly, Isaiah's posture (unlike Jeremiah and Ezekiel's) is that Zion in exile never receives a bill of divorce (50:1), hence the separation is not permanent. This makes it possible in Isa. 54 for the

abandoned bride to be taken back into her husband's house for the permanent marriage which Yahweh contracts with his people. The marriage is then celebrated in joyful song.

It suffices for you to note here some of the textual problems associated with Isaiah's saying. The ambiguity stems from the vocalisation of the Hebrew word used to describe the marital relationship. The discussion now among bible scholars is whether this marriage is entirely new or a continuation of the old. Isaiah's message to Israel, however, is that in spite of her shameful situation after abandoning Yahweh her husband (54:4), the same Yahweh is the Creator and the only God of the absolutely new beginning, the God who makes all things new, hence can effect a complete renewal of the marriage, no matter how disrupted it is. "The Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer" (54:5). So, the new marriage is the continuation of the covenant concluded once and for all, and also an absolutely new beginning. It is the surprising consequence of God's restoration of this marriage by creation that attracts our admiration (cf. 54:1-3).

In the context of marriage, chapter 54 of the Book of Isaiah is most significant not only by preserving the already familiar prophetic idea. It also emphasises the "eschatological" dimensions of marriage. It rejects despair over even the most disrupted and disjointed circumstances and rekindles hope with solid foundation that he who holds the world together is able to re-join a broken marriage? It calls for unconditional trust in Yahweh, in the absolute creative power of God, capable of renewing all things, in the service of salvation, in the service of the marriage relationship between Yahweh and Israel (Schillebeekx, 1965).

Besides chapter 54, the marriage metaphor is also found in many other passages in Isaiah (49:14-20; 50:1; 62:1-5). They combined to symbolise the covenantal love between Yahweh and Israel, and Yahweh's eternal redemptive act. Isaiah is also conscious of the fact that mixed marriage violates the covenant, and that it is only by keeping faith in the covenant that Israel will receive God's blessing. In short, the covenant between Yahweh and Israel is like the covenant between husband and wife—a covenant so strong that it cannot ever be broken by any form of infidelity because Yahweh's redemptive act surpasses all.

Self-assessment exercise

What is the specific contribution of Isaiah in the understanding of marriage?

What is ambiguity associated with Isaiah's description of the "new" marriage?

How can mixed marriage in Isaiah be a violation of the covenant?

3.5 The prophets, marriage and creation

Our argument has been that the prophets are not primarily theologians of marriage, but through their teachings we have come understand that marriage can also be experienced from the vantage-point of faith in God's covenant of grace with Israel. Also, faith in creation is derived from the faith in God's covenant of grace with human. How do we mean? Faith in creation and its goodness, which is peculiar to Israelite belief, breaks through forcibly at a definite moment in Israel's existence, and has no place in the message of the earlier prophets including Hosea (Schillebeekx, 1965). It is only through Israel's experience of the saving act of God that Israel's awareness of herself as a creation of Yahweh unfolds itself; that is to say that the belief in creation, which is so characteristic of the Old Testament, is a product of accumulated experience of the salvific act of Yahweh. This idea breaks through almost violently in Deutero-Isaiah and remains the most significant contribution of Isaiah.

Isaiah technically applies the term *bara'* (creation) exclusively for Yahweh's activity, either in his creation of the world or in his saving actions. God's saving activity itself becomes a creation, and creation gained its deepest dimensions of faith when seen in the perspective of human experience of God's powerful saving activity. The God of the covenant is then seen as the Creator, and Israel is to confess her faith in the formula: "God of Israel, the Creator." This formula points to the fact that God's activity made everything new. In other words, all the actions of God, whether they are viewed from creation or saving perspective it is the same covenantal love of God in operation.

Therefore, the covenant of love is the theme of all God's saving activity and the deepest meaning of the creation. You can now see that the prophets' use of the image of marriage as a means of expressing the Covenant of God in human terms is an affirmation of the goodness of creation including marriage. So, the community of marriage is a gift of creation from the God of the covenant. Schillebeeckx (1965) considers this as a "mystery," which by creation is implicit even in the so-called "natural" marriage, with the result that among all people, marriage appears to have a *religious* significance. In other words, the gift of marriage is not simply a good gift of creation, but also a personal gift of salvation from God.

The transgression in the *garden* automatically distorts the gift of marriage. It gives rise to misunderstanding, misinterpretation and misrepresentation of marriage, whose attendant consequences are found in various forms of abuse and inhumanity including subjugation, bestial- and same-sex, infidelity, and divorce. You can now see that it is only by taking marriage back to creation, which Isaiah inspirationally does, can we understand in concrete terms the covenant loving care of Yahweh, and at the same time appreciate the true value of marriage as God has intended it. So, it is clear that the saving significance of marriage is a reference to the Yahweh, the sovereign and free God, and at the same time that this significance, seen within marriage itself, refers to something transcending marriage, that is, the salvation of creation.

Self-assessment exercise

1. How does faith in God's covenant of grace lead to faith in creation?
2. What is the relationship between marriage and creation?
3. What do you mean that marriage is a mystery?

4.0 Conclusion

The use of marriage as an image of the community life of Israel with Yahweh is rich in theological content. It is, however, important to remember that this is only one of many images used in the Old Testament to express the same relationship between God and humanity. Among these are the father-son relationship, the king-subject relationship (the image of the kingdom of God), and the lord-servant and/or master-slave relationship (Moran, 1963). But it is in marriage that the mutual love between God and his people comes very close. It is about communion and dialogue between two partners, though of unequal status. It expresses the dynamic and indeed dramatic course of human relationship with God, and of God's sovereign and free saving activity with human. With the image of marriage, the covenant love of Yahweh with Israel, which remains ever new and renewal, is illuminated. The symbol which expresses the concrete historical truth of Israel with a beginning, a middle, and, in the future, an end, leaves us with the choice of blessing and salvation or disaster. It challenges the modern and contemporary perception of marriage, and reminds us all that marriage business is beyond a man-woman relationship. It is a communion, in which Yahweh leads, modulates and directs. It is a sacrament, a symbol of human salvation.

5.0 Summary

From the lectures you have seen that:

- i. How Hosea demonstrated through his prophetic actions that Yahweh the God of Israel is a faithful and caring God. He is God who keeps his covenant irrespective of the shortcomings of his people Israel. Through this Hosea among other things, pressed on the unconditional love of God for Israel, and thus made divorce in human marriage inconceivable. This is not because it could not be thought of, but the covenant love in marriage delists divorce from marriage vocabulary.
- ii. That human marriage symbol presents the one body relationship that has been disfigured and placed in jeopardy through infidelity. But Hosea informs you as well that human marriage is not only the loving union of a man and a woman, it is a prophetic symbol,

proclaiming and making real in representative image the steadfast love of Yahweh for Israel. It is a covenantal love.

iii. Jeremiah followed the Hosean tradition and identified two areas that Israel has sinned against her God. Yet he painfully assured Israel that God will still remember his covenant, hence will not abandon Israel.

iv. Ezekiel joined the prophetic tradition to stress the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel, which for him is indissoluble. It cannot permit divorce of any kind because of God's faithfulness, even when it is clear that Israel is guilty of infidelity. Ezekiel further perceives the relationship in terms of eschatological perspective of the covenant of grace.

v. Isaiah informs us that Zion in exile never receives a bill of divorce (50:1), hence the hope for possible reuniting with her spouse Yahweh is real. It is to the credit of Isaiah to bring us to the insight of God as *the ONE*, who is ever there to renew his relationship with Israel irrespective of Israel's infidelity.

vi. The God of the covenant is then seen as the Creator, and Israel is to confess her faith in the formula: "God of Israel, the Creator. It is Isaiah who raises the consciousness. He invites us to take marriage back to creation in order to appreciate what Yahweh intends marriage to be. It is a sacrament of creation.

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignment

1. How do you mean that marriage is a covenant of love? What are the possible implications of the statement?
2. Having read Hosea, can you think of any situation that may support divorce in human marriage irrespective of the prophetic actions of Hosea?
3. Do you believe that Yahweh hates divorce? Then on what basis can we justify divorce?
4. What are the two major ways in Jeremiah that Israel's infidelity is portrayed?
5. How do you explain Ezekiel's idea that the City of Jerusalem is an inherited burden to Israel?
6. What are the two main symbols in the book of *Jeremiah* that describe Yahweh's relationship with Israel?
7. Describe the worry of Jeremiah over Judah's behaviour? Do you think that Isaiah will agree with Jeremiah that Yahweh has given a bill of divorce to Israel?
8. Do you think that Isaiah's understanding of mixed marriage in the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel can be of any positive help in our appreciation of marriage in the contemporary setting?
9. Do you agree with the statement that the prophets of ancient Israel are not primarily theologians of marriage?
10. Evaluate the statement that the Creator God is the same God of the Covenant love as proclaimed by the prophets.

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UNIT 4: Marriage in the Wisdom Literature

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1.0 Introduction

In the last unit, the use of marriage symbol in the prophetic literature and its rich theological content were considered. We argued that there is a connect between the Creator God and the God of the covenant, which also made it possible for the prophet Isaiah to take marriage back to creation in order to appreciate what Yahweh intends marriage to be. The natural conclusion is to classify marriage as a sacrament, a symbol of human salvation.

We shall continue with marriage symbol in this unit. Here we shall talk about the use of marriage symbol in the sapiential tradition. Marriage, including human erotic love and sexuality within the context of marriage, is presented as a gift from God and a sign of God's favour. The literature will condemn adultery as folly, and encourage the wise person to seek for wisdom, which is closely linked with marriage. Wisdom literature will be more positive to its disposition to women compared to the negative characterisation of women as found in the prophetic literature. More surprising will be a value-reversal we shall be meeting, that now

praises virginity, eunuch, bareness, and childlessness contrary to earlier vision of large family.

2.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Identify wisdom literature and the value of marriage metaphor in the sapiential tradition
- Discuss the similarity and difference between the use symbol of marriage in the wisdom literature and in the prophetic literature
- Know why marriage is extol as wisdom and adultery condemned as folly
- Appreciate some positive aspects of womanhood in the wisdom tradition.
- See the injury and sinful nature of adultery and infidelity to the institution of marriage.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Proverbs

You will discover in the book of Proverb that marriage is conceived as a gift from God. It is *something* good and desirable for a young man (5:16-19). It is associated with wisdom, but at the same time contrasted to adultery. Metaphorically woman/wife/bride is projected as the common denominator that defines marriage or adultery, wisdom or folly (Winston, 1979). Thus, the choice for marriage is wisdom, and adultery is folly. In this case, both wisdom and wife are gifts from God, and to love them faithfully puts one in touch with God (18:22 also 8:35; 19:14; 31:10-31).

Again, marriage is seen as a relationship of commitment within which sexual freedom and delight are to be found (5:15-19). Here, fidelity and sexual exclusivity are presented as among the higher values to be cherished for human well-being in marriage, family, and society (cf. Exod 20:14) (Leeuwen, 2002). But the exceptional position given to fidelity and sexual love stems from Israel's commitment to marriage and family as created realities (Gen 2:24), to which every young male should responsibly aspire, and abide with (cf. Osiek, 2002). The writer also expresses some legitimate concern with the damage that male promiscuity can cause to a family, society, and the self. For this reason, young males are persuaded not to yield to their promiscuous sexual impulses (Leeuwen, 2002) that would lure them into having affairs with woman strangers, defined as any woman other than one's own wife.

In the thinking of Proverbs, the woman "stranger" herself embodies the failure of fidelity, for she "forsakes the partner of her youth" — that is, her husband (2:17; cf. 4:17). She ignores her "sacred covenant" (lit., "the covenant of her God"). Hugenberger (1994) argues here that the reference to "covenant" (2:17) is unique in the Book of Proverbs with the closest verbal and conceptual parallel in Mal 2:14-16. You will now see Leeuwen (2002) insisting that there is primarily faithfulness in marriage, and above all with God appearing as witness to the "covenant" between the marriage partners (cf. Gen 2:24). In other passages, Israel (metaphorically a bride) is bound by a marriage covenant to Yahweh (cf. Jer. 3:4; Ezek. 16:8; Hos. 2:18-20; Mark 10:2-9; Eph. 5:21-33). However, marriage embodies not only wisdom (cf. 8:35; 12:4; 18:22; 31:10-31). It is sometimes chaos and confusion (21:9, 19; 25:24; 27:15).

Literally, adultery and marriage are set in parallel as wrong and right modes of sexual love (interhuman relationship), and metaphorically, as the duty and service of human to Yahweh (human-divine relationship). The love for one's wife, the love for Yahweh and being committed to the Laws of Yahweh are counted as wisdom, and the contrast is folly, that is, the desire for another woman (2:16-19), the worship of Baal or lack of commitment to the things of Yahweh.

It is also important for you to note that there is some similarity and difference between Proverbs and the Prophets. The prophets called on sinful men and women to reflect on their relation to God by using the shocking symbol of Israel as God's unfaithful wife (cf. Hosea 1–3; Jeremiah 3). The moral ambiguity of life, and the need for fidelity in human-divine and in inter-human relationship, above all in marriage covenant are the emphases. But Proverbs comes from another perspective. In its realism, it notes that humans can be unfaithful, they can choose wisdom or folly, Yahweh or Baal, and thus summons all humans to love wisdom and eschew folly. You may note here too that as wisdom relates to humankind as woman to man, so also Yahweh relates to Israel as husband to wife. It is therefore a metaphoric representation of a reality whose depths remain mysterious.

Nevertheless, the issue in Proverbs is not directly that of breaking a marriage covenant with the Lord as found in the Prophets. In contrast, the portrayal of faithful and unfaithful marriage has as its analogue, not Israel's relation to Yahweh or to a foreign god, but human relationship with the female – wisdom or folly. In its symbolic context, all humans, male and female alike, are portrayed in the image of young males attracted to females (Leeuwen, 2002). You will also see that the problem of literal exogamy with “foreign women” (as in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah) and with the foreignness of their religions (as in the days of the Monarchy, esp. Solomon) is not the central concern of Proverbs. Rather the woman of Proverb is a foreigner/stranger/alien because she ignores the covenant of “her God” (i.e., Yahweh) by being unfaithful in literal human marriage (Leeuwen, 2002; also, Blenkinsopp, 1991).

Self-assessment exercise

1. How does Proverbs conceive marriage in relation to understanding human relationship with God?
2. How do you explain the exceptional attention given to fidelity and sexual love in Proverbs?
3. What do you understand by woman stranger in the Book of Proverbs?

3.2 Ecclesiastes

We may not spend much time with Ecclesiastes (Qohelet or Koheleth) because of its lack of interest in marriage, and therefore, could not see it as adequate metaphor to represent human relationship with Yahweh. One appreciates the difficulty of the author, who is so much overwhelmed by his theology of vanity. The author expresses disdain over one's inability to discover a single trustworthy woman, although he does not spare the male folk (Eccl 7:23-29; cf. Crenshaw, 2002).

However, the author still comes to a zenith of its very restrained praise of women in 9:9. Here Qohelet links marriage with love. As Towner (2002) observes, the point is not the exact arrangement within which a man and a woman find happiness in each other. The importance of marriage is rather the ability to love amid the fleeting absurdity of life. This is because the destiny that confronts all people is Sheol (9:10).

Self-assessment exercise

What could be the possible reason for Ecclesiastes to show less interest in applying the marriage metaphor in his writing?

3.3 Song of Songs

You will see that the Song of Songs, known also as Song of Solomon or Canticle, represents a remarkable departure from much religious literature. The book launches the unsuspecting reader straight into the clutches of a *woman's* sexual fantasies. It forces the reader to see her/himself, the world, and God in an unfamiliar way, viz. through a woman's libidinous cravings. As Weems (2002) puts it: Whatever ambivalences one may have about hearing from God or discovering the sacred through the messy mysteries of the female body are

forced to the surface. By beckoning the reader into the private world of female imagination and longing, the poet gambles on her audience's curiosity about sex and romance and fascination with tales of obstructed love winning out over whatever squeamishness the readers may have about associating women's bodies with divine revelations. Hence, the meaning of the opening verses of Song of Songs lies not only in what they tell us about God, but also in what they tell us about ourselves.

The Song is understood and interpreted in various forms. The major approaches adopted in the interpretation of the book view it as: (i) a dramatization of an ancient fertility rite in which the deity and humans are ceremonially united in sacred marriage (Meek, 1922-23); (ii) a single love poem structured around repetitive words, phrases and motif (Cheryl Exum, 1973); (iii) a cycle of marriage songs (Goulder, 1986); and (iv) an allegory idealizing, from Jewish point of view, God's love for Israel, and from the Christian perspective, Christ's love for the church or for the individual's soul (Joüon, 1909). Our position here, however, subscribes for the last three with varied emphasis at different sections of the book. You will observe that the book stands out in bold relief against the background of Israel's faith in Yahweh. Here marriage and sexuality are taken outside the purely religious sphere. The surprise, therefore, is that the secularisation and desecralisation of marriage and sexuality in the book occurs in an environment permeated with a religious mythical view that amounts almost to a deification of sexuality. So, in the view of the author(s) of the book, marriage, erotic love and sexuality are purely human reality.

It important for you to note theologically the import of the Song that demonstrates Israel's faith in a new God, who break with the fundamentals of the myths of the religious environments of Israel's neighbours, thus the deification of sexuality. Eroticism is then completely removed from the sphere of the religion and all forms of myth. It is rather conceived in the light of Israel's belief in Yahweh. In other words, ancient Israel would prefer to experience sex and sexuality in a spiritualised, human and profane environment.

Negatively, the presentation of sexuality in the book is a frank protest against the mythical and religious rites of Canaan's worship of Baal, and against the religious sexuality which pervades the whole of the ancient Near East. Positively, its presentation of sexuality and eroticism is an affirmation of the creaturely goodness of the relationship between man and woman – a relationship which ends in a bridal feast. As Weems (2002) puts it: The relationships in the book are private (i.e., a man and a woman), the conversation is between intimates (e.g., "darling," "beloved," "friend"), and the language hints of kinship bonds (e.g., mother, daughter, sister, brother), and far removed from the normal palace intrigue, temple politics, prophetic conflict, international doom, natural disasters. This would be all the more compelling if Song 7:11 are an allusion to the most ancient account of the creation (Gen 3:16) as many exegetes claim (cf. Weems, 2002).

The absence of the name of Yahweh and any of Israel's sacred religious traditions (covenant and God's saving acts) in the Song is undoubtedly dictated by motives of awe of a reluctance to associate Yahweh with any religious sexual myth. But this awe is overcome in Genesis by idealising creation as good and desirable. That is to say that the lovers in the Song of Songs exchange their love poems against the backdrop of a pastoral, utopian garden setting where images of animals, hillsides, and exotic flowers dominate, thus allusions that suggest the intimations of the Garden of Eden story (Genesis 2), with its focus on the first human couple and their major dealings with each other.

We once more stress that the assumption made in the-Song demonstrates the unerring feeling that belief in Yahweh is incompatible with any deification of human sexuality. It describes the creaturely splendour of human love and the refreshing playfulness which testifies to this gift, and places it all in the natural setting of a beautiful countryside. Great value is to be placed upon the virgin state of the beloved (Songs 4:12; 8:8-10), and true love, which is expressed as unshakable fidelity (Songs 8:6-7): "for love is strong as death." (Wenms, 2002). There is also an emphasis on sexual exclusivity. "My beloved is mine and I am his" (2:16;

6:3; 6:9; 7:10; 8:12), by the imagery of “a garden locked, a fountain sealed” (4:12), and by the private vineyard (8:12). (Leeuwen, 2002).

In another note, the beauty of the chief character of the Song is compared to two capital cities of Tirzah and Jerusalem, thus reminding us of Ezek. 16 and 23. Suffices it to let you know at this point that the comparison is the influence of ancient Near Eastern mythology, which understands capital city as the patron city of the deity. But the dramatic departure of the book from negative characterisation of women as found in the Prophets makes it to stand out. It is only in the book (6:4) that the tenor (the subject) and the vehicle (the figurative language) are reversed. Usually in the OT the capital city (tenor) is compared to a woman (vehicle). But in Song 6:4, the woman (tenor) is compared to a capital city (vehicle) (cf. Leeuwen, 2002). Weems (2002) equally observes that the Song is the only biblical book in which a female voice predominates and expresses itself without hindrance. The voice is unmediated female voice and stands exceptional in all of Scripture. It is about the experiences, thoughts, imagination, emotions, and words of the anonymous black-skinned woman. Moreover, the protagonist is not merely verbal; unlike many of the women in the Bible, she is assertive, uninhibited, and unabashed about her sexual desires. She is natural, true to herself, and speaks in action of equality and freedom of expression in female-male relationship (2:16; also Prov. 31:10-31). This anticipates Paul’s instruction to the Church of Corinth that “the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does” (1 Cor. 7:4; cf. Eph. 5:21). It simply re-echoes in most fundamental way the creation of male and female in God’s image grounds the dignity of both (Gen 1:26-28). In this way, the Song forms a healthy counterpart to the other Old Testament tendency to see the function of marriage almost exclusively as the perpetuation of the clan and the nation. It extols not fertility (this may also be a reaction against the fertility rites), but human love. It thus forms an idyllic commentary, taken from life, on what the oldest creation account in Genesis, which must have originated more or less at the same period, has to say concerning the relationship (Schillebeeckx 1965). The Song reminds us of how crazy, how innocent, how ardent is the passion that brings human beings together. It also reminds us how preposterous, how unthinkable, how supernatural is the actual union that takes place, often years after the ceremony is over, when passion fades and true love has a chance to emerge.

Self-assessment exercise

1. What is the theological import of the Songs of Solomon for marriage and sexuality?
2. What are the two main issues that single the Songs among the Old Testament books?

3.4 Sirach

The author of Ben Sira inherits a mixed biblical tradition with respect to women, which is so much coloured by Hellenistic views. But for the purpose of our course, we shall concentrate more on the examination the positive aspect of womanhood as expressed in the book. The author is conscious of the positive side of a woman and extols it. This is profusely demonstrated by Schillebeeckx (1965). Thus a wife is regarded as a treasure, the priceless value; “a wife’s charm delights her husband” (Sir. 26:13) and “a woman’s beauty gladdens the countenance, and surpasses every human desire” (Sir. 36:22). “He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favour from Yahweh” It also delights the sage to see “a wife and husband who live in harmony” (Sir. 25:1). But this is a special blessing accorded only to the man who fears God: “Happy is the husband of a good wife ... A good wife is a great blessing; she will be granted among the blessings of the man who fears Yahweh” (Sir 26:1, 3). “He who acquires a wife gets his best possession, a helper fit for him and a pillar of support” (Sir. 36:24), for “where there is no wife, a man will wander about and sigh” (Sir. 36:25), as helpless and insecure as if he had no home. A happy marriage is therefore a blessing from God (Sir 26:3, 14). Although his erotic appreciation for a woman’s physical beauty seems boundless, issuing in effusive language based on the holy artifacts in the Temple (Sir 26:17-18. Cf. Crenshaw, 2002) and the delight of her husband, Sirach is very

careful not to extend physical beauty in isolation. The believer may enjoy this beauty only in faithful love and virtue (Sir. 26:15-16). The emphasis is always on the “wise,” the “prudent” woman (Sir. 7:19; 25:8). Praise of the “beautiful woman” is permissible only within marriage.”

You may notice that Sirach at some point must have reacted negatively to women. It does not offer a legitimate ground to accuse the author or biblical authors of portraying women in *absolute* negative light (cf. (Crenshaw, 1978:65-98; cf. Carlston, 1980; Skehan, & Di Lella, 1987; Lefkowitz, & Fant, 1982). However, they might have reacted negatively to the moral threat of the notorious foreign woman of Proverbs (Newsom, 1989; Blenkinsopp, 1991). The negative statements, argues Schillebeeckx (1965) can be counted as a result of man’s high expectations from women. You already discovered that wisdom and folly are personified as a woman. The ideal wife is praised, largely from the point of view of the husband whom she benefits. Again, there are numerous instances of mutual love between husband and wife, and good wives seen as gifts of and from God, and the unknown author of 1 Esdr 3:1–4:41 praises woman as the strongest thing on earth, exceeded only by truth and its Author (Crenshaw, 1981; Crenshaw, 1995). The erotic passion expressed in Song of Songs testifies to a society that values the power stronger than death that draws men and women to each other (Crenshaw, 2002).

Ben Sirach clearly demonstrates his aversion to infidelity and adultery (Sir. 23:18-27), and warns that man’s eyes must be turned away from the beautiful woman who is not his wife, for “many have been misled by a woman’s beauty” (Sir. 9:8; cf. Sir. 9:3-9). One should neither allow oneself to be ensnared by a woman’s beauty, nor desire a woman for her beauty (Sir. 25:28). The author adopts a common form in wisdom literature – the numerical proverb – to describe those who give themselves over to sexual sins of various kinds (cf. 25:1-2, 7-11; 26:5-6, 28; 50:25-26. See also Prov. 6:16-19; 30:15b-16, 18-19, 21-23, 29-31; Job 5:19-22; 13:20-22; 33:14-15; Amos 1:3–2:16). Like the book of Amos, Sirach does not list the full quota of sins (three here, four in Amos) but pauses to explore a single offense, carnal lust.

According to Ben Sirach, the sin of adultery consists of breaking the divine legislation, betraying a marital relationship, and bringing children into the world where they will not be wanted (cf. *Qiddushin* 78b). This threefold offence could probably be interpreted as an arrangement to emphasize a descending order of gravity. But Crenshaw (2002) reminds us that marriage infidelity and sexual misplacement of any kind impair one’s relationship with God, and weakens characters and undermines personal integrity. They end in depersonalisation and thingfying of the humans as objects of pleasure.

In addition, Sirach makes a special contribution to the wisdom tradition by highlighting the universal concern of family life and of parents’ worries for their daughters (Sir. 62:9f). Here the subject of the daughters is treated as a separate category (Bohmbach, 1996).

Self-assessment exercise

1. Do you agree with the claim that the author of Sirach has high regard for women? Give some scriptural references to support your position.
2. What are the possible reasons that could have led Sirach to react at some point negatively to women?
3. Discuss some of the contribution Sirach in the context of marriage and family.

3.5 Wisdom

The author of the Book of Wisdom presents positively the connection between human and wisdom in the light of marriage symbol. But the marriage image is not the same as in the prophets for the covenant of grace. It is for the love of wisdom. Thus, the general notion is that God loves the person who lives with wisdom. Hence Solomon from his youth seeks wisdom as his spouse, desires to take her as a bride, and become infatuated in her beauty (Wis. 8:1, 9, 16). For the author, to accept wisdom into one’s life is like engaging oneself in marriage. They are completely faithful to each other, and their mutual love reaches a completion that goes beyond themselves (Kolarcik, 2002). The commitment to live with

wisdom will assure human (Solomon) good counsel and encouragement in the trials of life. It is good for us to note here that the image of “living with wisdom” conjures up the parallel that the relationship between the just and wisdom is comparable to that of husband and wife (cf. Isa 62:5).

The underlying metaphor of courtship and marriage is unmistakable seen in the book as an influence of a long tradition. According to Winston (1979), the literary device of treating wisdom or other abstract values as a lover and wife who is to be sought and cherished is common in both the Israelite and the Greek traditions. The relationship is a mystical marriage between humans (represented by Solomon) and Wisdom. It highlights the personal engagement involved in choosing and appropriating values through the metaphor of human love. Just as courtship and marriage fully engage the entire spectrum of our intellectual and affective concerns, so too does the pursuit of God’s wisdom demand the engagement of the entire person (Kolarcik, 2002). For Teresa of Avila, it is the final stage in one’s relationship with God in terms of a spiritual marriage. It is the complete fusion of the soul with God through the image of a spiritual marriage. In short, human friendship, love, and commitment provide images through which we can grasp both the challenge of wisdom and its gifts of rest, completion, and intimacy

Another interesting contribution of the book is the characterisation of large family not as something *of* intrinsic value in itself but as a value within the context of the moral and religious life. It is clear, too, that it is a polemic against the prosperity of the "ungodly Egyptians" which gives the first impetus to this new idea. Along the line of argument of Wisdom, the pagans should not glory in prosperous and large family because it is not an indication of Yahweh’s blessing (Wis. 3:10-4:6). According to Schillebeeckx (1965), the idea is new. It emerges in post-exilic Israel. Thus "Blessed is the barren woman who is undefiled ... [and] the eunuch whose hands have done no lawless deed" (Wis. 3:13f.), and large number of children is, in itself, no blessing; it is better to have no children at all, if this childless state goes together with virtue (Wis. I).

Self-assessment exercise

1. What is the bond between human and wisdom?
2. What do you understand by mythical marriage?
3. Why does the Book of Wisdom praise barrenness, eunuch and childlessness?

4.0 Conclusion

You can now see that the sapiential tradition, compared to the prophetic literature, has a wider horizon that portrays the relationship between God and humans through the image of a marriage. Unlike prophets who extensively used courtship and marriage to portray the painful consequences of unfaithfulness as well as the renewal of the relationship in a more profound manner (cf. Hos. 2:1-23), sapiential tradition personified wisdom in womanhood, and encourages humans to pursue wisdom (cf. Kolarcik, 2002). The marriage metaphor in the literature heightens the beauty of the exchange of love in the covenant and sharpens the pain of loss due to unfaithfulness. Wisdom is the one who brings complete peace, rest and joy both in public life and private life.

However, we are once more reminded that life and nature are matter of created structures and limits (8:29), and also that the ultimate “loves” for one “woman” or another. When love is misplaced, when one loses direction, when boundaries are violated, when creation’s goods are misappropriated, then the good becomes harmful and damage is done. Consequently, wisdom implies love within limits, freedom within form, and life within law (Cohn, 1981).

We may therefore conclude that the Wisdom literature testifies to the Israelites and to the Jewish faith about the goodness of marriage based on a firm foundation of religion and morals. While many may have different opinions on the genre of the Song of Songs, it stands as a living echo of a positive and healthy concept of married love. It tells us how crazy, how innocent, how ardent the passion that brings human beings together is. It reminds us how

preposterous, how unthinkable, how supernatural is the actual union that takes place, when wedding ends and marriage begins, when the ceremony is over and true life takes over, when passion fades and true love has a chance to emerge.

5.0 Summary

You must have seen how marriage symbol is presented in the sapiential tradition, and some of the areas of emphasis such as:

i. Marriage is a gift from God and a sign of God's favour. It is a source of joy, happiness and fulfilment, which must be appreciated, hence desirable for young person. And this must be guided by faithful love and virtue.

ii. Adultery is folly; hence any wise person should endeavour to avoid anything that could bring one closer to it. Among the evils of adultery are (i) breaking the divine legislation, (ii) betraying a marital relationship, and (iii) bringing children into the world where they will not be wanted

iii. The marriage symbol used in the wisdom literature does not only tell us about God, but also about ourselves. It presents to us positively the connection between human and wisdom in the light of marriage symbol. It differentiates itself from the prophets, for the interest is not primarily on covenant of grace but love of wisdom. It highlights the personal engagement involved in choosing and appropriating values through the metaphor of human love.

iv. Human erotic love and sexuality is also captured in our discussion. It tells us among other things that love is life. While it is positively an affirmation of the creaturely goodness of the relationship between man and woman, it is also a frank protest against the mythical and religious rites of Canaan's worship of Baal, and against the religious sexuality which pervades the whole of the ancient Near East. It reminds us that belief in Yahweh is incompatible with any deification of human sexuality. It further emphasises the sexual exclusivity as an integral aspect of marriage, which is often translated not necessarily for fertility and the perpetuation of the clan and the nation but for human love

v. In its application of marriage symbol, wisdom literature has more positive disposition to women, thus a dramatic departure from the negative characterisation of women as found in the prophetic literature.

vi. Another interesting contribution of the book is the characterisation of large family not as something *of* intrinsic value in itself but as a value within the context of the moral and religious life. Hence virginity, eunuch, bareness, and childlessness assume new positive meaning in Jewish tradition.

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignment

1. What is the value of the marriage metaphor in the sapiential tradition?
2. Compare the use of the marriage symbol in Proverbs and in the Prophets.
3. What is the connection between marriage and adultery in the Book of Proverbs?
4. What could be the possible reason for Ecclesiastes to show less interest in applying marriage metaphor?
5. What does the Song of Solomon approach marriage and sexuality? What makes its approach a surprise?
6. What are some of the negative implications of the sin of adultery in the mind of Sirach?
7. What is the disposition of the Book of Wisdom on large family?
8. Has the Book of Wisdom any positive contribution to the contemporary understanding of marital love?

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1.0 Introduction

Our discussion in the previous unit demonstrated clearly how the wisdom literature testify to the Israelite and to the Jewish faith about the goodness of marriage. You could have equally discovered that the conception of the goodness of marriage is rooted on the firm foundation of religion and morals. Our intention in this unit to examine more closely the morals guiding Israel’s attitudes towards marriage and family. Our principal reference material for the discussion is Schillebeeckx (1965), whose outstanding reflection on marriage ethos in OT cannot be over-emphasised. It will also be very interesting for you to see how creation and covenant dominate the ethics of Israel with some deuteronomistic flay, which is not devoid of Israel’s historical experience. The discussion will cover the root of Israel’s holiness and ethics, and the force behind its loyalty and commitment to marriage and family. Monogamy is considered as the ideal marriage, which also directly or indirectly discourages mixed marriage. It will be of interest follow closely Israel’s effort to reconcile the apparent contradiction of human experience between marriage, family name and happiness in marriage on the one hand, and virginity, eunuch, bareness and childlessness in married life.

2.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Evaluate Old Testament ethos as they affect marriage and family
- Discuss how nature and actions of God predicates the holiness and marriage ethics of the people of Israel
- See the connection between the service and loyalty to Yahweh and to the clan (nation)
- Appreciate how Israel is able to reconcile the apparent contradiction of human experience between marriage, family name and happiness in marriage on the one hand, and virginity, eunuch, bareness and childlessness in married life.
- Understand why monogamy and indissolubility are inseparable from Christian concept of marriage and family
- Why mixed marriage, though permissible, could be discouraged.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Creation and covenant ethos

It is Yahweh's faithfulness, his unconditional love and care for Israel, a nation whom he freely and graciously chose (Amos 9:7; Deut. 7: 6-8; Ezek. 16:4-5) that occasions Israel's spirituality and holiness. Israel is consequently challenged to reciprocate unconditionally to goodness of Yahweh through unalloyed service and loyalty to Yahweh as the *only true* God (Deut. 10:12-15). Israel is charged to acknowledge the Lordship of Yahweh as the Creator God, and his Kingship as the Saving God. He is the one, who creates and the same one who saves. This idea forms the nexus between creation and covenant, which also ties human to the plan of creation and covenant (Jer. 31:35; 33:25; Ps. 148:5-6; 119:89-93; Hos. 8:14; Jer. 27:5; Ps 100; Isa. 22:11; 44:21; Deut. 32:6-15). It is also important for you to note that Israel's spirituality and holiness will be predicated on the very holiness of Yahweh, and his free choice of Israel as a nation set apart. Therefore, Israel must be re-fashioned to behave in a certain way different from other nations (Lev. 18) and also to hold to the covenant (Lev. 20), which will also be reflected in Israel's understanding and practice of marriage.

The welfare of the clan is equally fundamental to the Old Testament ethos of marriage. Tribal well-being is the ethical norm for all sexual conduct, and it provides the key to an understanding of all kinds of regulations in Israel concerning sexual matters (cf. Deut. 25:5-10; also Gen. 38:1-11). But the ethics of the clan acquired a new significance with the revelation of the true God, Yahweh. God himself made the nation his own, and for this reason every sin against the well-being of the clan comes to be a sin against Yahweh himself, a breaking of the covenant. This is the evil of Onan in the sight of God – he has no care for Israel's seed, her posterity. This is also why the Israelites are forbidden to “do as they do in the land of Egypt ... (or) Canaan” (Lev. 18:1-5). The people of those lands do not know Yahweh.

Self-assessment exercise

1. What is the relationship between the Creator God and the God of the Covenant in the thinking of marriage?
2. Why must Israel behave differently from other nations?

3.2 Married love and the founding of a family

It is indisputable that the founding of a family and the perpetuation of the family name through Israel's sons are central in Israel's ideology and theology. Consequently, you can then see why fertility, especially male offspring (cf. Exod. 34:23; 12:48; Gen. 34:15-26; 17:10-23; 1 Sam. 1:11), is considered the greatest blessing that God can bestow on marriage (Gen 4:1; Ruth 4:13; 1 4:11; 1 Sam 1:5-13; 2 Macc. 7:22-23). Again, besides the quest for personal survival, one may argue that the motivating interest in the founding of family is thanks to God's covenant with Abraham, and through Abraham with the whole nation of Israel. The messianic expectations of the later Judaism could have equally added some impulse to this.

The founding of family must also have been understood from the basic experience of marriage as a natural primary institution belonging to the world and serving to strengthen tribal solidarity. For this reason, childlessness and widowhood (without remarriage) are inevitably regarded as real calamities. That is to say, a childless wife or unmarried widow is a liability in the eyes of the tribe (Judg. 11:34-40; 1 Sam. 1:5-6; 2 Sam. 6:23; Gen. 22:17-18; 30:23; Lev. 20:20-21; Deut. 25:6; Hos. 9:11-14; Isa. 67:8-9; 4:1) because she contributes nothing to perpetuate the clan. To have no children means that one's own name is “blotted out of Israel” (Deut. 25:6). And motherhood is then the adornment of a woman (Gen. 16:10; Job 62:12-16; Ps. 127:3-5; 128:3; 144:12), and as her children's mentor the mother has a position of fundamental importance in the family (Prov. 1:8; 4:3; 6:20; 10:1; 15:20; 17:25; 19:26; 23:22-25; 30:11,17; also Gen. 28:7; 37:10; Exod. 21:15,17; Lev. 18:7; Num. 6:7; Deut. 27:16; 21:18; 1 Kings. 19:20; Ps 27:10; 109:14).

Another important point for you to note in this lecture as we proceed is the place of marital love in the Old Testament tradition. There is no doubt that the Old Testament text is

generally silent about the reality of the intimate and private side of marriage. Rather prominence is given to family and children in the narrative. That does not mean that married love is of secondary importance. Instead now and then *something* breaks through to demonstrate that married love is never lacking in the Old Testament ethos (1 Sam. 1:5-8; Gen. 24:20). Woman's love for a man, though very few but strongly expressed (cf. 1 Sam 18:20) so also "lovesickness" (2 Sam 13:2, 25; Song 2:5; 5:8). So, you have seen that the frank assertion of loving and even of "petting" (Gen 26:8-9) can be found in the Yahwist accounts, the Books of Samuel, and the Song of Solomon. Married love is also strongly affirmed in the Wisdom literature of the exile, though here it is given a markedly moral and religious slant.

Furthermore, the theology of 'one flesh' in Genesis speaks in clear terms in favour of married love. Furthermore, in our understanding of the marriage symbol in the context of the covenant of grace between Yahweh and Israel, shows clearly that procreation plays no significant role.

You can equally observe that even Israel's law, on another note, protects the demands of early married love – after the betrothal or wedding, the man is released from various public duties for a year, "to be happy with his wife" (Deut. 24:5; 20:7). Even in the anti-feminist tradition of the rabbis a story is told about a happy marriage which has been childless for ten years and could therefore, according to custom, be dissolved by the husband. He consequently prepares a festive meal to celebrate the separation, and asks his wife to take the most precious possession in the home with her when she leaves him. The woman waits until her erstwhile husband is asleep, she has him taken to her new home as the most precious possession in the house.

You can see that the heavy stress on family does not mean that married love is put right in the background even though it is not regarded, at least in theme form, as the primary function in the institution of the family.

Self-assessment exercise

1. State some of the Old Testament sources to prove that married love does exist in the Old Testament tradition.
2. Do you think that marriage can ever exist without any form of married love?

3.3 Married love and childlessness

You have already seen from the story of Elkanah and Hannah (1 Sam. 1:5-18) the torment and pitiable state of a childless woman. You also observe from the same story that love can make even a childless marriage meaningful. Such case does not prove that childlessness is a virtue but the possibility of married love without child. It also indicates a possible reward from Yahweh to a family that reveres him, for he will, even a later age bless them with children.

You must have equally observed a sort of revolution in in the Book of Wisdom. This we earlier identified Israel's understanding of family constitution, which is one of the major contributions of the Book. We have also mentioned that one of the major contributions of the Book of Wisdom is to change Israel's understanding of the constitution of a family. The later understanding is that 'large family does not count' as God's blessing. What matters is a moral and religious family, whose faith is root in the new God – Yahweh (cf. Wis. 1; 3:10-4:6). In other words.

As a result of the social and religious situation in which the writer and the intended readers of this book are living, Wisdom reacts against the myth of the large family, at least as an end in itself. The mere fact of having a large number of children – or only a few – makes no difference; what mattered was the moral and religious attitude involved. Israel herself comes to apprehend the meaning of the childless marriage which she earlier despises. *Not* only is it deemed that "to die childless is better than to have ungodly children (Sir. 16:1-3), but the "barren woman who is undefiled" and the "eunuch whose hands have done no lawless deed" are thought blessed (Wis. 3:13-15; 4:1-2). Unlike the case of Elkanah the fertility of the childless in these texts is shown in their virtue. The childless state of marriage, and thus

Israel's "popular ideology" is given a relative value in this moral and religious focus. Neither the stranger nor the eunuch are excluded from the eschatological kingdom (Isa. 41).

So, one may not be correct to insist of marriage without married love among the Jews. The people of Israel experience marriage as a commission to found families, but carry out this task in the light of "one flesh," that is, of personal relationship within marriage. Though married love may be salient, it forms the background of marriage. You will, however, observe later that Christ exceeds human wildest expectation and subordinate both married love and the foundation of the family to love for the kingdom of God. According to him, it is neither marriage nor family that qualifies one for the kingdom, for there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven (Mt 19:12).

Self-assessment exercise

1. Do you still remember the argument of Wisdom regarding virginity, eunuch, bareness and unmarried widow? Does it support the idea that there could be a happy marriage without children?
2. Describe the two different pictures regarding childless marriage as presented in the story of Elkanah and Hannah (1 Sam. 1:5-18), and in the Wisdom literature (Sir. 16:1-3).
3. What could have led to the idea of the Jewish acceptance of childless marriage as equally a blessing?

3.4 Monogamy as the ideal

In the age of the patriarchs the prevalent form of marriage was relative monogamy with a tendency towards bigamy, in which a man kept one chief wife and one concubine (cf. *Codex Hammurabi*). The custom gradually assumes prominence in ancient Israel so much that in the days of the judges and the kings almost unrestricted polygamy and concubinage prevail, especially at the higher levels of society. The possession of many wives is then considered a mark of power, prestige, and economic prosperity (1Sam 5:13; 1 Kings 11:1-8).

Another area of concern, which some scholars have described as the social evil in post-exilic Israel (Schillebeeckx, 1965) is the so-called "successive polygamy." A husband is able to annul his marriage, send his wife away, and enter into a new marriage. The husband is also allowed to enjoy all kinds of relationships with girls and slave-girls whose status is not recognized as one of legal marriage (Exod. 21:7, 10; Gen. 16:2-4; 30:3ff; Deut. 21:10-14; Num. 21:9; Hos. 3:2).

In sexual sphere, a lot is given to the man at the expense of women. The man is free and sometimes encouraged to engage in polygamy while woman is strictly bound to monogamy. In cases where a woman would have been punished for adultery, a married man is normally acquitted, so long as such offence is not committed with a woman who is subject to the authority of another man. In certain respects this inequality between man and woman in married life reflects a lower appreciation of the woman's role than in the pagan Greeks and Romans. The inequality is also experienced in divorce, where the right is reserved only to the husband, but not to the wife.

However, the Deuteronomic writers, of course, come up with a clear protest against the *harem* system (Deut. 17:17). It is probably not accidental also that in the vision of the history of saving events given in Genesis, polygamy begins with Lamech, who is a descendant of Cain (Gen 4:19). There is also apparent opposition to polygamy in the Genesis account of the creation. The Greek translation of the Pentateuch reinforces this monogamous tendency: "They become one flesh" (Gen 2:24); for in Judaism, and certainly among the Alexandrian Jews, the keeping of concubines is increasingly criticized. This tendency becomes even more pronounced in the ascetic circles of the "community of Damascus," as is apparent from the finds at Qumran, where concubinage is roundly condemned as unchastity. But even in the Wisdom literature the monogamous marriage is clearly regarded as both normal and ideal. (Prov. 5:15-19; 12:4; 18:22; 19:14; 31:10-13; Ps. 128:3; Eccles. 9:9; Sir. 26:1-4).

In short, after the exile it becomes *very* difficult to reconcile polygamy with the ethics of marriage seen from the standpoint of faith in Yahweh, and those who practised it are probably despised. At this point, some scholars may seem to be of the opinion that polygamy

has virtually disappeared in Israel by the beginning of the Christian era. But the story of Herod I, who has taken up to ten wives, some of them simultaneously, questions such claim. Though he is held in contempt because of it, he accounts for his conduct by appealing to the "custom of the patriarchs (Cf. Josephus, *Antiq.* 14.12.1; 15.9.3; 17.1.2). The fact, however, is that what the older laws *permit* is not always accepted as good or fitting by pious Jews of the post-exilic period. Moreover, the historical, social, and religious character of many of the laws relating to marriage emerges clearly from the fact of that which is first permitted, and forbidden by later laws (compare Gen. 20:12 and 38:13-28 with 2 Sam 13:13. Also Ezek. 22:10-11). For this reason, you may find in the bible some conflicting positions.

It will then appear that the essence of marriage initially is the perpetuation of the family name (cf. Deut. 25:5-10), hence polygamy is encouraged and less attention given to the advancement of monogamy (Deut. 21:15-17). It is also clear from the Bible that considerations of prestige, political motives, and even lust are not lacking in the case of polygamous marriages (1 Kings 11:4-8; 2 Sam 15:16). But you can now see that there is in the Old Testament a suggestive but deliberate polemic against polygamy (Gen. 2:24). We also agree that polygamy abound for various reasons, and is officially tolerated in ancient Israel during the period of Judges and Kings but more among the upper class. However, the priestly tradition in Deuteronomy and also in the Wisdom literature speak out vehemently against the practice (cf. Deut. 27:17). In other words, the marriage ethics of Israel is monogamy (cf. Gen. 2:23-24; Mal 2:14-16).

Self-assessment exercise

1. Name some of the areas of inequality between a man and a woman in the social life in the Jewish world as related to marital relationship.
2. How do you explain some of the conflicting positions regarding polygamy in the scripture?

3.5 Husband's right to divorce

The general understanding in Israel is that proven adultery between a man and another married or betrothed woman is punishable. The two guilty parties are normally condemned to death after trial (Deut. 22:2-5). The wife is subject to her husband's rule, with the result that a third party has no right to her (Deut. 20:5-7; 28:30). Furthermore, according to sound Yahwist doctrine, marriage is a divine institution in which God himself gives the woman to man as his life's companion and places the woman (wife) under the authority of the man (husband). Therefore, no other man is permitted to lay any claim to a married woman.

But the conviction that God gives the woman to the man, and thus bestows a measure of indissolubility upon marriage is only a teaching that develops very slowly in Israel. Pious Jews live according to this vision, but in official Israel its deeper implication are never fully realised. Initially divorce is the almost restricted right of the man. The woman, on the other hand, is neither able nor permitted to repudiate her husband (Judg. 19:2-10). But she can of course, flee from him (Exod. 21:11), in which case she is not given a bill of divorce and cannot remarry, according to custom.

The law, however, in the spirit of the Mosaic cult of Yahweh, moderates this unrestricted right and regulates it. A man may repudiate his wife only if he finds "some indecency" in her (Deut. 24:1; also Sir. 7:28; 25:36; 42:9). In that case, it is sufficient for the husband to give her a "bill of divorce," in which he declares she is henceforth no longer his wife (Deut. 24:1-4; Jer. 3:8; Isa. 50:1). With this the marriage is annulled and both are free to remarry.

The precise meaning of "some indecency," or "something shameful," is not clear, however. Apart from the dispute over the interpretation of the phrase, there are also difficulties in connection with its translation. In an ancient Aramaic translation, the Targum of Onkelos, it is rendered as "for the sake of an offence against a word," that is, if the wife does not obey her husband. The Book of Sirach also appears to follow this interpretation, in demanding the repudiation of a wife if she does not do as her husband directs (Sir. 25: 25-26). In practice the law is widely interpreted.

But when at the approach of the Christian era-no doubt partly due to the influence of the looser customs of the Greeks, repudiation becomes a frequent occurrence. This is probably

because under Roman occupation the death penalty for adultery cannot be carried out by the Jews themselves. So, the rabbis take up a firm position. Two divergent schools of thought emerge at this time. The school of Rabbi Shammai is of the opinion that the only valid reason for divorce is adultery or unchastity. The school of Rabbi Hillel, on the other hand, interprets the text in accordance with actual practice and, in the view of this school of thought, all kinds of reasons, some of them quite insignificant, are considered sufficient for the legitimate repudiation of a wife and the annulment of a marriage. Here Rabbi Akiba opines that even falling in love with another woman is sufficient reason. According to the law, a man has to leave a wife who has committed adultery, otherwise he will make himself an accessory to the sin. And Pious Jews frequently send such a wife away "quietly" (cf. Mt 1:19).

After the exile, at the time of the reform carried out by Ezra and Nehemiah, sharp protest is heard in certain quarters against divorce. We find in the book of Malachi: "For I hate divorce (repudiation), says Yahweh, the God of Israel." Here, however, it is a question of a qualified divorce, in which no appeal can be made to Yahwist legislation. The background is that after the exile many Jews contract new marriages with daughters of pagan soldiers and citizens, thus repudiating their first, Israelite wife ("the wife of your youth") in order to improve their position. That is what constituted an offence. In other words, the idea of indissolubility of marriage comes up in the Old Testament after the exile, at least when it implied the legal support and privilege of Israel's faith. What we have here is, as it were, a "privilege of faith" working in the opposite direction. According to Malachi, and thus according to the reforming spirit of Nehemiah, marriage in the Old Testament may not be annulled in favour of a new marriage with an "unbeliever," that is, with a woman who does not belong to Yahweh's people. You will find the same coming up in different fashion in Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians, where a non-Christian marriage is dissoluble in favour of a Christian marriage. This, of course, brings us to the question of the Old Testament judgement on mixed marriages.

Self-assessment exercise

1. What is the implication of a Jewish woman fleeing from the husband without a certificate of divorce?
2. What are the positions of the two prominent rabbinic schools (Shammai and Hillel)?

3.6 Mixed marriages in Old Testament

There are very many mixed marriages in Israel (Gen. 38:2; 46:10; 41:25; 26:34; Exod. 2:21; Judg. 3:6; also Ruth; Num. 12:1; 1 Kings 7:14) in spite of the common experience that a marriage with a "stranger" brings all kinds of trouble (Gen. 26:35; 28:14; Judg. 14:3). But who is really the "stranger?" It is very important for you to understand the concept of stranger to enable you better assess the context of the discussion. Originally, a "stranger" is somebody from outside one's own tribe or clan. This is in itself an indication that no marriage shall take place outside one's own tribe or clan, especially if it is borne in mind that even within Israel a man prefers to find a bride from among his own blood-relatives, (Gen. 20:12; 24:15; 28:9; 29:12; Num. 26:59). The social and psychological factor here is that such a wife will always be subject to the protection of the entire clan. If she were given in marriage to a stranger she will place herself in an unprotected position (Gen. 29:19; Num. 36: 1-12).

More important part in the matter of mixed marriages is played by Israel's religion. Israel is above all a "holy people" (Exod. 13:12; 19:10, 14; Lev. 11:44; 19:2; 20:26; Deut. 7:6; 14:2). She is "set apart" from other nations and consequently also remarkable among them in her way of life. She is "different" from all other peoples, and for this reason mixed marriage is an abomination for Israel. A stranger does not simply come "from a different nation." S/he comes also "from a different god," one's own tribe or nation and one's "own god" (henotheism) are intimately connected (Ruth 1:15; 1 Sam. 26:19; 1 Kings 17:26; Judg. 11:23-24). The non-Israelite peoples are pagans whom Yahweh will wipe out (Exod. 23:23; Deut. 7:1-8; 25:17-19 etc.). Even the Deuteronomic writers have begun to oppose mixed marriages for religious reasons: "For mixed marriages will turn away Israel from following Yahweh, to serve other gods (Deut. 7:4; also Exod. 34:12-16). The commandment against mixed

marriage acknowledges only one exception (Deut. 21:10-14). The basic reason for opposing mixed marriages is, however, the danger which they constitute for the education of the children of Israel in faith in Yahweh, for the children belong to Yahweh and have to live according to the commandments of the covenant (Deut. 7:6-11).

After the exile, the religious view is propounded with increasing emphasis as the Israelites begin more and more to leave their Jewish wives and marry "strangers." It is at this point that Ezra and Nehemiah will come in – men who work resolutely for the purity of the Yahwist ethos of marriage (Ezra 2:59-62; 9:1-10, 44; Neh. 7:61-64; 13:23-29; also Mal 2:15). The "holy" people is on no account to mix itself with the peoples of the lands, the strangers (Ezra 9:2). Should the "holy remnant," now returning from exile defile itself with strangers? (Ezra 9:8, 13, 14). Ezra tears his clothes because of this abomination, which is also the cause of the disappearance of the "holy language of Judah" (Neh. 13:23-30). Mixed marriages are infidelity to Yahweh and to the covenant of Israel's election. They break the covenant, and this is why Nehemiah in his zeal, "cleansed them from everything foreign" (Neh. 13:30).

For Israel, and especially for the post-exilic generation, the "set apart" cannot be separated from the reality of salvation of her election as the one chosen people of God. Malachi, who in this precise context makes Yahweh say that he hates the repudiation of Jewish *wives*, also provides the real Yahwist objection to mixed marriages, namely that the fruit of human, viz. "one flesh" or "one life" of man and woman in marriage brought about by Yahweh himself is precisely the "children of God"; "Has not he [Yahweh] made them one flesh and one life? And what does he desire? Godly offspring [=children of Yahweh]" (Mal. 2:15-16). The basic and essential dogmatic meaning of this Old Testament vision is undoubtedly that faithfulness to God takes precedence even in marriage. Moreover, it is a grave matter of conscience for the parents to bring up their children in the religion of Yahweh. How this duty is to be reconciled with the conscience of the other party in a mixed marriage is a challenge which is not posed in Israel.

Self-assessment exercise

1. Do you believe that faithfulness to God is convincingly strong enough to dissolve marriage?
2. How do you explain the concept of stranger in the Old Testament thinking? What effect has it in the worship of Yahweh?
3. What is the relationship between mixed marriage and the concept of stranger?

4.0 Conclusion

It is so evident that the Old Testament ethos permeates the fabrics of the institution of marriage and family. It once more reminds us that marriage is an actual institution, a reality set within a definite historical and social framework, and that marriage is experienced by the Hebrews before the demands of faith in Yahweh come upon them through the Prophets and the Deuteronomic writers. It is a reality which the people of Israel encountered among the people with whom, directly or indirectly, they come in contact.

5.0 Summary

Our discussion in this unit has gradually led us to draw out some of the basic teachings and their implications for marriage and family. So, we remind ourselves of the following points:

- i. We observe that it is God's faithfulness, love and saving act that is the primary force that attracts Israel's attention to creation. It is also the same free choice to make Israel his own and as a people set apart that predicates Israel's holiness. It therefore means that the welfare of the nation is the welfare of Yahweh, and any sin against the nation is a sin against Yahweh. Consequently, the founding of family and its perpetuation is seen as a service to the nation, indeed, to Yahweh. It is a divine and holy obligation.
- ii. We also noticed that despite the emphasis on the founding of a family and the perpetuation of the family name through male issues, married love is never found wanting in the theology

and ethos of the Old Testament. Rather Israel's interpretation of childlessness in the later days tells us that Israel's theology and ethos change along the line of later historical experiences and values-reversal.

iii. We also discovered that Yahwistic religion has always tended towards monogamy in spite of the setbacks from simultaneous and successive polygamy, concubinage, and other extra-marital affairs from the male partners. In spite of the inequality, there have always been various silent protesting voices calling human for a return to the original intention of Yahweh (cf. (Gen. 2:24). The same form of protest will find itself against the "right to divorce" which is place to the 'advantage' of the man, and at the expenses of the woman.

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignment

1. How does sin against the clan is sin against family and Yahweh?
2. Give some of the reasons why the founding of family is given a high priority in Jewish tradition.
3. Demonstrate with the help of some scriptural passages that married love has been part of the customs of the Old Testament.
4. What are some of the moves both in the Old Testament and in history that suggest that monogamy is intended as the ideal in married life?
5. What are the possible reasons for polygamy in the Old Testament?
6. How do you mean that a measure of indissolubility of marriage is a teaching that develops very slowly in Israel?
7. What is the challenge linked with the interpretation of 'indecent' in marriage and divorce?
8. Why does Israel insist that even in a mixed marriage, the children from the marriage should be brought up according to the religion of Yahweh?
9. How do you mean that mix marriage is infidelity to Yahweh?

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MODULE II: Marriage in the New Testament and in the Fathers of the Church

You have already seen in MODULE 1, how the prophets used the image of marriage as a means of revealing Yahweh's covenant of grace with the people of Israel. In this unit, you will see that the New Testament that the conception of marriage as a prophetic symbol, a representative image of a mutually faithful covenant relationship is continued. We are turning to the New Testament and the Church Fathers' teachings on marriage and family to complement the information we have earlier acquired from the Old Testament. You may come to discover the difficulties involved in talking about the *teaching* of New Testament and the Fathers, for there are several *teachings*, and sometimes they are not in agreement. Nor are they all derived solely from Jesus, as is frequently and simplistically claimed and put forward as the reason either in support or opposition to the institution of marriage and family (Lawler, 1985).

UNIT 1: Marriage in the Synoptic Gospels

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1.0 Introduction

Marriage in the synoptic traditions goes further than the Old Testament in its details to present marriage both as a secular and eschatological reality. Thus the wedding feast, which constitutes a major component of Jewish secular marriage ceremony is linked with the eschatological feast in the kingdom of God. The synoptic writers in addition identified some of the specific challenges of married life – divorce and remarriage, which becomes a common concern in the synoptic Gospels. To enable you follow the logic of the synoptic writers, you are advised to always see the connection between human marriage and the kingdom of God. You shall also be introduced to the complexity of marriage, divorce and remarriage in the time of Jesus, and the various interpretations that different schools hold on the reality of marriage and family. The reason for Christians' insistence on absolute monogamy, permanence in and indissolubility of marriage relationship will be left for you to adduce from the discussion. You may also be expected to evaluate the contributions the teachings of Jesus have made to the advancement of the institution of marriage and family.

2.0 Objective

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Make a connection between the use of marriage metaphor and the understanding of the kingdom of God in the synoptic Gospels
- Notice the common concern of the synoptic writers about human marriage is divorce and remarriage, and identify the peculiarity of each writer in their respective accounts.
- Discuss divorce and remarriage in the time of Jesus, and the different various postures taken by different sects within Judaism of Jesus's epoch.
- Evaluate the various perspectives from which the issue of marriage and divorce is considered in the synoptics, and their respective implications
- Understand why the Christians insist on absolute monogamy, permanence and indissolubility in marriage relationship
- Appreciate how Jesus' teaching on marriage raises the status of womanhood.

3.0 Main Content

The reference of the subject of marriage to Jesus is very explicit in the NT (cf. Lk 14:20 in the context of vv.15-24; Mt 22: 1-4; Rev 19:7-9, 21:2-9). It is also important to observe that Jesus in the synoptic gospels makes two fundamental references to the Old Testament on the subject of marriage (cf. Matt. 19:1-12 and 5:31-32; Luke 16:18; Mark 10:1-12; see also 1 Cor. 7:10-11):

i) He affirms the plan of God on marriage by citing the creation account (Gen. 2:24) in the context of forbidding the dismissal of the wife as an offence against the divine will.

ii) He responds to the reference made to Moses (Deut. 24:1-4) regarding marital relationship that ought to exist between a woman with certification of divorce and her former erstwhile husband(s). Incidentally, many have misdirected the emphasis of the text. The central issue in Deut. 24 is not divorce as such but the post-divorce conditions.

You will observe that unity and permanence are projected as fundamental values in marriage. So, these values are inescapable in any discussion on the subject of marriage in the synoptic gospels. It does not, however, give us the whole picture of what the subject marriage stands for in the synoptic gospels. On another note, the marriage symbol signifies the kingdom of God. It is a metaphor that opens window for the followers of Jesus to understand the nature of and operations in the kingdom of God (cf. Mk 2: 19-20; 8: 11; Mt 9:15; Mt 21:37-38; 22:1-10; 25:1-13, 34-40; Lk 5:34-35; 14:16-24).

3.1 The symbol of marriage and the kingdom of God

The NT teachings on the kingdom of God is conveyed in the metaphor of marriage. The NT transfers the name of bridegroom from Yahweh to Jesus and the imagery of the God-Israel relationship to that of the Jesus-disciples/Church relationship. This is evident in the parable of the bridegroom (Mk 2:18-21; Mt 9:14-17; Lk 5:33-35); the parable of the marriage feast (Mt 22: 1-10); the parable of the Kingdom of God as a wedding feast (Lk 14:16-24; Mk 8: 11) prepared by God (who is represented as King in Mt 25:34-40) for the wedding of His Son, Jesus (who is represented by the son in Mt 21:37-38); the parable of the ten virgins (Mt 25:1-13) (cf. Savarimuthu, 2007; Chundelikkatt, 2013). You can now see that in all the cited examples the bridegroom is the major character in marriage ceremony. So, what you should note here is that Jesus speaks of the marital life in relation to the Kingdom of God, and also that Jesus himself is the bride of the bridegroom of the kingdom, i.e., the Church, and the latter, his bride.

Self-assessment exercise

Do you agree that the marriage metaphor distorts the understanding of the kingdom of God? Give reasons for your view.

3.2 Background to marriage, divorce and remarriage

Besides the presentation of the kingdom of God in marriage symbol, the synoptic adds another aspect, which underlines the unity and permanence of human marriage (Mk. 10:2-10; Matt. 19:2-12 & 5:31-31; Lk. 16:18). Marriage is then seen as human reality and as sacrament. You appreciate what is said here if you can have a clue of what marriage is all about during the time of Jesus, especially with regard to divorce and remarriage.

3.2.1 Marriage in the time of Jesus

You will discover that the synoptic gospel writers situate the sayings of Jesus about divorce and remarriage in the context of some Jewish presuppositions. In Jesus' world marriage is a family affair in the sense that families marry; and marriage symbolizes the fusion of the honour of two extended families, undertaken with a view of political and/ or economic interest (Malina, 1981). Males draw up a marriage contract, which includes bride wealth for the father of the bride, and eventually the father surrenders his daughter to the groom who takes her as his wife by bringing her into his *own* house.

The process results in the disembedding of a daughter from the honour of her father and her embedding as wife in the honour of her new husband. It creates between husband and wife a bond that is not of a legal but of blood relationship which is called a "one body" relationship.

Divorce is the reversal of this marriage process. "Divorce means the process of disembedding the female from the honour of the male, along with a sort of redistribution and return of the honour of the families involved (Malina, 1981). Divorce, like marriage, is a family affair as well.

In Roman law, the spouses themselves dissolve their marriage, simply by withdrawing their will to be married. Just as their will to be married has married them, so also their will to be unmarried unmarries them. In Jewish law it is quite different. Only the husband can dissolve the marriage, and he does so simply by writing his wife a bill of divorce and dismissing her, a practice which is prescribed in Torah. Thus in Deut. 24: 1-4, you will find the right of the husband to divorce his wife, the prohibition to remarry a spouse he has divorced and the ground for divorce.

The cause for divorce is "something indecent," *erwat dabar*. The word is a very general ground which will later in history provoke dispute over its interpretation. Consequently, in the generation prior to Jesus the dispute on *grounds* for divorce has split into two camps, one following the great Rabbi Hillel, the other following the great Rabbi Shammai. Hillel and his disciples interpret *erwat dabar* broadly thus entertaining all that is conceivable. Shammai and his school interpret the same statement but strictly. The interpretation restricts itself to only serious moral and sexual delinquency. The great debate continues to rage at the time of Jesus, and provides the context for Jesus' sayings about divorce in the gospels (Lawler, 1985).

It may also be of interest for you to note that in the marriage a wife does not look to her husband for affection or companionship or comfort. She looks to him to be a good provider and an honourable citizen.

Self-assessment exercise

1. What is the difference between the Palestinian understanding of divorce and Roman?
2. What is the primary difference between the school of Rabbi Hillel and the school of Rabbi Shammai in their interpretation of divorce?

3.2.2 The Essene and divorce

The Essene interpret the Law in favour of the indissolubility of marriage. The understanding is also understood as a polemic against the polygamy, divorce and or remarriage of the kings of Israel, and also apply it in general terms to members of the sect (cf. 11QTemple 57:17-19; CD 4:21-5:2; also Fitzmyer, 1976; Collins, 1992). The argument of the Essene against divorce is an appeal to Genesis (1:27; 7:9) and Deuteronomy (17:17).

The political implications, thus the danger to which the Pharisees hope to expose Jesus (cf. Mk. 10:2-12; Matt. 19:3-12), becomes clearer when you remember that the Essene, resorting to Genesis, argue strongly against divorce, and formulate anti-divorce law as a check on marriage ethics of king. That is to say, a king is not permitted to have more than one wife.

Nor is the king to divorce his wife to marry another. Viewed in the context of the members of the Herodian family both in Palestine and Rome (cf. Fenn, 1992) the danger posed by the question of the Pharisees is obvious. John the Baptist's death (6:17-19) will then be portrayed a *type* of the fate that awaits Jesus. Moreover, the connection between the circumstance surrounding the execution of John the Baptist and the question put to Jesus would even be stronger if the geographical notice in v.1 should refer to Herod Antipas's other territory, Perea (Schürer, 1986; Goodman, 1987).

Self-assessment exercise

1. How does the question of the Pharisees political pose danger to Jesus?
2. Do you think that the question has any theological significance? If yes, how then?

3.3 Note on Mark (10:2-12)

The account of Jesus's teaching on marriage and divorce as presented by Mark (10:2-12) probably conveys the idea that Mark could not have been familiar with laws against divorce among the Essenes (Perkin, 2002). Nevertheless, he knows that royal marriages and divorces are politically dangerous.

But more interesting for us is that the Jesus of Mark does not deny the origination of a divorce notice from Moses but insists that its existence is a consequence of the hard heartedness of humanity (v.5). Mark's readers know that the kingdom of God inaugurated by Jesus' ministry does not belong to the hard-hearted, faithless generation with which Jesus constantly has to contend (9:19) (Via, 1985). They also know that Jesus opposes any attempt to substitute human traditions for the commandment of God (7:9-13). So, the determination to seek God's will for humanity in creation, not in the conditions of a world marked by sin, appears to have been central to the teaching of Jesus (Perkins, 1990). In other words, God intends men and women to be permanently joined in marriage, so no human tradition can claim the authority to override that fact (v. 9). Jesus exploits the metaphoric possibilities of Gen 2:24, "they become one flesh," to exhibit the absurdity of thinking that divorce "law," whatever conditions it sets down, represents God's will. Divorce will be like trying to divide one person into two irrespective of the argument on whether the Genesis tradition (Gen 2:24) includes the full text, "becomes attached to his wife," or an elliptical, "leave father and mother, and the two shall become one flesh."

Another interesting aspect is Mark's Roman-Greco perspective of the account, which creates a *hypothetical* situation that allows both the man and the women the equal right to divorce the other. This is contrary the Jewish Law, which allows only the husband the right for divorce. The twist also fits well the story of Herod Antipas's second marriage (Perkin, 2002).

Self-assessment exercise

1. Do you agree that royal marriages and divorces are politically dangerous? Give your reasons.
2. How would you prove that Mark's audience is Greco-Roman, and not Jewish?

3.4 Matthean account (5:31-32; 19:3-12)

You will find out that Matthew 19:2-12 is quite literally devoted to a deeper understanding family in relation to divorce, remarriage and celibacy. These themes may not be properly appreciated without articulating the eschatological vision of cultural and value reversal of "the last shall be first and the first last" (19:30; 20:16). This is vindicated in the career of the Son of Man, whose way of life is still misunderstood by ambitious and jealous disciples (20:20-28).

For Matthew (19:3-9), the norms and ideals for the basic structures and functions of marriage and family are given with creation — norms such as fidelity, lifelong partnership, love and respect, sexual exclusivity, and the rearing of healthy, appropriately socialized children. Needless to say, human beings continually struggle with and fall short of creational ideals for marriage and family, profound tales of sin and dysfunction commingled with redemptive grace and growth (Gen. 12–50; 2 Samuel 11–1 Kings 2; 2 Tim 1:5) (cf. van Leeuwen 2002).

3.4.1 The question of the Pharisees

Read the parallel of Matthew in Mark. You will observe that the Markan text appears to be assimilated to Matthean. In the Matthean storyline, the Pharisees' question of vv.3 and 7 has three levels:

- i. Matthew alters Mark's question on the legality of divorce. Matthew does not ask whether divorce is lawful or not (Mark!). For him, the presumption is that divorce could be legitimate. So the interest now is on what makes divorce legitimate. You can see that his stance reflects the continuing rabbinic argument between the conservative Shammaites and the more liberal Hillelites. That is to say, divorce could be allowed for any serious reason (Shammaites) or for any reason at all (Hillelites) (cf. Gnika, 1978).
- ii. Yet the ensuing dialogue is also an expression of the continuing conflict of the two kingdoms, that is, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan (cf. Matt: 12:22-37), which intensifies as Jesus leaves Galilee and enters Judea.
- iii. It calls for the definition of identity of the representatives of God's kingdom (John and Jesus) and the membership of the hostile kingship of this age, and also reminds the reader that Jesus' destiny will be like John's.

Self-assessment exercise

What are the three possible levels of understanding of the question of the Pharisees on divorce and remarriage?

3.4.2 The reactions of Jesus

You can notice the following points from Jesus' answer.

- i. Jesus' answer corresponds to the pattern of ethical reflection developed in the antitheses (cf. Matt. 5:31-32).
- ii. In Mark Jesus begins with the *concession* (Mk. 10:5) and proceeds to the *original will* (command) of God in creation (Mk. 10:6-9). But the Matthean Jesus begins with the absolute will of God (Matt: 19:4-6) and proceeds to the concession (Matt. 19:8-9).
- iii. Matthew changes the Greco-Roman perception of Mark that grants a woman also the legal ability of initiating divorce. The obvious reason is that it is not applicable of his Jewish perspective. In other words, the "*man* (one)" who "separates" (Mk. 10:2 and Matt. 19:3) is not any of the two parties (Mk. 10:10-11), but the husband alone (Matt. 19:9).
- iv. In addition, Matthew builds an exception clause (Matt. 19:9; also 5:32) into Jesus' absolute prohibition of divorce (Mk. 10:9, 11-12), thus softening in principle the absolute "ideal" will of God.

Self-assessment exercise

Do you think that Mark's and Matthew's presentations of Jesus' teachings on marriage and divorce make any difference at all?

3.5 Agreement between Mark and Matthew

Important for us, however, is that both writers agree that the union of husband and wife as "one flesh" (physical, personal, parental) is the creation of God and is not at the husband's disposal (cf. Boring, 2002). In all of this, while still reflecting the first-century patriarchal culture, Jesus has transcended its views of marriage and the family by making marriage an element of the will of God, expressed in creation rather than merely a culturally conditioned contract on the human level. That is to say, the first human pair in creation narrative is intended solely for each other, marriage being a God-given human relationship.

Again, the anxiety of the disciples on the moral responsibility of marriage is expressed by Mark (10:10) and Matthew (19:10), though it is Matthew who sharpens the question whether Christians should get married at all (cf. also 1 Cor. 7:1-40), thus making the discussion strictly Hellenistic Christian marital ethical challenge.

Matthew in addition explains why married and unmarried can co-exist as members of the kingdom of God, thereby giving reasons for the exceptional and charismatic life of prophets and missionaries that remain unmarried as a mark of their special calling. John the Baptist, Jesus, and Paul apparently will come under discussion (cf. Boring, 1991).

Some exegetes (cf. Boring, 2002; Hare, 1993; Sigal, 1986) have cautiously observed that Jesus' pronouncement:

- i. Constitutes the first definitive (but tacit) pronouncement in Jewish tradition against polygamy, to which the Old Testament prophets have earlier laid their voices (Mal. 2:14-16);
- ii. Places more responsibility on the husband than previously, tending toward removing the double standard by declaring the husband's relationship with the second woman as adulterous; and
- iii. Protects women from the arbitrary power of the husband's right to divorce at will.

Self-assessment exercise

1. State and the areas of agreement between Matthew and Mark in view of divorce?
2. Do you think that there is any relationship between marriage and celibacy?

3.6 The Lucan account (16:18).

3.6.1 Background

The context of the pronouncement of Jesus on divorce and remarriage in Luke remains one of the contesting lines among exegetes. But if you read through the Lucan pericope, you may then agree with Culpepper (2002) that Luke's emphasis is that the law and the prophets are still valid, hence the pronouncement against divorce serves as an example of the validity. Any attempt to divorce for the sake of remarriage is consumed by greed and lust rather than the desire to serve God.

3.6.2 The primitive character of the Lucan account

The importance of Luke's account lies more on 'Traditionsgeschichte'. It is classified as the most primitive account of the versions of the prohibition, and by implication closer to the actual saying of Jesus (Gnilka, 1978; Fitzmyer, 1985). Thus:

- i. The Lucan account tallies with what we know of Jesus' use of words, the man marries and the woman is married" (cf. Lk 17:27; 20:35). It reflects the patriarchal attitude to marriage that prevails in his time.
- ii. In establishing the unity and permanence of bond between husband and wife, Jesus opposes polygamy, and re-establishes the will of God for monogamy. This means that for the husband there exists no right to take a second wife while his wife is still alive, and if he still does so, it equals adultery. This is clear from the other evangelists, too.
- iii. It lacks the "except" clause, which appears to be a Matthean addition.
- iv. It takes no note of the plight of Christian women married to pagan husbands (as in the mission situation in view in 1 Corinthians 7).
- v. It has not been adapted to the provisions in Roman law whereby a woman could divorce her husband (as in Mark 10:10-12).
- vi. It is set outside the context of a controversy dialogue.
- vii. It considers only the husband's violation of the marriage union.

The text contains a double prohibition: It forbids divorcing one's wife in order to marry another woman, and also marriage to a divorced woman, thus forestalling the possibility of a woman provoking a divorce from her husband in order to marry another man. Incidentally, both parts of the saying declare that it is the man who commits adultery bearing in mind that adultery is forbidden by the Decalogue (Exod. 20:14; Deut. 5:18). Moreover, by marrying another woman, the man commits adultery (Lev. 18:20) against his first wife (Mal. 2:14-16).

Self-assessment exercise

1. What are some of the implications of accepting Luke's account as the most ancient in connection to the accounts from other synoptic writers?
2. How do you interpret Matthean exception clause in the context of Lucan account on divorce and remarriage?

3.7 The convergence of the synoptic accounts

The discussion on the synoptic accounts makes our understanding of the dignity of marriage and family more demanding. It tells us how the bond of marriage spread over the realm of

might-not and *could-not*. So, you may understand the indissolubility of marriage as a moral task to be realized personally. It is first and foremost a “life commitment” or an “oath of fidelity” which *might not* be dissolved since it involves a personal commission to live married life in such a way that the bond of marriage is not broken. On the other hand, marriage invites us all to appreciate its ontological character, which includes our participation in the kingdom of God, and by extension reflecting the Christ-church relationship, hence *could-not* be dissolved. In other words, marriage is an objective bond which once made is exempt from any action or interference on the part of human (Schillebeeckx, 1965). The bond of marriage, duly and sacramentally celebrated and consummated, cannot be dissolved by divorce, not even by any human authority or institution.

The above understanding brings us back to re-evaluate the exclusion clause of Matthew (19:20), which probably hints the separation “from bed and board,” without any possibility of remarriage (cf. Jerome, *In Matt.* 19:9, Pl. 26. 135). While several other interpretations are open, Schillebeeckx (1965) tells us that Matthew must have wished to impress even more upon his Jewish readers that adultery is no reason for divorce. This is better seen, and to some extent more plausible, from the philological point of view. It is equally supported by all the elements which various interpretations have established beyond dispute.

Self-assessment exercise

How do you mean that the bond of marriage spread over the realm of *might-not* and *could-not*? What is the implication of the statement to the understanding of the indissolubility of marriage?

4.0 Conclusion

The several NT variations on Jesus’ teaching about divorce suggest that the subject is of considerable importance to early Christians. Jesus refuses the grounds for the original question asked by the Pharisees (cf. Mark and Matthew) and takes a posture that coincides with those of teachers who are even stricter in their interpretation, hence he does not border to create new legislation (Perkin, 2005). He also takes side with John the Baptist, who condemns the marriage between Antipas and Herodias, which is understood as adultery. However, he goes further to remind humanity of the original intention of God for humans, thus setting God divine will over other provisions of the Mosaic Law (Collins, 1992 100). For Jesus, marriage has reason of existence and fulfilment in God’s creative love, which transcends human creation and tradition.

So, the church, the Christian community has no power or authority to legislate but only to defend the institution of marriage and family against a hard-hearted and/or utilitarian view of marriage, not because the Church wants tougher laws against divorce, but because she seeks to make Christian families what God intends them to be (Perkin, 2005). Nevertheless, the church continues to counsel and encourage couples contemplating marriage to work at gaining basic respect for each other and the ability to negotiate differences before they get married. Other programs aim to help couples and families strengthen their commitments to each other or to help single parents rear their children. All these efforts go back to remain us all of the sacredness and dignity of marriage and family life.

5.0 Summary

The NT transfers the name of bridegroom from Yahweh to Jesus and the imagery of the God-Israel relationship to that of the Jesus-disciples/Church relationship. We also set the teaching of Jesus on divorce and remarriage in a historical context in order feel the impact the teaching makes in our contemporary age, and also appreciate the contributions made by Jesus to the on-going discussion during his days.

Unlike the Greco-Roman tradition, marriage, divorce and remarriage among the Jews are family issues. Also in the Jewish tradition (unlike the Greco-Roman), divorce is a special reserve of husbands. They decide when and how to go about it.

The brief discussion on the three synoptic writers reveals that their individual representation of the teachings of Jesus is biased by their respective audience. But all agreed that the original will of God is that marriage should be permanent and indissoluble. Above all, indissolubility of marriage is a *divine will and intention*, which, however, should be nurtured by human through love in loyalty, service and fidelity. Consequently, no human authority, not even the Church has the legitimate power to legislate on it. We finally observed that the acceptance of the account of Luke as the most ancient on the teachings of Jesus on divorce and remarriage comes along with various implications.

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignment

1. Discuss the relationship between NT marriage metaphor and the kingdom of God.
2. Do you agree with Perkin (2002) that the account of Jesus's teaching on marriage and divorce as presented by Mark (10:2-12) probably conveys the idea that Mark could not have been familiar with laws against divorce among the Essenes? What are laws against divorce among the Essenes? If Mark had known the laws, how do think Mark could have used them for Jesus's teaching on marriage and divorce?
3. What is the position of Mark on divorce among the followers of Jesus?
4. What are the contributions of Jesus to the on-going debate on marriage and divorce?
5. If Luke argues that any attempt to divorce for the sake of remarriage is consumed by greed and lust rather than the desire to serve God, of what implication is that to the children of kingdom?

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1.0 Introduction

The major piece of Paul’s teaching on marriage and sexuality is found in 1 Cor. 7. Paul is reacting to some of the ethical issues on marriage and sexuality raised by the Corinthians, who seem to be confused on how the life of faith bears on sexual matters, consequent upon the earlier teachings of Paul on the subject of sexuality (Mitchell, 1991:39-60). The interest of the text is not necessarily on sexual asceticism (Deming, 1995:3-4) but on a ‘good-faith’ effort in response to Paul’s call for holiness, thus insisting, but mistakenly, on the maxim that a man should not touch *any* woman (cf. Sampley, 2005). Following the social convention of his time, Paul accepts the maxim (7:1b) only to qualify it (7:2-7), and then offers his own position on the issue (7:25). Paul, however, goes further to relate the subject as it affects people of different marital status – husbands and wives, widowers and widows, married but at the verge of divorcing, those engaged in mixed marriage, the virgin and unmarried. Paul also talks about few other issues relating to marriage and family life such as cares, desire and self-control as well as the possibility of remarriage by widows.

2.0 Objective

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Discuss the basic hermeneutic tools for Paul’s teaching on marriage and family
- Discover that the call to married life as one of the most authentic ways of witness to Christ
- Know how and why Paul is strongly opposed to divorce and remarriage
- Appreciate the positive role of human sexuality in marriage and family
- Recognise the place of religion and faith in the growth of married life
- Identify the significant difference between the marriage of baptised persons and the unbaptised persons.

3.1 Basic hermeneutic tools for Paul's teaching on marriage

The question on how best to handle Paul and his teachings has been one of the major contention in biblical studies. But Sampley (2005) is able to inform us that Paul's imminent expectation of the end of the ages, as witnessed in his other correspondences (cf. 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Rom. 13:11-14), is fundamental to our understanding of his teachings, above all, his arguments and advice in 1 Cor. 7. According to him, Paul is uniformly and steadfastly convinced that God is on the brink of finishing up the creation's restoration, already begun in Christ's death and resurrection. So Paul reminds the Corinthians in his teaching that "the form of this world is passing away" (v.31); that "the time has grown short" (v.29); of "the impending crisis" or "present distress" (v.26; cf. 1 Thess. 3:3). For him, the present social structures that believers encounter in the world around them are temporally bound and determined to annihilation beyond the parousia; in short they are already configured to an eschatological verdict. Consequently, believers should remain the way they are (7:20, 24, 26, 38, 40), and to act only in line with God's culminating of history. Paul also believes that one can live out one's faith in whatever circumstance one finds oneself, hence the married and unmarried, the slaves and the freed are not to be distracted by the social structures of this fading world.

You can now take note of these two other factors that bear on Paul's interpretation of realities:

- i. His understanding of life of faith as a walk, that is, as a growth from being a baby to maturity; and
- ii. His Cynic/Stoic influence of "what really matters" (cf. Rom. 8:35-39; 14:8; Phil 1:10; 4:10-13; Gal 3:28) and what does not matter" or what matters less" or "not at all."

Along the line of his Stoic idea of "preferreds" and "not-preferreds" (Sampley, 2005), Paul prioritizes competing factors. In other words, if one is confronted with a situation, the first attitude is judge whether it matters or it does not. If it matters, then special attention is given to it. But it does not matter (or matter less or not at all), then an attitude of indifference could be developed towards that. But if one must make a choice between not-matter subjects, one is then forced to develop the principle of "preferreds" and not-preferreds (or less preferreds).

So, what matters for Paul is "Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2) and that one is "blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:24). Consequently, one has to maximize one's devotion to the Lord (v.35), and also minimizes cares and anxieties (v.32). Among the "not-matters" is the "indifference" "to-be-married" and "not-to-be-married." But since every human is condemned to make a choice between the two competing values of indifferent matters ("to-be-married" and "not-to-be-married), Paul has to apply the principle of "preferreds" and "not-preferreds" or ("less-preferred"). For Paul, therefore, one value could be preferred to another, without necessarily negating the less-preferred. For same reason, Paul argues with regard to marriage as an indifferent matter, that is, whether married or not-married, it has no direct or necessary bearing on one's relationship with God (what matters). A married or an unmarried person can be in good or bad relationship with God.

That notwithstanding, Paul does have a "preferred" based on what minimizes anxiety and maximizes devotion to God (7:32-35) as he sets his mind on the imminent apocalyptic eschatology (7:26-31, 36-38). You have to take note at this juncture that Paul's identification of marriage as an indifferent matter does not diminish the importance of marriage, nor does it suggest that marriage is outside the range of moral consideration. It places marriage rather in perspective of only a relative but not ultimate value.

Self-assessment exercise

1. What is the ultimate value for Paul in relation to his discussion of marriage in 1 Cor. 7?
2. What are the major philosophies that could have influenced Paul in his treatment of married life and sexuality in 1 Cor. 7?

3.2 Christian husbands, Christian wives (1 Cor. 7:1-7)

You can still remember our earlier observation that in Paul's world of indifferent matters, there lies a scale of preference ranging from 'preferreds', to 'less-' and 'not-preferreds'. Again, that the determining factors for the preferreds is based on what minimizes anxiety and maximizes devotion to God within the context of the imminent apocalyptic eschatology. It is also important for you to note that *pornei, a* is distasteful for Paul because it impairs human relationship with God, hence it must be avoided. Paul proceeds from this to argue that the *preferred* would have been not to touch a woman, but for *porneia*, not only that the man should have his own wife (7:2a), the woman should also have her own husband (7:2b). In other words, sexuality within marriage is not only proper but also encouraged as a way of avoiding *pornei, a*.

Paul also depicts marriage as a relationship in which husbands and wives have equal standing and equal authority over the body of the other. He insists that none of the parties should deny the other sex except by mutual consent of both parties and for a higher value. But he equally warns that the period should not be unnecessarily prolong to avoid Satan taking advantage of any lack of self-control (v.6). So within the married life sexual intercourse is the 'normal', temporary abstinence is only a concession (*suggnw, mh*), which must be based on mutual agreement (vv.5-6).

Paul concludes the address to the married Christian couples with a 'preferred'. He offers his own his own model of life – celibacy – as indeed the preferred. He is fully aware not only that this is a special charisma, a gift (by God, understood) of abstinence, to him but also not practicable for most. The question then is what can we learn from Paul in his instruction to married Christian couples?

Paul comes up with several new ideas concerning marriage:

- i. He does not restrict his focus to what men should do, but also women;
- ii. He affirms that sexuality in marriage is not only appropriate but necessary for proper self-control;
- iii. He treats men and women even-handed, and insists that a fundamental reciprocity should be present in their exercise of their sexuality and in their deciding when to have intercourse and when to abstain;
- iv. Celibacy should be understood as charisma, for which not every person may so be gifted and disposed, and therefore should not be universalised. However, it remains the 'preferred'.
- v. Paul establishes the notion that believers' moral reasoning may result in a variety of acceptable responses ranging from "better" to "good," from preferable to permissible.
- vi. Interesting for us also is the assertions about the woman's having authority over the man's body and the man's having authority over the woman's body give a modern Christian couple an opportunity to discuss and evaluate their practice not only of who is allowed or expected to initiate sexual intercourse but also of how authority is shared in other family decisions and practices.
- vii. Above all, Paul's view of 'shared authority' among married couples honours both the needs and the rights, as well as the competence of each sexual partner within the bond of one family. And by extrapolation, wives and husbands could work at honouring one another's needs and rights in all aspects of their shared lives.

Self-assessment exercise

1. What do you think could have made Paul to be so much upset of *pornei, a*?
2. Why do you think that celibacy counts for Paul as the '*preferred*'?
3. State some of the practical implications of Paul's teaching on marriage, sexuality and family life in 1 Cor. 7:2-7?

3.3 Widows and widowers (1 Cor. 7:8-9)

Paul is also very much interest about the affairs of the widows (*ch, rai*) and widowers (*av, gamoi,*), especially as it relates to their life after the first marriage (vv.8-9). He comes up first with the 'preferred', that is celibacy (v.8; cf. also v.7). Then he also offers a

concession as the less-preferred, that is, marry if you cannot control yourself (v.9). In other words, celibacy is the preferred for widows and widowers (v.8), remarriage is the less-preferred and a loss of self-control or a burning with sexual desire is the not-preferred (v.9). You can see that Paul operates with a notion of what is best but also acknowledges that not everyone has the capacity to attain the best. In other words, there is more than one way of achieving a goal, although some ways are preferred to others.

You may see some difference between Paul and Matthew in their interpretation of the scope of celibacy within the life of the church. Matthew (19:12) gives greater allowance for celibacy as part of the life of the church, to which many are called. But for Paul (v.7) it is for the minority who “can” (v. 12) do this because “it is given” to them by God (v. 11) (Boring, 2005).

Self-assessment exercise

1. What are the preferred, less-preferred and not-preferred offered by Paul to the widows and widowers?

3.4 Married Christian couples and divorced (1 Cor. 7:10-11)

Paul speaks about divorce between married Christian couples. His teaching is that “A wife should not separate from her husband ... and a husband should not divorce his wife” (vv.10-11). Paul pointedly argues that the teaching is not his but Jesus’, and probably gotten from the apostolic tradition, with which the evangelists could have shared in a later period (cf. Mark 10:2-5; Matt 5:31-32; 19:9; Luke 16:18).

We have equally observed in the synoptic gospels that in Jewish tradition a man can divorce his wife (Deut. 24:1-4) for almost any reason, but a wife has no right for such. But Roman law and practice allows either men or women to institute divorce (Corcopino, 1940). The Corinth community, as a Roman colony city with enormous Jewish influence, follows the Roman laws in all matters but with Jewish conscience. For this reason, a Corinthian wife or husband can initiate divorce or separation. This reality is known to most of the Corinthian congregation. So, the concession granted in v.11 accommodates the rights of women under Roman colonial law (Sampley, 2005). But Paul’s teaching of the higher good as allowing no divorce affirms his understanding of Jesus’ teaching. It runs counter to both the Roman law and orthodox Jewish practice.

Your attention is also drawn at this point to Paul’s choice of words: “divorce” (*avfi, hmi*, v.11) for the husband, “separation” (*cwri, zw*, v.10) for the wife, which has generated a lot of controversies (cf. Lawler, 1985). But we consider them here as synonym. They depict the same social reality. The married partners are no longer together literally or metaphorically. It is a marriage situation which Paul not only distaste but even condemned. Paul, therefore, sets the same high standard for wife and husband by urging both parties better not to divorce. But if they should, the bitter concession for Paul is that once separation there could be no remarriage (v.11) to a third party.

Paul’s position reflects the life of the primitive church. It does happen that wives are sent away or abandoned, but remarriage is impossible for both parties. Paul argues from the *logion* of Jesus (vv.10-11). It is equally clear that the Jewish concept of “repudiation,” is in Christian circles divided by Christ’s radical ban, so that repudiation on the ground of *porneia* is still permissible, but without the possibility of remarriage. This is further confirmed by Hermas and the whole of the sub-apostolic practice of the church (Schillebeeckx, 1965).

You can now observe that the interpolation in Matthew is a “saving clause” which refers only to the “sending away” of wives, and not necessarily to “remarriage.” As far as its content is concerned, the implication in Matt. 19:9 is the same as that of the less problematical

interpolation in Matt. 5:32. The meaning of Matt. 19:9 is, however, far less obvious, in view of the fact that the content of Matt. 5:32 is closely bound up in 19:9 with an affirmation of remarriage. Nonetheless, the idea is clearly expressed that repudiation on rounds of adultery can be understood, even if remarriage is out of the question.

As a matter of emphasis, Paul views any divorce as less than the ideal by the use of the conditional ‘if’ (eva.n, v.11). That is to say, Paul adheres to Jesus’ pronouncement on divorce as the ‘preferreds’. But he has also the ‘less-preferred’ as separation and ‘not-at-all-preferred’ as remarriage. The post-separation options considered by Paul are therefore “remain unmarried” and “be reconciled” (v.11). Reconciliation of humans to God and of people to people is at the heart of the gospel for Paul (2 Cor. 5:14-21). So as Paul weighs the possible alternatives for divorced people, he quite naturally thinks of reconciliation.

Self-assessment exercise

1. Can you make a clear distinction between “separation” (cwri, zw, v.10) and “divorce” (avfi, hmi, v.11)? Do you think that your analysis agrees with the readings in 1 Cor. 7:10 and 11?
2. Identify the interplay of Jewish and Roman influence in the argument of Paul in vv.10-11?

3.5 Married Christian and unbelieving Partner (1 Cor. 7:12-16)

Paul counsels Christians, who have unbelieving partners. He is clear on the teaching as his, and not of Jesus’ tradition (v.12). He draws on other resources and convictions:

- i. Paul extends Jesus’ teaching against divorce by urging the believing spouses not to initiate divorce against the unbelieving spouses, if the latter are willing to remain married. Can you now see the difference between the marriage relationship of married Christian couple and that of a Christian with non-believer? It may interest you to observe that Paul provides us with an exception IN terms of the indissolubility of marriage. The conclusion is that the absolute indissolubility of marriage is applicable only to Christian marriage (Schillebeeckx, 1965).
- ii. That notwithstanding, Paul does countenance divorce in such mixed marriages as less than the ideal. In other words Paul affirms the validity of mixed marriage, and reflects on equality of partners in such marriage just as in marriage between believers.
- iii. Divorce is only allowed at the instance of the unbelieving spouse (v.15) irrespective sex (vv.12, 14a and 13, 14b).
- iv. Paul view the mixed marriage relationship in positive light. He argues that the believing spouse *can* be an instrument of holiness, and probably salvation to the unbelieving partner (v.14). That is to say, Paul sees human as agent of holiness.
- v. Paul seems also to suggest that holiness is infectious, and can go a long way to manifest itself in marriage and family bond. Thus holiness can be transmitted through the believing party to the children born out from such marriage.
- vi. Paul affirms that “God has called us into peace” (v.15; cf. 14:33). According to Sampley (2005), the laconic declaration that “God has called us to peace” (v.15) is given with incontrovertible force, no defence and no elaboration. The usage suggests that it is a foundational claim that Paul presumes his audience to know and affirm (also 14:33).

A take-home for you here is that *peace-making* and *reconciliation* are at the heart of the gospel, and therefore of the life of faith (2 Cor. 5:14-21; cf. Matt. 5:9; Eph. 4:1-6). Marriage between a believer and an unbeliever is an extreme test of the range of the commitment to peace. The call to peace-making is not restricted to expression between believers alone, but also is the way believers should relate to unbelievers. It is the same commitment to reconciliation as expressed in v.11. The moral guidance from the conviction is that believers who are able to avoid divorce are called to peace. But if peace can *only* be achieved through divorce (between a believing and non-believing parties), then grant divorce to them as a ministration of God’s peace.

That notwithstanding, the persistent commitment to restoring relationships, to affirming peace and reconciliation remains dominant. In the light of this it is not surprising that Jesus,

and Paul aligning himself to the tradition of Jesus, should counsel against divorce. Neither is it surprising that each of the noted texts reckons, for different reasons that separation sometimes occurs, and we should do everything to encourage reconciliation, not just in disputed marriages but in all aspects of life.

A further reflection on the portrait of marriage and family as presented to us by Paul shows that marriage is a mutually sanctifying growth in relationship. Each marriage partner seeks the best for the other, encourages the other, and consoles the other when appropriate; that is love put into action. Also children as fruit of and gift to marriage shares automatically in this relationship, which is anchored in the Trinitarian blessings. Children are therefore set apart as God's love that genders greater commitment in married life. In other words, all the relationships in the family are not just private transactions. Family relationship is communal.

Self-assessment exercise

1. What are the basic lessons that could be drawn from the counsel of Paul to the married Christian and unbelieving couple in 1 Cor 7:12-16?
2. What are the possible implications of Paul's call to peace-making in married life (1 Cor. 7:15)?
3. What do you understand by the statement "marriage seeks the best for the other partner?"

3.6 Betrothed and unmarried (1 Cor. 7:36-38)

Paul also includes in his discussion the unmarried, who are betrothed or engaged. Incidentally, he uses the same structure of argument of the "proper" or "fitting" (*eusch, mon*) relation to the Lord as found in the early part of the letter (v.35). Thus Paul finds that if an engaged man considers that he is "behaving dishonourably" or "improperly" (*avschmone, w*) toward his betrothed, if his passions are strong (cf. the same consideration in v.9), then "let them marry" (v.36). For such a person to marry is not to sin (v.36; cf. v.28). But the ideal for Paul is to "Remain as you are," provided you are "resolved," "under no compulsion," "master of your own desire" and "self-determined." Such a person in our own terms must be a matured believer with an integrated moral life. He is a person whose "head is screwed on straight," who is centred on a core of established values. Neither necessity nor compulsion is a primary factor in the person's moral decision. And the person's choices are not guided by the passions (anger, avarice, lust, etc.). Consequently, whether you are married or not, you will do well provided the above conditions are met. So, each does "well"; both responses – *to-marry* and *not-to-marry* – are within the scope of proper moral comportment for believers. Nevertheless, Paul's predilection for "remaining as you are" as a means of maximizing devotion to the Lord emerges as a "better" option: "The one who does not marry does better" (v.38). To marry is acceptable, but it is an accommodation limited to self-control and involves a change in social status—and on both counts is less preferred to "staying as you are."

Self-assessment exercise

1. What could be the possible reason for Paul to insist that one better remains the way he is called?
2. Do you think that the unmarried has any advantage over the married, or vice versa?

3.7 Dissolubility of inter-faith marriage

From our discussion, you have noticed that Paul can give in easier to the "separation" of a Christian and an unbeliever, but may be very reluctant to grant the same condition to Christian couples. But there is still a challenge. How do we understand "separation"? Do we understand it in the Jewish sense of the dissolution of marriage, or in the new Christian sense of separation without remarriage?

In the first place, we should be concerned with the so-called "Pauline privilege" which conferred preferential legal treatment upon the believing party; in the second place, it is probable that Paul is generalising from his own experience. Certainly, Paul says, in the case of marriage between two Christians (1 Cor. 7:10-11), that those who are in fact separated are not permitted to remarry. This assertion is based on Christ's own dictum. In the case of a

mixed marriage, to which Paul is referring in 1 Cor. 7:12-16, he is speaking on his own, however with apostolic authority which still has some bearing with the tradition of Jesus, and thus permits separation. The contrast between the arguments of 1 Cor. 7:10-11 and 1 Cor. 7:12-16, therefore, shows that in the latter "separation" implies the dissolution of the marriage (1 Cor. 7:15). Although Paul does not say explicitly that the baptized party in the second argument is permitted to remarry after separation, this is also implied in the text.

Paul seems also to suggest that communion *in* faith is very central to marriage, and forms such an indispensable element in its constitution. Consequently, the dissolution of marriage between a Christian and unbeliever partner is only allowed from the side of unbeliever, and justified on grounds of the principle of marriage itself, that is, the biblical "one flesh," the living communion which is peace. In other words, there must have been a kind of *error substantialis* (fundamental mistake) in the conclusion of the contract between the Christian and unbeliever, if the unbelieving partner no longer desire to live with a believer in marriage. Paul does not say that this marriage is dissolved by subsequent remarriage," but that this marriage dissolves itself because of the factual situation.

It is a biblical datum that the marriage of a baptised person has a deeper and more radical meaning than the marriage of an unbaptised person, although the latter is certainly a real marriage. For, whereas marriage is formally indissoluble as far as a baptised person is concerned, it is dissoluble as far as an unbaptized person is concerned. (Even the marriage of a baptized person is thus indirectly dissoluble, via the unbaptized party.) The basis of absolute indissolubility is therefore to be found in Christian baptism. And so "the will of the Creator" to which Christ referred means that marriage, as a human reality, is a reality that includes a religious relationship with God – the saving relationship that is concretely provided in Christ-and thus formally falls to the share of man by faith and baptism.

Self-assessment exercise

1. Do you agree that communion *in* faith is very central to marriage and forms an indispensable element in its constitution? What are some of the socio-religious implications subscribing to such opinion?
2. What is the fundamental difference between the marriage of baptised persons, and mixed marriage?

3.8 Paul's opposition of post-conversion Christian marriage with unbeliever

In the preceding sections we have considered Paul's views on the marriages of Gentiles who were already married before one of the two partners became converted to Christianity. "Mixed marriages" of this kind are, of course, inevitable in the earliest Christian period, and Paul has only good to say of them. His reaction to "mixed marriages" contracted by those who are already baptized with non-Christians is quite different. Thus Paul warns: Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership have righteousness and iniquity; or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? ... What agreement has the temple of God with idols: For we are the temple of the living God (2 Cor. 6:14-16).

You may be astonished at such stance that presents the world in black-and-white with the note of triumph at the end: Paul, however, sees things in a totally different light. For him the central fact of existence is that the mystery of Christ has appeared and that redemption has come in Jesus. The "saints" are those who have turned to Christ in faith and baptism. Everything else fades into insignificance beside the explicit acknowledgement of this central fact of salvation. Christianity really appears to the Gentile world of that time as a sun in the darkness – a phenomenon that "set the world on its head," as the Gentiles themselves put it: *hoi ten oikoumenen anastatosantes* (Acts 17:6), surely a remarkable definition of Christians as the people who "set the world in an uproar." Both Gentiles and Christians themselves feel that Christianity is something quite unique. And indeed, it is unique, even today. What Paul said then is still applicable today. The church still regards a marriage with an unbaptised person as invalid in principle. It is not a marriage unless the impediment to marriage has been removed by an ecclesiastical dispensation, and even then it is still dissoluble.

Self-assessment exercise

1. Do you think that marriage between a Christian and non-Christian should be encouraged? Give reasons for your position.

2. What is the relationship between marriage and Christ's redemptive love?

3.9 "Marriage in the Lord"

Towards the affairs of this world and human status in the world is that human should remain as they are at the point of becoming Christians and allow the things of this world to take their course (vv.17, 20). But it good for you to understand the position of Paul and his disciples, otherwise they may be falsely accused of social insensitivity towards *human social structures and patterns of relation* including marriage. The Pauline (Paul and his disciples) insistence is that Christian understanding of "social role" is better defined "as to the Lord" (Eph. 5:22) or "in the Lord" (Col. 3:18). Even the obedience of Christian children is placed "in the Lord," as if they are obeying Christ (Col. 3:20). Thus, "marriage in the Lord," is human marriage raised to sacrament. The new status allows it to operate in the sphere of salvation. 1 Cor. 7:39 carries some practical implication that the Christian marriage experience includes yet transcends secular realities. It ends in obedience "in the Lord" in a deeper sense than that of the slave to his master.

You may theologically argue that marriage is Christ's redemptive love is symbolically represented and made actual and present in the personal relationship of marriage. That is to say, Christ's love is made present by married Christians as married persons, in their state of being married and in their conjugal relationships as are experienced within the pattern of social behaviour prevailing at the time. Experience of marriage "in the Lord" is therefore not an addition to the structure of secular marriage but the Christianisation of its natural and human interrelationships. Thus Christian marriage is not on structure but in the intrinsic; it is something within the scope of the "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15). It is an inward transformation in the spirit of *agape*, which deriving from grace permeates the relationship of ordinary, secular marriage (1 Cor. 7:4-5; also Col. 3:19; Eph. 5:25).

Our conclusion is that:

- i. "Marriage in the Lord" presupposes and emphasises the ordinary, secular reality of marriage, and at the same time explicit states that this secular reality is inwardly taken up into the sphere of salvation. So marriage cannot be seen either in Paul or in the New Testament as a necessary evil or inferior form of Christian life (contra. Preisker, 1927; Bultmann, 1958). It is an authentic form of Christian witness, and therefore must be defend against any threat.
- ii. Religious celibacy in the NT does not in any way conditions the historical underrating of marriage, neither does marriage appreciate at the expense of Christian celibacy. We say the very opposite: the greater the decline in Christian celibacy, the less Christian marriage is valued. In other words, whenever the vocation of celibacy is underrated, that of marriage is underrated too (Schillebeeckx, 1965).

Self-assessment exercise

1. What you understand by "marriage in the Lord?"
2. Assess Paul's claim that all should remain the way they are called in the context of marriage?
3. How is marriage authentic form of Christian witness to the gospel of Christ?
4. Discuss the relationship between celibacy and married life.

4.0 Conclusion

Paul establishes what he thinks is the ideal in Christian life, how he thinks things ought to be, and he depicts that as the goal or paradigm toward which people ought to aim and with regard to which people should order their lives. Yet alongside each such elevated goal-setting, Paul recognizes that, for various reasons, people may not be able to achieve the ideal. He is

therefore careful to make room for full participation in the fellowship of those who, for whatever reason, may not be able to hit the heights. Thus, Paul concludes that it would be in the spirit of Jesus' word on marriage for a Christian whose non-Christian spouse had divorced him or her to remarry (1 Cor. 7:15), but the same is not, and ought not to be for Christian spouses. In principle, Paul thinks that Christians should not seek divorce or separation. But by remaining unmarried after their divorce, a Christian couple leaves open the possibility of their reconciliation (1 Cor. 7:10-11)." (Perkin, 2005).

5.0 Summary

We have seen that marriage is an authentic form of Christian witness, and therefore must be defend against any threat. We also established from Paul's teaching that celibacy is another form of authentic witness.

We argued that for us to appreciate the profound teaching of Paul on marriage, sexuality and family life, there are three principal points to be taken serious: (i) the imminent expectation of the end of the ages, (ii) the understanding of faith as a dynamic reality, and (iii) the influence cynic/stoic philosophy. It is based on the cynic/stoic principle that Paul considers *married* and *not-married* as *indifferent matters*. But within the world of the indifferent matters, if one much choose, Paul gives preference to *not-married* because it minimizes anxiety and maximizes devotion to God (7:32-35). Yet, whether married or not-married, one has not sinned. But the unanswered question is whether as we will agree with Paul that such value (married life) will be left in the list of *indifferent matters*.

Paul's integral approach to the issue of marriage becomes clearer, especially in his consideration of sexuality as part of married life, and his insistence that none of the married partners should deny the other of it. He thus stresses the value of honour, respect, love and loyal between husband and wife as constituting the nutrients of marriage. In this respect both the male and female partners are considered equal. While Paul encourages married couples to live up to their marital life, he still presents celibacy as the *preferred*.

Paul is not hesitant to recommend to the widows and widowers to marry if they cannot keep to celibate life, bearing in mind that celibacy is the *preferred*. The same piece of advice goes to the unmarried and betrothed. To marry is not to sin. Paul also warns strongly against divorce based on his conviction on the teachings of Jesus. This stands as a critique against both the Roman law and orthodox Jewish practice. Paul, however, insists that wherever divorce is accommodated as a necessary evil, then the only but bitter concession is for the Christian parties to remain single and never to remarry. At this point, he positively demonstrates his strong belief in the reconciliation and the restoration of peace. For him, in whatever life a Christian chooses, peace with the Lord and the self is of utmost importance.

Paul also recognises a mixed marriage, but treats it unpaired to the Christian marriage, yet without denying that both are real. Whereas marriage is formally indissoluble as far as a baptised person is concerned, it is dissoluble as far as an unbaptized person is concerned. In other words, divorce is allowed in mixed marriage but only on condition that it is at the instance of the unbelieving partner.

6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment

1. How does Paul's understanding of the imminent apocalyptic eschatology influence his evaluation of marriage and sexuality in 1 Cor. 7?
2. What do you understand by the statement that marriage in Paul is only of relative but not ultimate value?
3. What is the difference between Paul and Matthew on scope of celibacy within the life of the Church? How do you interpret that reality in the light of African church?

4. Do you agree that communion *in* faith is very central to marriage and forms an indispensable element in its constitution? What are some of the socio-religious implications subscribing to such opinion?

5. Do you think that marriage between a Christian and non-Christian should be encouraged? Give reasons for your position.

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1.0 Introduction

You have already seen in the previous discussion how the prophets used the image of marriage as a means of revealing Yahweh's covenant of grace with the people of Israel. In this unit, we shall review, and also expand the theology of marriage in the New Testament by appealing to the Letters, especially Ephesians. The understanding of marriage as a prophetic symbol, an image of a mutually faithful covenant relationship continues. However, there is slight change. It is a change on the dramatis personae, from Yahweh-Israel to Christ-Church. Here the image of the relationship between the Christ and the new Israel, his church (Lawler, 2001; 1985) is of utmost interest. Paying special attention to this shift gives you also some insight why Christians could insist on love, mutual giving and equality in marriage relationship; for what happens in the Christ-Church relationship, ought also to be the case in husband-wife relationship. We shall finally understand why both are of great mystery.

2.0 Objective

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Identify some of the images used in the NT to describe marriage
- Discuss the difference between the use of marriage symbol in the Old Testament and the New Testament.
- Make a connection between the Jewish marriage custom and the New Testament theology of marriage
- Recognise the fundamental equality in marriage partnership, and the responsibility of a Christian husband and a Christian wife to one another.
- Evaluate the traditional and new understanding of permanence and indissolubility in marriage
- Appreciate the reason why Christians insist that marriage is a mystery.

3.0 Main Content**3.1 The Image of marriage in the New Testament**

It will be of importance for you to note here, that any discussion on the image of marriage in the New Testament should take into consideration the following points:

i. In the New Testament marriage is used primarily as a means of revealing the eschatological character of the kingdom of God. Christians together with Christ are to celebrate the eternal wedding feast with God (cf. Rev. 18:23; 19:7-9; 22:17. Also Matt. 22:2-14; 25:1-12; Mk. 2:19; Lk. 14:8, 16-24; 2 Cor. 11:2-3). You will see here that the idea of wedding feast frames and dominates almost all parables associated with the kingdom of God/heaven.

ii. You will discover also that the Greek term *gamos* (marriage) in NT, with only two exceptions (Heb. 13:4; Jn. 2:1-2), relates to marriage between humans. This is used to denote the eschatological wedding of Christ and his redeemed, irrespective whether married, single or celibate.

iii. The notion of “becoming one” or that “the two shall become one flesh” which goes back to the Genesis tradition (2:24) is a backdrop of the image of the eschatological wedding-feast of the Book of Revelation (cf. Rev. 21). The same idea is linked to that of oneness and unity in Eph. 5:22-33 but in the context of the church on earth (Schillebeeckx, 1965).

iv. We may also understand the presence of Christ at wedding feast at Cana (Jn. 2:1-11) in the prophetic tradition as an “image-in-action”. It is the inauguration of the messianic wedding feast here on earth. You can see that it is one of the grounds to appreciate the saving significance of marriage, which is already present in Israel as an image of God’s covenant of grace. So, the presence of Jesus at Cana prophetically portrays the kingdom of God as a heavenly wedding feast.

v. Christ himself is repeatedly addressed as the “bridegroom” in the New Testament (Matt. 9:15; Mk. 2:19; Lk. 5:34-35; 12:35-36; Jn. 3:29). That is to say, just as woman is taken from the rib of man to form “one life” with man (Gen. 2:24), so the church is founded from the open wound in Christ’s side (Jn. 19:34-37). As Augustine (In John Evang., Tr. 9, no. 10, [Pl 35, 1463] puts it: “Christ died so that the church might be born.”

Self-assessment exercise

1. Do you agree with the statement that marriage as presented in the New Testament is predominantly a symbol and not the real? What is then the real? What relationship has the image of marriage to do with the real?

2. Describe the ways the covenant relationship between Christ and his church is expressed in the New Testament.

3.2 The bridal page as marriage symbol

Some New Testament texts convey the impression that the eschatological wedding feast has already begun in the church here on earth but awaits fulfilment at the end of time. This we shall reflect upon under three main points:

i. In Christ’s wedding-feast with his eschatological community, the Fourth Gospel regards John the Baptist as the “bridal page,” the “friend of the bride-groom” (Jn. 3:19) or *sosebin* who prepares the marriage ceremonies and conducts them, and who above all leads the bride in the bridal procession to the husband’s house. This “page of honour” also prepares the bridal bath and helps the bride to array herself for the wedding.

ii. Similarly, according to 2 Cor. 11:2, Paul is as apostle, the bridal page, who espouses those who believe in Christ to him and presents them to Christ.

iii. In Jewish exegesis there is a tradition which compares Yahweh’s “presenting” of Eve to Adam (Gen. 2:22) with the function performed by the bridal page at a Jewish marriage ceremony. This image is probably taken over by John (Jn. 3:39), just as Paul adapts it in 2 Cor. 11:2. We find the same adaption in Eph. 5:21-33, in which Christ fulfils the functions both of the bridegroom and of the bridal page, thus Paul insisting here that Christ himself (*autos*) presents the bride, the church to himself (*heautoi*).

Self-assessment exercise

1. What is the role of the bridal page?

2. Do you think that John the Baptist fits well in the picture of the bridal page? Give reasons for your position.

3. What role is Paul actually playing as a bridal page for Christ?

3.3 Christian marriage: A critique of the traditional household code

You may not be surprised to observe that the reference to marriage in Ephesians falls within the household codes with parallel readings that invoke Christ either the Lord to whom obedience is paid (Col. 3:18--4:13, esp. v.23) or as the model in suffering unjust treatment (1 Pet 2:13-3:7; esp. 2:18-25). The passage in which the writer of Ephesians offers his view of marriage (Eph.5:21-33) is situated within a larger context (Eph.5:21-6:9) which sets forth a list of household duties that exist within a family at that time. This list is addressed to wives (Eph.5:22), husbands (Eph.5:25), children (Eph.6:1), fathers (Eph.6:4), slaves (Eph.6:5), and masters (Eph.6:9). However, our interest is on what is said of the pair, wife/husband.

In Ephesians, the Christ-and-church application probably originates as an example of subordination (Eph. 5:23-24) in which the harmonious governing of the household and ability to rule rest closely on the male partner (Balch, 1981). But you should not lose sight of the strange injunction, which is found only in Ephesians: "Because you fear Christ subordinate yourselves to one another" (cf. Barth, 1974, p. 607). Surprisingly, the writer takes over the household list from traditional material, but critiques it in 5:21. His critique challenges the absolute authority of individuals or group over others, of husbands, for instance, over wives, of fathers over children, of masters over slaves (Lawler, 2001; 1985).

The pastoral letter (Ephesians) establishes the basic attitude required of all Christians. It is an attitude of giving way or of mutual obedience. It is an attitude which challenges not only the wives, children, and slaves, but also the husbands, fathers, and masters (Barth, 1974). Mutual submission is an attitude of all Christians, because the root is that they "fear Christ" (cf. Schlier, 1962; Sampley, 1971), and this fear is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 1:5; 9:10; 15:33; Ps. 111:10). It is a mutual giving way, which is required of all Christians, even of husbands and wives as they seek holiness together in marriage, and even in spite of traditional family relationships which gives husbands some advantage to lord it over their wives (Lawler, 2001; 1985).

Consequently, it comes as no surprise that a Christian wife is to give way to her husband, "as to the Lord" (Eph.5:22). What does come as a surprise will be the fixed male attitude that sees the husband as supreme lord and master of his wife and appeals to Ephesians 5:22-23 to ground and sustain that un-Christian (superior) attitude. But the truth as you can see with me is that a husband is to give way to his wife. That ensues from the general instruction that Christians are brothers and sisters, and are to give way to one another. It arises also from the specific instruction about husbands. That instruction is not that "the husband is the head of the wife," but that "in the same way that the Messiah is the head of the church is the husband the head of the wife. (Barth, 1974).

3.3.1 *The husband as the head of the family*

A Christian husband's headship over his wife is in image of, and totally exemplified by, Christ's leadership over the Church. When a Christian husband understands this, he will understand the Christian responsibility he assumes toward the woman – the gift he receives in marriage as his wife (cf. Gen. 2:22-24). In a Christian marriage, spouses are required to give way mutually, not because of any inequality between them, not because of any subordination of one to the other, not because of fear, but only because they have such a personal unity that they live only for the good of that one person. Mutual giving way, mutual subordination, and mutual obedience are nothing other than total availability and responsiveness to one another so that both spouses can become one body.

The way Christ exercises headship over the church is set forth unequivocally in Mark 10:45 as a servant leadership. It is *diakonia*, service, is the Christ way of exercising authority, and our author testifies that it is thus that "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Eph. 5:25). A Christian husband, therefore, is instructed to be head over his wife by serving, giving way to, and giving himself up for her. Headship and authority modelled on those of Christ does not mean control, giving orders, making unreasonable demands, reducing another human person to the status of servant or, worse, slave to one's every whim. It means service. The Christian husband-head, as Barth (1974) lectures, becomes the first servant of his wife. It

is such a husband-head, and only such a one, that a wife is to fear (v.33b) as all Christians fear Christ (v. 21b).

The reversal technique adopts in the text (cf. vv. 22, 25 and 33) may also be of interest to you. Watch out: Verse 22 enjoins wives to be subject to their husbands and verse 25 enjoins husbands to love their wives. Verse 33 reverses that order, first commanding that husbands love their wives and then warmly wishing that wives fear their husbands. This fear is not fear of a master. Rather it is awe and reverence for loving service, and response to it in "love-as-giving way." Such love cannot be commanded by a tyrant. It is won only by a lover, as the church's love and giving way to Christ is won by a lover who gave, and continues to give, himself for her. This is the author's recipe for becoming one body, joyous giving way in response to, and for the sake of, love. It is a recipe echoed unwittingly by many a modern marriage counsellor.

But it is important to remind you once more that the love the Bible urges upon spouses is not interpersonal affection but loyalty, service, and obedience. That such love is to be mutual is read from v.21, "Be subject to one another," though it is not stated that a wife is to love her husband. But the reasons that the writer adduces for husbands to love their wives apply to all Christians as well, even those called wives!

It is also important for you to note that for Ephesians, the church now exists in holiness and glory. The church as "bride" does not depict the eschatological future as a wedding in the manner of Rev 19:5-10 (Contra Barth, 1974, p. 669). This extended description of the church as a bride prepared for the wedding stresses what has been accomplished by Christ's self-giving love. Husbands should love their wives with similar devotion. Ephesians does not imply that husbands are agents of holiness for their wives. Holiness comes to individual Christians through their incorporation into the body of Christ (Contra Mussner, 1982, p. 158). However, the audience might assume that husbands are responsible for instructing their wives in holiness (cf. 1 Cor. 14:34-35 cf. also 4Q416 frag. 2 1:6-9).

Self-assessment exercise

1. Describe the way Christ exercises his headship.
2. What do you understand by reversal technique husband-wife relationship as found in Ephesians?
3. What is so strange about the household code of Ephesian in relation to the other two similar lists in the New Testament Col. 3:18--4:1 and 1 Pet. 2:13-3:7)?

3.3.2 Why husbands must love their wives

Three reasons are offered to husbands for loving their wives, all of them basically the same: (i) "husbands should love their wives as [for the wives are] their own bodies" (v. 28a); (ii) the husband "who loves his wife loves himself" (v. 28b); (iii) "the two shall become one body" (v. 31b). There is abundant evidence in the Jewish tradition for equating a man's wife to his body (Cf. Sampley, 1971:33). But even if there is no such evidence, the sustained comparison throughout Ephesians 5:21-33 between Christ-Church and husband-wife, coupled with the frequent equation in Ephesians of church and body of Christ (Eph.1:22-23; 2:14-16; 3:6; 4:4-16; 5:22-30), clarifies both the meaning of the term *body* and the fact that it is a title of honour rather than of debasement.

It may be of interest for you to note that the idea of "a wife is like her husband's own body" is a similar sentiment expressed in Plutarch, who insists that the husband should not rule his wife in the way in which a master rules property, but in the same way that the soul directs the body (Plutarch, 142E). Also, it is often inscribed in ancient marriage contracts as the husband's obligation to provide his wife with clothing and nourishment (Gnilka, 1980).

Again, love is always essentially creative. The love of Christ brought into existence the Church and made its believers "members of his body" (v.30). In the same way, the mutual love of a husband and a wife brings such a unity between them that, in image of Christ and Church, she may be called his body and his love for her, therefore, may be called love for his body or for himself. But it is only within the creative love of marriage that, in the Genesis phrase, "the two shall become one body" (Gen. 2:24). Prior to marriage, a man did not have

this body, nor did a woman have this head. Each receives a gift in marriage, a complement neither had before, which so fulfils each of them that they are no longer two separate persons but one blood person. For each to love the other, therefore, is for each to love herself or himself.

The second reason offered to a husband for loving his wife is that "he who loves his wife loves himself" (Eph. 5:28b, 33a). Viewed within the perspective I have just elaborated, such reasoning makes sense. It makes even more Christian sense when one realizes that it is a paraphrase of the great commandment of Lev. 19:18, cited by Jesus in Mark 12:31: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." Ephesians, of course, does not say that a husband should love his neighbour as himself, but that he should so love his wife. Where, then, is the link to the great commandment? It is provided through that most beautiful and most sexual of Jewish love songs, the Song of Songs, where in the LXX version, the lover addresses his bride nine separate times as *plesion*, neighbour (1:9, 15; 2:2,10,13; 4:1,7; 5:2; 6:4). "The context of the occurrence of *plesion* in the Song of Songs confirms that *plesion* is used as a term of endearment for the bride (Sampley, 1971; Barth, 1974). Other Jewish usage further confirms that conclusion, leaving little doubt that the author of Ephesians has Lev. 19:18 in mind when instructing a husband to love his wife as himself (Lawler, 2001; 1985).

Self-assessment exercise

What are the reasons given in the text that compel husbands to love their wives? Can you remember other reasons?

3.3.3 "And the two will become one flesh" (Eph. 5:31)

The Torah and Gospel injunction to love your neighbour as yourself is also, and most strongly, applicable to marriage. It can even be retraced to the Genesis account of the bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23). As all Christians are to give way to one another, so also each is to love the other as himself or herself, including husband and wife in marriage. The paraphrase of Lev. 19:18 repeats in another form in Ephesians: husbands "love your wives," but omits the conventional "never treat them harshly" found in Col 3:19. Instead, Ephesians develops the body of *Christ motif*. Christ's self-sacrifice is a model to be imitated (Eph. 5:2 also 1:23; 2:16; 5:23, 30). The author of Ephesians insists on husbands to love their wives, as Christ loved the Church (v.33, taken together with v.25). Just as Christ cleansed, cared for, and cherished the church, his body, with which he formed "one flesh," in the same way "men should love their wives as their own bodies" (v.28). "No man ever hates his own flesh (v.29). To love one's wife is to love "one's own flesh," "as Christ does the church," his body (v.29), of which we are individually fully incorporated members. (Schillebeeckx, 1965).

Ephesians takes the "one flesh" language from the earlier instruction of Paul (cf. 1 Cor. 12), but shows no concern with the practical issues that Paul is addressing in that earlier context. As we have earlier hinted, we understand this from the Genesis text (cf. Gen. 2:24). You will find out how significant and fundamental that Old Testament text will be for marriage and family.

Remember that we have already seen how marriage image in the Old Testament tradition symbolically reveals a more profound bond of unity and affection between Yahweh and Israel. We read also from a pre-Pauline voice: "Has not he [God] made them one flesh and one life? ... So take heed to your life and let none be faithless to the wife of his youth" (Mal. 2: 15-16). You can equally see the citation from Gen 2:24 appearing in other places to bolster the prohibition of divorce (cf. Mark 10:7-8).

Such theology underscores the gracious covenant bond of unity and affection experienced in the relationship between Yahweh and Israel, which is indissoluble (cf. Hosea). The same image is seen in the revelation of a deeper dimension in marriage between Christ and his bride, the church, which is now transposed to the unity that ought to exist between man/husband and woman/wife. Ephesians does not mythologize human marriage. Instead the text limits application of the "mystery" to the relationship between Christ and the church (v.32). In other words, the love, unity and indissolubility as expressed in human marriage

may not be strictly speaking taken as a given, but should be nurtured with every good faith that marriage is love and unity.

Self-assessment exercise

1. Do you see any relationship between Genesis account of the “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” and the Ephesians’ insistent on “the two becoming one flesh?”
2. Do you think that Ephesians really says enough about the indissolubility of marriage?

3.4 Marriage as a great mystery

Another interesting aspect of the discussion is the use of the term “mystery” (*mysterion*) to qualify marriage in Ephesians. “Mystery in the context of Eph. 5:32 is understood as the hidden purposes of God (cf. 1:9; 3:3; 4:9; 6:19). The Essenes also speak of patient study of the law as learning to perceive the mysteries (4Q416 frag. 2 4:1). The legal codes of the Essene employ the allied passage from Gen 1:27 in formulating their prohibition against divorce (CD 4:21). Ephesians may be familiar with the use of Gen 2:24 in such legal material. However, its exhortation to husbands gives no indication of addressing such issues. For the gnostic interpreter the “mystery” (*mysterion*) involves liberation from the domination of the lower powers, including the god of the Genesis story. Some sects may also see the liberation as demanding ascetic renunciation of all passions and desires, since passions are then widely regarded as the means by which the demonic powers controlled human behaviour. Some Gnostics of the Valentinian School assimilate human marriage to the “bridal chamber” reunification of the soul with its counterpart (cf. *Gos. Phil.* 64, 31-32). In fact, marriage in the world is a mystery for those who have taken a wife (cf. *Gos. Phil.* 82, 2-6). It is a sacrament (Schnackenburg, 1991) and mystery, which points to something of a “deeper significance”. However, it is not an image in the heavenly union that restores the soul to freedom from passions and death. In other words, Ephesian distances itself from the Valentinian School.

"This is a great mystery," because goes back "the two shall become one body" (cf. Gen. 2:24). The mystery here refers to Christ and his church; for Christ chooses the church to be united to him, as body to head; that he loves the Church and gives himself up for her; that the Church responds to this love of Christ in fear and giving way. Christ who loves the Church, and the Church who responds in love, thus constitute one body, the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; 2:14-16; 3:6; 4:4-16; 5:22-30), just as Genesis 2:24 represents same. The writer is well aware that this meaning is not the meaning traditionally given to the text in Judaism, and he states this forthrightly (cf. 32b). But the fact that Gen. 2:24 is a central Old Testament text traditionally employed to ordain and legitimate marriage, the writer of Ephesians acknowledges the meaning that husband and wife become one body in marriage; indeed, in v. 33, he returns to and demands that husband and wife live up to this very meaning. But he goes beyond the traditional understanding of Gen. 2:24 and insinuates another that the text refers not only to the union of husband and wife in marriage, but also to the union of Christ and his church which he has underscored throughout Eph. 5:1-33. On one level, Genesis 2:24 refers to human marriage; on another level, it refers to the covenant union between Christ and his Church. It is a small step to see human marriage as prophetically representing the covenant between Christ and his Church. In its turn, the union between Christ and Church provides an ideal model for human marriage and for the mutual conduct of the spouses within it.

Self-assessment exercise

1. What are the two relationships, according to Ephesians, to which Gen. 2:24 refers?
2. Describe the relationship between Christ and his church as related to the symbol of marriage
3. What is the position of the Valentinian School on marriage? How does the letter to the Ephesians distance itself from the Valentinian School?

4. What do you understand by mystery? Relate your understanding to the institution of marriage.

4.0 Conclusion

In our discussion of marriage we come to the conclusion that marriage is a mystery, which points beyond itself to something else that transcends marriage itself. We also emphasised that the transcendental character of marriage is not found in a mystical marriage in a supernatural and divine world. Marriage points to historical facts of the divine constitution of marriage (cf. the Genesis account of the creation), and subsequently to the saving fact of the covenant of grace. This is first identified in the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel, now in the mystery of Christ; that is, the covenant relationship between Christ and his Church. This transcendence itself now leaves us with a twofold meaning: ((i) a real transcendence of marriage on the part of some Christians in celibacy dedicated to God, and (ii) the transcendence of marriage by “marrying in the Lord.”

5.0 Tutor Marked Assignment

1. Read through the text of Eph. 5:21-6:9. What is your understanding of man’s headship of the family? Is it possible in African Traditional setting?
2. Do you consider marriage as mystery? What does mystery mean for you?
3. The two great commandments in Judaism and Christianity prescribe the love of God and the love of neighbour. Reading from the letter to the Ephesians, how are these commandments to be lived in a Christian marriage?
4. What does it mean to you to say that a man and a woman become one body in marriage? Do you understand their one-body relationship to be a legal or a kind of blood relationship? If it were a kind of blood relationship, how would you go about getting a divorce?

6.0 Summary

You have seen that marriage as presented in both Old and New Testaments is predominantly symbol and not the real. However, there is a shift from Yahweh-Israel to Christ-Church.

We stressed that human marriage is not an imitation of the eternal marriage of some divine couple, but a truly human, and therefore a truly secular reality which *man* and *woman*, hold as their own as gift from their Creator-God. In the giving and receiving of this gift, the Giver, the gift and the recipient are essentially and forever bound together.

We equal spoke about the connection between the Jewish marriage custom, and its adaptation in the development of the teachings on the mission of Jesus, and also on the relationship between Christ and the Church.

We pointed out the difference between the household codes in Ephesians and other New Testament writings, which makes Ephesian special among the writings. The text of Ephesians was also seen as a critique of the Greco-Roman household codes. It is also within this text that you can see a more systematic approach to the theology of marriage and family. We concluded by arguing that the relationship between husband and wife is that of love in loyalty and service. The relationship is such that divorce is outside the question, hence marriage must be indissoluble.

We also noted that marriage is a mystery. The great mystery is that as a *man* and a *woman* become one body-person in marriage so also are Christ and his Church one body-person, and that the *one* reflects the *other*. From such thinking we will be led slowly to declare that *human* marriage is a *Christian* sacrament

We also noted that Christian marriage is both a covenant and a community of love between a man and a woman, love that does not seek its own, love that gives way, love that serves, love that is steadfastly faithful. Because it is a covenant and a community of steadfast love, it is a

permanent and exclusive state and a prophetic symbol of the steadfast covenant and community of love between Christ and his Church. The permanence of marriage we read but with caution is not necessarily a static, ontological quality, but a dynamic, living quality of human love on which marriage, both human and Christian, thrives.

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UNIT 4: Marriage in the Teachings of the Greek Fathers

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1.0 Introduction

The three last discussions centred on marriage and family in the New Testament perspective. We discovered the prominent place of marriage both as human reality and as a metaphor for the kingdom of God. We also identified that the major interest among the synoptic writers, which was divorce and remarriage as a challenging issue of their days. The fundamental question for Paul was whether marriage should be encouraged among Christians, and how to go about managing marriage. It is in Ephesians that the theology of marriage, so to speak, was really up. But in the remaining two units (UNIT 4 and UNIT 5) within this module (MODULE 2), we shall examine the notion of marriage and family among the Greek Fathers, and in the Latin tradition.

2.0 Objective

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Discuss the notion of marriage and family among the Greek
- Appreciate the value of marital life and family
- Explain why marriage is conceived as one of the means of salvation
- Describe the relationship between virginity and marital life, celibacy and marriage in the minds of the Greek Fathers

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Marriage and family as blessing

3.1.1 Family: A 'little church'

The point you should note here is that marriage right from the early days of the Church has always been conceived as a domestic church. The family is simply a church. Clement will employ the term “the *church in the house*” simply to express his admiration for the role of the family in the society and in the Church. It accentuates the importance and value of marriage and family life. Probably it may not be difficult for you find out that the hint is thanks to the scripture: “where two or three are met together in my name” (Matt. 18:20). Clement explicitly expostulates on the text and ingeniously applies it to Christian family life. A church in the house is a chaste matrimonial home of husband and wife (and also children). It is the true name of authentic Christian home, where family prayers are conducted daily, the grace before and after meals said, the hymn, the lighting of the lamps at eventide, and the complines or prayers at bed time are all conducted as a result of the divine promise and assurance.

Chrysostom highlights the same idea by using the expression “Little *Church*.” He articulates the expression to underline the dignified status of marital life, and the husband-and-wife relationship. According to him, if the husband-and-wife relationship is perfect in all matters of their dealings and activities then such a relationship surpasses all other models of governance and structure. For indeed a house is *a little Church*. And it is possible for us by becoming good husbands and wives to surpass all others (cf. Chundelikkatt, 2013).

Self-assessment exercise

Do you think that the use of the text of Matthew 18:20 by Clement to argue for “family as a little church” is correct?

3.1.2 Married couple: Crown of the other

You will notice another theological idea connected with marriage. It speaks of marital strength, honour, love and unity. The beautiful expression of Clement shows the depth and the inexpressible worthiness of marital life. According to him, the husband is the crown of his wife, and the crown of her husband is marriage. Therefore the strength, power, honour, glory and succession of marital life depend neither on the husband nor on the wife alone but on both. It is only when the relationship between the husband and his wife is firm, and the mutual intimacy between them is strong that they can crown each other. And the flower of the crown is their children, and their children’s children (Deferrari, 1954). That is to say that by perfecting the original plan of God through procreation, the couple adds to the beauty the crown placed on the head of the man as a father, and the woman as mother (cf. Chundelikkatt 2013). Clement further advises the couple to safeguard the crown and protect it from its broken nature by keeping away from unnecessary feasting and improper conduct, indecent things heard and unbecoming things seen etc. (cf. Sir. 9:9). Chrysostom adds that the inner beauty of the couple is the grace of God that brings them together, and the best possible way to crown their marital life is by respecting themselves and remaining in the word of God.

Self-assessment exercise

How do children add to the flower of the crown of glory for the married couple?

3.1.3 Husband and wife as teachers of each other

Another interesting aspect of husband-wife relationship is highlighted by Chrysostom, who argues that the husband is a teacher, a guardian and a patron to his wife. Thus God has given the man to the woman as an instructor (Schaff, 2006). The husband is responsible for the care of his wife's life. As head of the family it is his duty to watch over the daily happenings in the house, to oversee the running of the house.

The wife is also called to be a model to her husband in all things, in words and deeds; for that is the way to save him from faults and going after other malice. Home is the place which God has given to her to practise Christian virtue and to be a model to her husband in all behaviours especially in her duties to look after him and take care of him when he returns from the marketplace or wherever. The way she behaves with him influences and moulds his behaviour and teaches him to lead a good life and be faithful to his wife (Deferrari 1960).

It is the wife's undivided love that helps her admonish her husband in a pleasant and acceptable manner and to change for the better his behaviour and attitude. The unfading love also induces her to share with him at table and in bed, in the holy act of giving birth to their children, in conversations and secret thoughts and, indeed, in all that takes place in his life. She is closely related to him as the body is fastened to the head.

Self-assessment exercise

How can a wife be a teacher and instructor to her husband in a male dominated culture as Africa?

3.1.4 Fecundity: An act of co-operation with the Creator

According to Clement of Alexandria to beget children is not merely a duty to society but also a response to the divine mandate, and implicit co-operation with the Creator. Thus human continues God's creative act in a very human way through procreation and the preservation of the entire human race. Clement, therefore, calls on human to respond to this call in a positive manner in the birth of another being (Wood 1954). Stressing on the point further, Chundelikkatt (2013) holds that the inner meaning of the teaching is that conjugal relations are for the natural purpose of begetting children, and married love requires much restraint and respect (Chadwick 1966); for excess and satiety kill love.

John Chrysostom also insists on the same idea that it is the duty of the citizens to enter into the marital state of life in order to protect and safeguard the glory of their own native nation. This union is a very close union which makes two bodies into one flesh. This one flesh union is further strengthened by the birth of the children. According to Chrysostom's teaching, father, mother and child even though in outlook appear as three persons, in reality the three are one flesh. A familial Trinitarian formula is actually developed in the relationship of husband and wife and children. The new born child plays the role of a bridge to the three to become one flesh. This does not mean that if they do not get children from their union then they remain separate, rather their coming together itself has the effect of joining them together (cf. Chundelikkatt 2013).

Self-assessment exercise

1. What is the role of children in the furtherance of unity between spouses?
2. Do you think that a childless family is less blessed in the marriage between a man and a woman?

3.2 Marriage and sexuality

3.2.1 Marital life and sexual purity

The teachings of the *Twelve Apostles* exhorts that one should abstain from evil carnal desires because these lead one to fornication. It points out that obscene language and the wandering eye are the major causes for adultery. It recalls the teaching of the eighth commandment of the 'Decalogue' in an elaborate manner, "you shall not commit adultery. You shall not corrupt boys. You shall not commit fornication." It strongly condemns abortion and infanticide as

crimes: "you shall not kill an unborn child or murder a new born infant." (Glimm, 1962). The same principle of marital morality is well stressed and recalled in the letter of Barnabas in the same manner. The letter of Barnabas relates the Leviticus code of cleanliness with the sexual purity of marital life. Here the author of this letter asks each one to be aware of his fallen nature and to protect himself from sexual impurity (Glimm, 1962). He urges listeners not to sit in the company of the insolent, but to identify with those who fear the Lord, meditate in their heart on the meaning of the word which they have received, speak of and keep the commandments of the Lord, and above all, with those who know that meditation is a work of joy, hence ponder over the word of the Lord. The author emphasizes the idea that the company of the righteous person helps one both to walk in this world and at the same time to look forward to the holy age.

The fourth commandment of the *Shepherd of Hermas* vividly depicts the preservation of chastity in the marital relationship between husband and wife. First of all, the teaching ordains to guard purity and exhorts the way for safeguarding purity in life - "Let it not enter your heart to think of another man's wife nor about fornication nor any such thing. If you do you will commit serious sin. Keep your wife in mind always and you will never fall into sin." (Roberts 2006) and Theophilus instructs very well about the importance of chastity in the marital state (Grant, 1988). He points out that the holy word teaches not to sin in act, not even in thought, not even in the heart to neither think of any evil, nor look on another man's wife with one's eyes to lust after her. He warns against the danger of allowing evil thoughts to enter into the heart of a person. One cannot be careless in this regard because its after-effects are very serious and dangerous (Chundelikkatt, 2013:95. Also Roberts & Donaldson, 2006:Vol. II).

Self-assessment exercise

1. Do you agree with the teachings of the *Twelve Apostles* that evil carnal desires, obscene language and the wandering eye are the major causes for marital infidelity?
2. The teachings of the *Twelve Apostles* condemn some of the evils contrary to sexual purity. Discuss the teaching in the context of the eighth commandment of the Decalogue.

3.2.2 Sexual immorality and marriage

Athenagoras asks Christians to flee from all immoralities practised by non-Christians. He painfully explains the impure activities of non-Christians, and condemns the shameless and promiscuous acts of intercourse they indulge in. According to him, they set up a market for fornication and establish infamous resorts for the young, for every kind of vile pleasure. They do not abstain even from males, males with males committing shocking abominations, outraging all the noblest and comeliest bodies in all sorts of ways. Thus, they are dishonouring the fair workmanship of God (Roberts, & Donaldson, 2006).

Chrysostom (cited in Schaff, 2006b) condemns also the unnatural way of seeking sexual pleasures. He openly criticizes the lustful nature of sex and sexual gratification. Men go against the natural way of sexual union and go after one another. According to him, the sodomic way of approaching sexual pleasure destroys the order of nature and dishonours what God has created in a natural manner. Ephraim also holds that the one who fails to keep up the marital commitment actually denies God's grace, sharing his portion with adulterers and keeping company with fornicators. He further warns that such a person's life situation is in trouble within himself, before God and in front of others. He will then insist on the importance of marital purity by quoting from the Book of Proverbs: "Let thine own fountain be for thyself, and drink waters from thy well. Let thy fountains be for thyself alone, and let not another drink with thee" (Prov. 5: 15-17). The purity of the body is as much required as the yellow yoke. The purity of the body is required from both husband and wife: (Chundelikkatt, 2013).

Basil strongly condemns the polygamists and promulgates a canon to regulate and keep up the sanctity of marriage. The polygamists are excluded for three or four years from the communion of the Church. Their marriage is not at all considered as marriage. Moreover,

they call such a state no longer marriage, but polygamy, or, rather, a moderate fornication (Deferrari, 1995).

Self-assessment exercise

1. Discuss the teaching of Athenagoras in the context of the contemporary gay-union. Do you think that gay-union could equally be regarded as marriage and family? Give reasons to support your idea.
2. What is the view of Chrysostom on sodomy? Do you think his views has any message for the present discussions on gay union and rights?

3.3 Permanence of marriage

3.3.1 Marital union as living together

According to Chrysostom, the living together of man and woman is willed, planned and established by God Himself, who discovers that loneliness symbolizes a lack, for which man wants to make up. Hence God creates woman for completing the imperfect nature of man, that which is lacking in man. Thus the living together of man and woman perfects their nature and gives them immortality by the fruitfulness of marriage (Schaff, 2006b). Clement further instructs that a good man always inspires and improves himself with the one whom God has given to him as a suitable life partner. Every day, step by step, he grows in knowledge, life and thanksgiving, in conduct, in words and in disposition with his wife. He enjoys life with his beloved one. In other words, God Himself sees some advantage from the union of husband and wife; and living together in the bond of love is an advantage of marriage (Chundelikkatt, 2013; also Schaff, 2006b).

Self-assessment exercise

What is the view of Chrysostom on marital union as living together?

3.3.2 Marital love as total surrender of self

Chrysostom reading from Sir. 25:1 and 26:23 notes that special blessings are given to the marital life for living a happy life. For the activation and the fulfilment of this harmonious and agreeable relationship and union between the husband and the wife, the creator has made a special provision from the beginning itself. God joined the 'twain' as one. God's plan demands of them a real surrender of the self to God's will precisely in order to fulfil the love relationship between them. For him, there is no relationship in the world comparable to the unique relationship between husband and wife, which joins them to be one (Lawler, 1996). It is for the same reason that most of them are ready to give up power and arms and also ready to sacrifice their life (Messenger 1948). It is the true love developed by giving rather than receiving (Arnold, 1965).

Self-assessment exercise

Discuss the divine origin of the institution of marriage in mind of Chrystosom?

3.3.3 Indissolubility of marriage

You have earlier been informed about the Greeco-Roman and orthodox Jewish traditional practice in view of divorce and remarriage. You also know that such practices runs contrary to the teachings of Jesus and the apostles (e.g. Paul). Consequently, the Fathers of the Church, who are also much personally familiar with the culture and context of New Testament times, will confront the situation with the biblical theology of the sacrament of marriage. They will use profusely passages from the synoptic gospels (Lk 16:18; Mt 5:31-32 and 19:1-12; Mk 10:1-12), 1 Corinthians (7:10-16; and 39) and Ephesians (5:21-32) to address the issue (Chundelikkatt, 2013). Their primary interest, however, is not to present a systematic theology on marriage. Rather the scriptural passages are used primarily for a kind of pastoral and moral catechesis, as forthright statements of God's will on fidelity and permanence in marriage. They profit from the idealized husband-wife relationship pictured in Ephesians to further defend the sanctity and indissolubility of marriage.

Basil the Great and the Gregory of Nazianzen insist on the indissolubility of marriage and equality of married partners. John Chrysostom furthers the argument in his teaching on the

impermissibility of remarriage even after dismissal on reasons of adultery (cf. Matt. 5:32; 19:9). According to him, even if the marriage becomes slavery for one of the spouses they have to bear it. They have only two options: The wives may (i) reform their husbands; (ii) bear their living martyrdom patiently. And those wives who have fled their husbands need not return but there would be no remarriage until the partner is dead. Just as a consecrated virgin cannot marry because her spouse Christ lives eternally so a wife while her husband is alive. God not only created but also commanded that they join and that one man should be joined to one woman continually and never break off from her.

So, the union between a man and a woman is itself inseparable and indestructible because it is a faithfulness that comes from God (Schaff, 2006b). Through marriage a man enters into an inseparable partnership with his wife. The aim of this partnership is to beautify their life by taking part in the original plan of God. It is quite clear that the original plan of God is to keep up the preservation of the human race and the sanctity of the created world by obediently fulfilling the will of God.

Self-assessment exercise

How and for what purpose is the scriptural text relating to marriage and family is used by the Fathers of the Church?

What is the understanding of Chrysostom and Basil on divorce and remarriage? Discuss this in the context of Matt. 5:32 and Matt. 19:9.

3.4 Virginitly and marital life

We refer to Gregory of Nyssa, who publicly holds to the good of marriage. For him, marriage is blessed in every respect: good family, sufficient wealth, harmony in age, the very flower of youth, much affection, and, what is divined in each by the other, that sweet rivalry in subduing one's own will in love (Deferrari, 1966) Methodius, Bishop of Olympus in Lycia and a third century Father insists that when Jesus introduced virginity into the world, he did not altogether abrogate matrimony. Each complement the other, and both are necessary for a healthy society. Thus argues Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, "Two kinds of life have been set up in the Church of Christ, one really outstanding and exceeding the common practice of men, and the other allowing a modest use of marriage and the procreation of children (Kerns 1964). Gregory of Nazianzen goes further to depict how marital life and virginity qualify, complement and are related to each other. So vividly he describes the relationship: "Marriage is good, but I cannot say that it is superior to virginity. Do not take this hard, you who are under the yoke of marriage. 'God must be obeyed rather than men.' For the rest, see to it that you are bound to each other as by a chain, both virgins and wives, that you are one in the Lord, that each is the adornment of the other. There would not be a celibate unless there was marriage. Where would the virgin come from into this world? There would not be an honourable marriage and one that demanded respect unless it presented a virgin both to God and to this life. You the virgin, honour your mother too, for, from her you have been born. You the wife, also pay honour to her who is from a mother and who is a mother. Indeed, she is not the mother but the spouse of Christ (Kern 1964).

You have seen from the discussion that the comparison between these two states of life clearly shows that each one contributes to the other and one is closely related to the other and both aim at the same goal of life, and both have the potentials of holiness.

Self-assessment exercise

Evaluate critically the views of Greek Fathers on the good of marriage. What is his contribution to the understanding of marriage and family?

3.5 Salvific act of marriage

John Chrysostom based on Rom 13:14 teaches that marital life is given by God Himself to a person in order to protect and safeguard his or her life from the evils of this world.' In this case, marital life is not inferior to solitary life, but a holy allowance for the perfect fulfilment of the human person (cf. Attwater, 1960). Consequently, marital life is not inferior to solitary

life; and all (married and celibate) are called to the practice of the beatitudes (Chundelikkatt, 2013; also Schaff, 2006). Against the Gnostics, Clement insists that there is nothing to be marriage is ordained by God Himself who made human male and female. Although the same God has called some to celibacy as part of their vocation to a higher spiritual life, it will be wrong to regard celibates as being inherently closer to God than the married. Sexual intercourse carries no ceremonial or moral defilement. In the contrary, married life has greater opportunities that make for sanctification than the celibate, since the married confronts the daily irritations that come to him/her from the partner and the children, and from the household responsibilities (Chadwick, 1966).

4.0 Conclusion

Holding to the dignity and sanctity of marriage and family. In their defence of marriage against the real and potential threats, they appealed solemnly to the scriptures. One of the surprises, however, is the understanding and interpretation of the Matthean 'saving clause' (Matt. 5:32; 19:9). Their exegesis of the teachings of Paul and the letter to Ephesians also add to their understanding and appreciation of marriage and family. For them, the "bone and the flesh" (Gen. 2:23-24) metaphor summarises the argument and conviction in the permanence and indissolubility of marriage.

5.0 Summary

We have gradually come to the end of the lecture in this unit. You can observe that many issues have been raised, most of them bearing on our contemporary experience of marriage and family life. However, we shall avail ourselves the opportunity of highlighting few of them as a matter of summary.

- i. You know now that marriage is the foundation of family, and family in a way can correctly be described as a "little Church".
- ii. I have equally taken sometime to explain to you how the Fathers understood human fecundity as an extension of the creative act of God.
- iii. The reciprocal relationship between spouses were also highlighted with the encouragement coming from the Fathers that married partners should understand themselves as crown and teacher of each other.
- iv. You have also seen the connection between marriage and sexuality. Sexuality is allowed only within the realm of marriage. Of course, you observed how the Fathers praised fidelity, loyalty and love in married life, and upheld sexual purity, but cautioned against sexual immorality in all aspects of life.
- v. Another interesting theme that drew our attention was the firm belief of the Fathers in the permanent character of marriage. For them marriage implies living together and total surrender of self to the marriage partner. Marriage for them remained indissoluble, and therefore everything should be done by the married couples to protect the institution of marriage.
- vi. Virginity, celibacy and marriage were presented by the Fathers as complementary reality. Consequently, none of them should be underrated. Above all, marriage has the potential of witnessing to Christ and leading couples to salvation.

6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments

Following the argument in the letter of Barnabas what are some of the advantages and disadvantages of companions? Discuss this within the context of marriage and family?

What is the position of the Greek Fathers on polygamy? Could such stand be justified in the present age?

Do you think that the Greek Father will accept the idea that marriage is an inseparable partnership between a man and a woman?

What is the relationship between marriage and virginity according to the teachings of the Greek Fathers?

How correct is it to describe marriage as one of the means of salvation?

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1.0 Introduction

The challenge to marriage and family continues to manifest itself in various forms under the guise of originality and/or modernity, and the Church's unceasing struggle against such attempts cannot be glossed over. Some of these challenges and the Churches effort shall be highlighted in this lecture. You are therefore advised to pay special attention to the issues that will be coming up, for they are not only pastoral but also existential. And some of the areas of interest may include the challenges that the Church has to confront in its inception, the essential elements of marriage, the place of consent and consummation in Christian marriage, the formalisation marriage, and the human and spiritual good of marriage.

2.0 Objective

- Discuss some of the doctrinal challenges of marriage and family, and the Church effort to confront them
- Identify the essential elements of Christian marriage in the teachings and practice of the early Fathers
- Highlight the importance of consent and consummation in marriage.
- Explain briefly the formalisation of the marriage liturgy, and its positive contribution to the development of the theology of marriage and family.
- Appreciate the human-divine realities of the sacrament of marriage as celebrated in the Church.
- Discover the values inherent in marriage liturgy

3.0 Main Content

3.1 The protection of the institution of marriage and family in the early centuries

3.1.1 Individual, family and church

You have already seen that family has its origin in marriage. The founding of family is therefore the primary goal of marriage. This is the central argument of the early period. One of the implications is that the individual is, so to say, absorbed into the family at the cost of his/her own identity. It is in such a context that Christianity finds itself, and therein operates.

In other words, there is no distinction, strictly speaking, between traditional and Christian marriage.

Although the Church still recognises the sanctity of marriage, it is out of pastoral concern for marriage that certain ecclesiastical writers start making their voice to be heard in louder manner. They voice that parents should respect the freedom of their children in choosing a marriage partner, and that those who marry unbelievers should be aware that their faith might be in danger of being compromised; that the father may have the task of conducting marriage ceremonies but clerical intervention may be only desirable and not juridical. (cf. Pinheiro 1995).

Self-assessment exercise

1. What is the difference between the understanding of marriage in the early period and in the present time?
2. What are the primary concerns of early Christian writers regarding marriage?

3.1.2 Marriage as naturally good

The Church's understanding of the institution of marriage is a development from a pastoral response to particular theological and cultural challenges. Such early development is as a result of attacks on marriage from Gnosticism and Manichaeism, who hold that marriage is evil because it is part of the material universe, which itself is evil. But you already know that the orthodox attitude is to look upon marriage as inherently good and also to acknowledge a necessary link between sexual intercourse and procreation. God's command to "fill the earth" (Gen 1:28) meant that marriage has a purpose beyond itself, that of populating the world. Similarly, in defending the orthodox position the Church increasingly depends upon Stoic and neo-Platonic philosophy to explain that the sole purpose of intercourse was that of producing offspring (Nairn 1996). Though there is little concern for the sacramental nature of marriage, several Church Fathers, following 1 Cor. 7, acknowledge that marriage itself can be a way of holiness.

Self-assessment exercise

What is the teaching of Gnosticism and Manichaeism, contemporary regarding marriage? How does it contradict?

3.2 Marriage as a sacrament: Unity, permanence and indissolubility

Again, just as the Greek Fathers used material from Genesis and Ephesians to argue for the indissolubility of marriage, you will discover the same among the Latin Fathers. Among these are Zeno of Verona, Ambrosiaster, Ambrose and Augustine. Zeno combines Gen. 2:24 and Eph. 5:32 and argues in favour of the indissolubility of marriage and marital fidelity. Ambrosiaster teaches that a true understanding of the unity between husband and wife helps one to appreciate the mystery of the union of Christ and the Church; that is, the union of husband and wife is a *sacramentum* of the great mystery of the relationship between Christ and the Church. Again, husband and wife are one by nature just as Christ and the Church are one through faith. Also, Tertullian speaks of marriage as a *Sacramentum*. According to him, the promise exchanged by husband and wife is an image or a prefiguring of the relation between Christ and the Church.

Ignatius of Antioch encourages couples to contract their union with the advice of their bishop, so that their marriage is made in the Lord and not for the sake of passion. Let everything be done to the honour of God. He insists that "Nothing, in the community, should take place without the bishop for he holds the place of God in the community. That is why all that takes place with his consent is according to the Lord." (Savarimuthu, 2007). According to him, "A marriage is permanent unless it is justifiably dissolved, and so to marry again while a marriage is undissolved is to commit adultery." A Church marriage according to him is a marriage between two Christians, and only such marriage receives the blessing and consent of the heavenly Father (Chundelikkatt, 2013).

Self-assessment exercise

1. List some of the Latin Fathers who speak about the unity, permanence and indissolubility of marriage.

2. Do you agree with the teachings of the Latin Fathers that marriage is indissoluble? State some of the implications of accepting and rejecting the teachings.

3. Who among the Fathers makes the celebration of marriage a direct business of the Church? What information can you draw from this?

3.3 The teachings of Ambrose and Augustine

3.3.1 Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan

According to Ambrose, marriage is good, and has honour place along with consecrated virginity and widowhood; for it is a vocation, a positive response to the divine mandate (Gen. 1:28). Marriage is therefore one of the produce of the same field (Chundelikkatt, 2013). So, anyone who despises marriage and sexual intercourse within it acts contrary to the divine mandate.

Ambrose also teaches that not every marriage is joined by God. "Only where both spouses are Christian does he do so. Consequently Christ's command does not hold marriages where one or both spouses are not Christians." (Meer, 1961, p.187). Above all, every marriage should be sanctified by the priestly veil.

You will discover that Ambrose is less disposed to remarriage in widowhood. He points out that the turtle dove, after losing its mate in death, does not take a second one, so must the Christian learn from the bird. According to him, "what we say as a matter of counsel we do not impose as a precept. We urge rather than obligate. We do not forbid remarriage, but do not recommend it... more than this, while not recommending a second marriage, we disapprove of repeated marriage." (Meer, 1961, p.193). Ambrose is also the first to write that no marriage should be dissolved for any reason and to insist that not even men have the right to remarry as long as their wives are alive. Even in the case of adultery, one has no right to remarry (Meer 1961).

Self-assessment exercise

1. Do you see any connection between marriage and sexuality in the teachings of Ambrose? What are some of the reasons given by Ambrose?

2. What metaphor does Ambrose use to discourage remarriage in widowhood? Do you think he gets it right?

3. What is the contribution of Ambrose in the development of the theology of marriage?

3.3.2 Augustine and marriage

The most developed theology of marriage in the Latin Church at the time is by Saint Augustine. It is his investigation into the nature of *sacramentum* that lays the groundwork for the traditional understanding of the sacramental nature of marriage. He sees marriage as a helpful social institution that is necessary for the conservation of society and the continuation of the human race as sanctioned by God from the beginning. But he also advises for self-control for the human sexual desire. He cautions that it can be hazardous, and also can tear society apart if not kept within bounds.

Augustine identifies three 'goods' or pillars of marriage, which he designates as the three 'goods' of marriage – *sacramentum*, *offspring* and *fidelity*. The first is sacramentum. Marriage is sacramentum in the sense that marriage makes union that is indestructible. The indestructibility and indissoluble bond of marriage is a matter of 'sacramentum', because it is the figure, the symbol of the union of Jesus Christ with His Church (Eph. 5:21-23). The unity and indissolubility flow from the words of Jesus, 'what God has joined together, let no man put asunder' (Mt 19:7). It is the sign of a sacred reality and a means of grace for the spouses because holiness is possible within the confine of married life (Chundelikkatt, 2013).

Another import of Augustine's teaching is that marriage once contracted cannot be severed; not even is any of the spouses free to abandon the other, not even so that the abandoner or the abandoned may remarry for the sake of children. (Savarimuthu, 2007).

The second 'good' is the gift of children. Augustine, influenced by Gen. 1:28, speaks of offspring (prates) in the sense of procreation and education. It means that a child is accepted in love, nurtured in affection, and brought up in religion.

The third is fidelity (fides) which is manifested in the mutual love and affection between husband and wife. Fidelity makes them share in each other's joys and sorrows. It also involves an exclusive commitment of the spouses to sexual acts meant for procreation (Chundelikkatt, 2013). Fidelity genders love and care within a family setting. It enables parents and children, and siblings to know, love and care for one another. It is simply, the virtue that stands against adultery, for it guides the rights that the spouse has over the body of his partner

Thomas Aquinas of the later period is able to synthesize the theology and law of marriage. Marriage, for him, is a union between a man and a woman, which results in their living together in undivided partnership. It confers grace on those who receive it deservingly, and helps the spouses to be faithful in performing all their duties.

Self-assessment exercise

1. What are the three 'goods' of marriage in the teaching of Augustine?
2. What are the two major ways Augustine perceive human sexuality?
3. State some of the implications of describing marriage as a union of undivided partnership.

3.4 The celebration of marriage in the early period

What you have to note here is that during the first three centuries there is increasing awareness in the Latin Church that marriage between two baptized Christians has some ecclesiastic significance. The first evidence is truly in the Church's liturgical celebration of Marriage, which dates from the time of Pope Damascus (366-384). Of course, there is the practice of betrothal found in the East and the West. It is effected by the means of the '*arrha*' (the giving of the pledge), represented by the exchange of engagement rings. The practice only of later period enters into the custom of the West. However, in the West, marriage ceremonies start in the bride's home and ends in the bridegroom's.

There are three stages in the marriage ceremony in the West: (i) '*ekdosis*' (handing over the bride at the bride's home), (ii) '*domum ductio*' (taking the bride to the home of the bridegroom) and (iii) '*telos*' (final ceremony). In addition is the blessing by the priest, which is often accompanied by his veiling of the bride and groom. It constitutes the main part of the celebration.

It is also important for you to note that before the Council of Trent (1563), marriages are celebrated privately, and most often clandestinely. But today, a clandestine marriage with a simple exchange of consent without any public ceremony is held to be void and invalid. All Church marriages are to be celebrated in the church with or without the nuptial *Mass* before the priest and in accordance with ecclesiastical laws (Savarimuthu, 2007).

Self-assessment exercise

1. What are the similarities and differences between marriage ceremonies in the East and West?
2. What are the three stages of marriage ceremony in the West?
3. Do you think that there is any good reason to discourage clandestine marriage in the Church?
4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of insisting on the public character of marriage?

3.5 Theological debate on consent and consummation in marriage

The marriage theory of *consensus facit matrimonium* (consent makes marriage) and that marriage is a contract, as seen by the Roman Law, becomes a norm for Christian marriage in the Latin Church (Chundelikkatt, 2013). John Chrysostom is among the early Fathers to argue that marriage is not brought into existence by intercourse but consent. The same idea is supported by Pope Nicholas I, who officially declares that consent makes marriage.

By the ninth century, theologians and canonists turn their attention to the fundamental issue of what constitutes marriage and theorize that Christian marriage has three stages: betrothal, solemnization and consummation. The essential distinction between the marriage contract

and the consummation of marriage through sexual intercourse is then established. If consummation does not take place, the marriage can be dissolved.

The two trends of thought of marriage as consensus (Paris School) and as copula (Bologna School) continue till 12th century without reaching a synthesis. But by the middle of the 12th century the two schools are able to reach an agreement that synthesises the two positions. Pope Alexander III promotes the compromise that the consent of the partners founds a true and valid marriage, but only the consummation of the marriage makes it absolutely indissoluble (Vorgrimler, 1992). In other words, consent constitutes marriage, and consummation perfects it and makes it indissoluble.

Self-assessment exercise

1. Do you think that marriage is made by consent or consummation?
2. Do you think that the Pope Alexander's compromise has any positive contribution to the understanding of marriage?

3.6 Formalization of marriage celebration

It is important for you to note the contribution of Martin Luther and John Calvin in the Church's understanding of marriage. The position of Luther and Calvin cause the Council of Trent (1563) to evaluate her earlier approach to marriage (Chundelikkatt, 2013). One of the outcomes is the insistence on a defined disciplinary *form* for the celebration of marriage, which aims at checking abuse of secret marriages of the time. Marriage *must* now take place before the proper parish priest of at least one of the parties or another authorized priest. The Council insists upon the publication of the banns of marriage and the registration of the contracted marriage in the records of the Church. With the intention of creating a sound and solid base for the theology of marriage, the Council has proposed a thoroughly strict orientation in this field.

Vatican Council II (Vat. II), however, opens a new and novel vista. It heralds a change and signals a direction. And it has succeeded in giving a new orientation to marriage and the family. It emphasizes in *Gaudium et Spes* (GS) 47-52 the special significance and the mission of marriage and family for the individual, the society and the Church. "The well-being of the individual person and of human and Christian society is intimately linked with the healthy condition of that community produced by marriage and family" (Rahner, 1969, p.417). And after Vat II theologians come up with the theory of "gradualness"; that is, the notion that marriage becomes a sacrament only gradually and therefore is indissoluble. Against this background, Pope John Paul II, in his apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortia*, insists on the personalistic notion of Vat. II and defends the sacramental and the indissoluble nature of all marriages among Christians (Chundelikkatt, 2013). Humans do not make sacrament or marriage, but both are made for human.

Self-assessment exercise

1. How do you think that Martin Luther and John Calvin contribute immensely to the development of the theology of marriage?
2. What are some of the contributions of Vat. II Council to the understanding of marriage?
3. What do you understand by the personalistic notion of Vatican Council II according to John Paul II?

3.7 Values inherent in the Christian marriage liturgy

3.7.1 Sacramental celebration

The Church teaches and also demonstrates in her liturgy that the Christian life is a journey, which reaches its first major climax in the celebration of baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist (cf. the Easter vigil celebration). It reminds the Christian that Christian life is the journey in Christian discipleship. It is the life of Baptism. This includes dying and rising with Christ sacramental, living out one's baptism in married life. Consequently, the marriage

liturgy is radically baptismal, a continuation of dying with Christ to sin and death, and rising with him unto life with the Father in the power of the spirit. It is Trinitarian and communion.

Self-assessment exercise

Discuss the relationship between the sacrament of marriage and the sacrament of Baptism.

3.7.2 Celebration of mutual love

The liturgy of the Latin Church gives primary importance to the love of the spouses for each other, unquestionably affirming love - the fact of it and its holiness. Marital spirituality and love are particularly taken into account by Vat. Council II - "Married couples and Christian parents should follow their own proper path to holiness by faithful love, sustaining one another in grace throughout the entire length of their lives.

Marital love has to be supported by conjugal love. "Conjugal love involves a totality, in which all the elements of the person enter - appeal of the body and instinct, power of feeling and affectivity, aspiration of the spirit and of will. It aims at a deep personal unity, a unity that, beyond union in one flesh, leads to forming one heart and soul, it demands *indissolubility* and *faithfulness* in definitive mutual giving; and it is open to fertility. In a word it is a question of the normal characteristics of all natural conjugal love, but with a new significance which not only purifies and strengthens them, but raises them to the extent of making them the expression of specifically Christian value" (John Paul II, 1996 (CCC), 1643).

The love of the spouses requires, of its very nature, the unity and indissolubility of the spousal community of persons, which embraces their entire life: "so they are no longer two, but one flesh." They "are called to grow continually in their communion through day-to-day fidelity to their marriage promise of total mutual self-giving." This human communion is confirmed, purified and completed by communion in Jesus Christ. It is deepened by the Faith lived in common and by the Eucharist received together.

Self-assessment exercise

How do you think that conjugal love demands indissolubility and faithfulness in marriage?

3.7.3 Marital fidelity

The blessing of rings expresses the concept of 'faith in each other'. That is to say, mutual faith or trust is an important factor in the Christian marriage liturgy. The liturgy in this aspect demonstrates the spirituality of marriage and the mutual love of the couples anchored in Christ and his Church. It speaks of marriage as a covenant of grace. It reveals the divine plan of love already established by God, and from thus seals the love of the spouses. Here the Church accepts the *real* love of the couples as the source of joy, desire, longing, anguish, pain, hope, disappointment and a host of other feelings and emotions. The couples have to follow and reflect in their union the selfless love of Christ towards the Church so as to bear witness to the Father's abounding and abiding love. They are reminded of the sacrament of marriage, which has made them one in Christ, must be reflected in their mutual love for each other the bond of love between Christ and his Church. The prayers are directed on marriage fidelity which is expected from the spouses. The rings or *thali* remains as the symbol and sign of their love and fidelity to each other in marriage. And the exchange of vows reminds the couples to honour and to be true to one another till the end of their life (cf. Chundelikkatt, 2013).

Self-assessment exercise

Examine the words (form) that go with the putting on of the ring (matter). Do they convey any notion of fidelity? Think about the possible implications of the utterance.

3.7.4 Child and childlessness as gift

You have already been informed that the fundamental spirituality of marriage is the life of holiness and wholeness, fulfilment and satisfaction of the spouses. It also entails procreation and education of children. "By its very nature the institution of marriage and married love is ordered to the procreation and education of offspring and it is in them that it finds its crowning glory" (GS 48). The fruitfulness of conjugal love extends to the fruits of the moral,

spiritual and supernatural life that parents hand on to their children by education. Parents are the principal and first educators of their children. In this sense the fundamental task of marriage and family is to be at the service of life. Spouses to whom God has not granted children can nevertheless have a conjugal life full of meaning in both human and Christian terms. Their marriage can radiate a fruitfulness of charity, of hospitality and of sacrifice (cf. John Paul II, 1981 (FC) 28). This aspect of childless marriage is further stressed by Rahner (1969) when he argues that marriage persists as a whole manner and communion of life and maintains its value and indissolubility, even when, despite the often intense desire of the couple, offspring are lacking. In other words, marriage is not instituted solely for procreation. It is for the welfare of the entire family members, whether biological children or not. It demands that mutual love of the spouses be embodied in a rightly ordered manner and that it grows and mature.

Self-assessment exercise

Are you convinced that childlessness can give marital satisfaction? Do you still remember where such idea is expressed in the Old Testament?

3.7.5 Faith in God and in the worshipping community

The Christian marriage liturgy acknowledges the realities of married life: it entails happiness and sorrow. The couple will experience both joy and pain in the course of adjusting to one another and living compatibly with one another throughout a lifetime. There will be moments when they will wonder why they ever ventured upon this marriage; and there will be moments when the joy they experience will be celestial. Their children will be a source of joy and sorrow also, as they go through the difficult process of growing toward maturity (Chundelikkatt, 2013).

Spouses are therefore encouraged to always turn to Christ, praise God in the Holy Spirit while they embrace the challenges of married life. They should trust in the divine providence in all conditions. They are reminded of their inseparability from the Church as a community of the people of God, and also assured the solidarity of the worship community in joy and sorrow, in success and failure, bearing in mind that they form part of the mystical body of Christ. As Chundelikkatt (2013) finely puts it: "marital spirituality will be a spirituality that nourishes itself and expresses itself in the community's regular Eucharistic Worship – 'as they come together to your table on earth ...may they one day have the joy of sharing your feast in heaven' and in the ministry to those who are afflicted or in need."

The Church also prays that the spouses may reach old age in the company of their friends and come at last to the kingdom of heaven. You can observe in the prayer the human and spiritual perspective of the blessings extended to the couple. The first part calls our attention to the humanness of the spiritual vision of the liturgy of Christian marriage. As it recognizes that life entails sorrow as well as happiness, it is also realistic in its acceptance of human goodwill. More than once we do find petitions for a long life even in the midst of hardship and sorrow. The same couple wishes each other same taking into consideration the down-to-earth sort of spirituality: "I promise to be true to you in good times and bad, in sickness and in health."

The point you may take along with you is that the Christian marriage liturgy is human-divine in all its orientation. It recognises the dual aspect of the human persons and tries in all ramification to address them in purely realistic manner. It is not purely rational, nor purely emotional. It speaks to the human person a whole person in his/her confrontation of the stark naked reality of humanity.

Self-assessment exercise

How does the Church encourage the couple to have faith in God and in the worshipping community?

4.0 Conclusion

A sacramental marriage is a union that is blessed by the Church; it is performed by a priest or another ordained minister of the Church. In such a union two become one, through their mutual self-giving consent and the bond of union blessed by God. The liturgy of the Latin

Church clearly expresses and proclaims in worship these profound convictions of the Church. Christian faith presents marriage as Good News: the total, reciprocal, unique and indissoluble relationship between man and woman, called to give life. The Spirit of the Lord gives to the spouses a new heart and makes them capable of loving each other as Christ has loved them, and of serving life by living out the Christian mystery, for in their union "the Paschal Mystery of the Death and Resurrection is being accomplished" (John Paul II, 2003).

5.0 Summary

You have come to the end of this lecture. There is no doubt as well that you are now placed in a better position to discuss better some of the key issues bordering around the understanding and celebration of marriage in the Latin tradition. However, we still bring to focus some of the issues raised in the course of the discussion.

- i. You must have observed that the contemporary doctrinal challenges to marriage and family are traceable to the inception of Christianity. You must have equally appreciated the efforts of the Church to defend the institution of marriage and family, and its natural 'goods'.
- ii. We emphasised some of that the essential elements of Christian marriage in the teachings and practice of the early Fathers, which the Church continues to preserve in teaching, in practice and in liturgical celebrations. The unity, permanence and indissoluble character of Christian marriage is highlighted. There is also allusion throughout the discourse that marriage cannot be anything but monogamous and heterosexual.
- iii. We also agree that what constitutes Christian marriage is consent and consummation. The implication as discussed is that a validly celebrated Christian marriage can be dissolved. But a validly celebrated and consummated marriage transcends all forms of human, civil and ecclesiastical authority, hence cannot be dissolved.
- iv. We discussed briefly on the formalisation of the marriage liturgy, and the positive contribution it has for the development of the teachings of marriage and family. This becomes clearer with the inception of the Vat. II.
- v. You have seen as well that the sacrament of matrimony as celebrated in the Church is entirely oriented to our supernatural goal as humans and the goal of the worshipping community. It express the interest in the mutual wellbeing of the couple, and also the good of the community, that is, increase in the number of the people of God. Devotion to this twofold end is the way of salvation for married couples, a way sanctified by the sacrament (cf. 1 Tim 2:15).
- vi. You must have equally discovered that in the liturgical celebration of marriage in the Latin Church all the essential elements of Christian marriage are firmly expressed and celebrated in the worshipping and believing community. This includes God uniting the two into one, for their mutual life and support and for the procreation and education of children and for the mission of proclaiming Christ to the world.

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

1. What are the implications of the Ignatius argument that only Church marriage receives the blessing and consent of the heavenly Father?
2. State your reasons to either support or reject the teachings of the Latin Fathers that Christian marriage has the essential character of unity, permanence and indissolubility.
3. What are the similarity and difference between the teachings of Ambrose and Ignatius on Church marriage?
4. How do you mean in the tradition of the Latin Fathers that marriage is a sacrament?
5. Do you think that there could be any reason to justify the fact that if consummation does not take place in a validly constituted marriage, that the marriage can be dissolved?
6. What are the possible reasons for the formalisation of marriage liturgy? Reflect critically on them, and list some of the advantages and disadvantages?
7. List some of the values inherit in marriage liturgy according to your order of preference. Give reasons for the ordering.

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**MODULE III: Marriage and Family in the Contemporary Theology and in the
Teachings of the Church
UNIT 1: Christian Marriage**

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1.0 Introduction

Our intention is to examine the Christian understanding of marriage. We shall also inquire for the characteristics that makes it Christian. It is also within this discussion that we may query the purpose of marriage. Has marriage any usefulness? If at all, who are the beneficiaries of such union? We shall also list some possible kinds of “de facto” unions, and then critique the ideal Christian marriage within African Context.

2.0 Objective

At the end of this unit you should be able to:

- Explain and differentiate Christian marriage from other forms of marriage and “de facto” unions.
- Discuss the nature, the essential qualities and purpose of Christian marriage
- Appreciate the personal, ecclesiastical and societal dimension of the ‘goods’ of marriage, as well as their inseparability.
- Evaluate some of the challenges confronting African theology of marriage.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 What is marriage for the Christian?

We have earlier described in the meaning marriage in general, and the different ideas associated with it in the OT (cf. Module 1), NT and among the Greek and Latin Fathers (cf. Module 2). But how does the Church conceive marriage? You should have gotten some feelings of this from what happens during marriage liturgy (cf. Mod. 2:5). The Christian understanding of marriage is more profound and demanding. Marriage is more than a social and natural institution. God himself is the author of marriage (Vatican Council II, 1988 Gadium et Spes (GS) 48§1). Marriage is a vocation written in the very nature of man and woman by God the Creator. In other words, marriage is not a human creation despite the many variations in social structures and spiritual attitudes in different cultures and in different generations.

We are therefore reminded that though the dignity of the institution may not transparent everywhere with the same clarity (GS 47§2), some sense of the greatness of the matrimonial union exists in all cultures. "The well-being of the individual person and of both human and Christian society is closely bound up with the healthy state of conjugal and family life (John Paul II, 1996 (CCC) 1603; also GS 47§1).

From the above teaching you can see that marriage has both natural and divine origin. It is both sacred and secular. Through marriage humans perpetuate the creative act of God, express intimate personal conjugal love to one another (man and woman), and physically, socially, psychologically and religiously fulfil the divine mandate (Gen. 1:27-28; Mt. 19), support one another; recreate the privilege of participating in the mystery of the incarnation and in the Trinitarian community of love.

The Church also underlines the nature of marriage as a contract of a special kind, which by its very nature transcends human institutions, authority and law. Consequently, any legal aspect of the marital contract is perpetually subordinate to the spousal covenant which provides a stronger, more sublime and more sacred framework for marriage. It is a covenant relationship (Burke, 2006), which does not cease, even if the consent of one of the parties is withdrawn. It is a covenant compared with the covenant between God and Israel in the Old Testament. It is God, theologically speaking, who alone brings a marriage into existence though with the consent of the couple – a man and a woman. The marital state is unique, for it is a union of a couple on all levels of human activity.

As a covenant, it goes beyond the minimum rights and responsibilities guaranteed by a contract. It calls the spouses to share in the free, total, faithful, and fruitful love of God. For it is God who, in the image of his own Covenant with his people, joins the spouses in a more binding and sacred way than any human contract. Marriage is a subject of divine law (cf. CCC 2202). The implication of this assertion, among others, is that the institution of marriage and family is prior to any recognition by human and public authority, which has an obligation to recognize it. In other words, civil law and authority have no supreme jurisdiction over the institution. It can only enact laws to protect, support and promote the institution. Anything short of this is an act in *ultra vires*.

You can also evaluate marriage in the Christian context as reference point for family relationship (CCC 2202). This, of course, reminds you of our earlier observation in Unit 1 that marriage is modulated by family relationship. This explains the reason for the Church, and probably other institution, prohibits marriage or intimate relations between relatives or in-laws within certain degree. Paul stigmatizes this as grave offense (cf. 1 Cor. 5:1-2). In fact, incest corrupts family relationships and marks a regression toward animality (CCC. 2388)

It is also good for you to note that the Church links the nature of marriage to freedom and free will, though not without responsibility. Those who contract marriage do so indeed by their own free wills, but they must assume the contract and its obligations *unconditionally* because the contract is a covenant, hence divine. It is based on the consent of the contracting parties, that is, on their will to give themselves, each to the other, mutually and definitively, in order to live a covenant of faithful and fruitful love (CCC 1662). Therefore, for a valid marriage to take place, it must arise from “a bond between the spouses which by its very nature is perpetual and exclusive.

Self-assessment exercise

1. How do we mean that marriage is a vocation?
2. Do you agree that incest corrupts family relationships? Can you give some reasons for that?
3. Can think out some of the responsibilities that are special to marriage?

3.2 Essential properties of Christian marriage

Taking our point of departure from the immediate preceding section, we shall stress some of the essential properties of marriage, which include (i) hetero-gender sensitivity (male and female), (ii), unity, and (iii) indissolubility.

3.2.1 Hetero-gender

If you look round critically, you will discover that there are today widespread of theories that have led to confusion about the nature of marriage. Some may insist on the legalisation of ‘anomalies’ in disguise of “human rights,” thus advocating for civil recognition of the union of same sex, or even a person and dog or other lovely pet (cf. Information Nigeria." Jan. 31, 2014) as marriage, and to be solemnised by the Church. But the very nature of marriage ridicules such proposition, and makes it morally absurd. Christian marriage covenant exists between a baptised *man* and a baptised *woman*. They are free to contract marriage provided they freely express their consent under no constraint and are not impeded by any natural or Church law (CCC 1630). This by way of explanation must be between persons, who are baptised, judged in full sense and free to make and take decision, and also of different genders – male and female. Our understanding here transcends cultural or sociological intellectualism, for each of the two sexes is an image of the power and tenderness of God, with equal dignity though in a different way. And therefore, *the union of man and woman* in marriage is a way of imitating in the flesh the Creator's generosity and fecundity (CCC. 2335; cf. Gen. 4:1-2, 25-26; 5:1).

The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (2004) speaks against theories that consider gender identity as mere cultural and social product of interaction between the community and the individual, independent of personal sexual identity without any reference to the true meaning of sexuality, the Church does not tire of repeating her teaching: “Everyone, man and woman, should acknowledge and accept his sexual identity. Physical, moral and spiritual difference and complementarities are oriented towards the goods of marriage and the flourishing of family life. The harmony of the couple and of society depends in part on the way in which the complementarities, needs and mutual support between the sexes are lived out” (CCC 2333). According to this perspective, it is obligatory that positive law *be conformed* to the natural law, according to which *sexual identity is indispensable*, because it is the objective condition for forming a couple in marriage.

West (n.d.) understands such complementarity as essential to marriage. Also, Reese (2005) retraces the root of the partnership to the creation accounts, and argues that the creation of humanity as male and female could not have been without a purpose (cf. Osa, 1992) and that the etiology for marriage is rooted in Gen. 2. In other words, the Christian doctrine of marriage touches the anthropological, social, and above all theological spheres.

At the design of the Creator: God is the author of marriage. He inscribed the call to marriage in our very being by creating us as male and female. Marriage is governed by his laws, faithfully transmitted by his Bride, the Church. For marriage to be what it is, it must conform to these laws. Man, therefore, is not free to change the meaning and purposes of marriage. Furthermore, “unity, indissolubility, and openness to fertility are essential to marriage” (CCC. 1664).

Self-assessment exercise

Has the union man-man, woman-woman or man-animal or woman-animal any negative effect to the society? Can you list some of them, if any?

3.2.2 Unity

Marriage is the closest and most intimate of human friendships. It is a mutual gift of two persons to each other, and excludes further union of such with anyone else. This exclusivity is essential for the good of the couple's children as well. It is the sharing of the whole of a person's life with his/her spouse; a total mutual self-surrender so intimate and complete that spouses – without losing their individuality – become “one,” not only in body, but in soul. This unity forms one of the essential elements. It demands total and inviolable fidelity of the

spouses, which must remain definitive and cannot be an arrangement (CCC. 1646). The deepest reason is found in the fidelity of God to his covenant, in that of Christ to his Church. The unity makes polygamy is incompatible with the Christian notion of marriage (GS 50 § 1). Osa (1992) lists some ways the unity could be lived out in married life:

- i. Recognizing the person of the 'other' as God's creature;
- ii. Accepting one another for what he/she stands for – husband/wife
- iii. Sharing thoughts, jokes, meals, bed, etc. together.
- iv. Discussing each other problems with full interest and understanding;
- v. Husband making himself available at home always but more especially when the wife needs his companionship
- vi. Being concerned about one another's health, temperaments, worries, joys and whereabouts;
- vii. Being one another's keeper;
- viii. Plan every action together before carrying it out.

Concomitant to the unity as essential element of marriage is indissolubility. Thus John Paul II (2003 [CIC] can. 1056) promulgates: "The essential properties of marriage are unity and indissolubility; in Christian marriage they acquire a distinctive firmness by reason of the sacrament."

Self-assessment exercise

Why is polygamy incompatible with the Christian notion of marriage?

3.2.3 Indissolubility

The Christian moral conscience regarding the unity and indissolubility of marriage developed under the pedagogy of the old law. Thus the Lord Jesus would insist on the original intention of the Creator who willed that marriage be indissoluble (cf. Mt 5:31-32; 19:3-9; Mk 10:9; Lk 16:18; 1 Cor. 7:10-11). He abrogates the accommodations that had slipped into the old Law (cf. Mt. 19:7-9). Between the baptized, "a ratified and consummated marriage cannot be dissolved by any human power or for any reason other than death (CCC 2382). The insistence here is that husband and wife are not joined by passing emotion or mere erotic inclination which, selfishly pursued, fades quickly away (cf. GS 49). They are joined in authentic conjugal love by the firm and irrevocable act of their own will. Once their mutual consent has been consummated by genital intercourse, an unbreakable bond is established between the spouses. For the baptized, this bond is sealed by the Holy Spirit and becomes absolutely indissoluble. Thus, Christianity does not so much teach that divorce is wrong, but that divorce contravenes the divine will and therefore should not be supported in any form, regardless of its civil implications.

You may find out that the unequivocal insistence on the indissolubility of the marriage bond may have left some perplexed and could seem to be a demand impossible to realize. However, Jesus has not placed on spouses a burden impossible to bear, or too heavy - heavier than the Law of Moses. By coming to restore the original order of creation disturbed by sin, he himself gives the strength and grace to live marriage in the new dimension of the Reign of God. It is by following Christ, renouncing themselves, and taking up their crosses that spouses will be able to "receive" the original meaning of marriage and live it with the help of Christ. This grace of Christian marriage is a fruit of Christ's cross, the source of all Christian life (CCC. 1640; also CIC, can. 1141). Consequently, divorce separates what God has joined together; the refusal of fertility turns married life away from its "supreme gift," the child (GS 50 §1).

It important for you to note that in a Christian marriage the spouses are strengthened and, as it were, consecrated for the duties and the dignity of their state by a special sacrament (CCC 1638). On this note, we agree at this point reason along with West (2013) that the essential elements, nature and purpose of marriage include the intimate, exclusive, indissoluble

communion of life and love entered by man and woman at the design of the Creator for the purpose of their own good and the procreation and education of children; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament (cf. GS 48 and CIC can. 1055).

Self-assessment exercise

1. What do you think we lose as human by insisting that marriage should be indissoluble?
2. What do you think could perplex people on the Church's teaching on indissolubility of marriage covenant?

3.3 Purpose of Christian marriage

You have been told that human, through marriage, perpetuate the creative act of God, and express intimate personal conjugal love to one another (man and woman). It is also through marriage that human religiously fulfil the divine mandate of the Creator (Gen. 1:27-28; Mt. 19), support one another; recreate the privilege of participating in the mystery of the incarnation and in the Trinitarian community of love. All these revolve round the purpose of marriage, which we intend to examine in this section.

The Church informs us that marriage, by its very nature, is ordered to the good of the couple, the generation and education of children (cf. CCC 1660; 2249; CIC, can. 1055 § 1; GS 48 § 1). These three basic realities are so much interconnected that the separation of any from the rest will alter the couple's spiritual life and compromise the goods of marriage and the future of the family" (CCC 2363). It is also important for us to underline the fact that the purpose and end of marriage and family is one and the same, and therefore cannot be isolated from one another (CCC 2249). The truth becomes clearer if consider marriage as the basic root of family. In other words, there cannot be a true and complete Christian family without the institution of marriage. However, we shall consider further but briefly the above mentioned reasons for the institution of marriage with view of appreciating more the dignity, privileges and responsibilities attached to marriage and family.

3.3.1 The Good of the Couple

"It is not good that the man should be alone" (Gen 2:18). This is one of the reasons given in the Scripture for creating human more than one, above all, to make them male and female. Conversely, it's for their own good, for their benefit, enrichment, and ultimately their salvation, that a man and a woman join their lives in marriage. Marriage is therefore the most basic expression of the vocation to love that all men and women have as persons made in God's image (West, 2013).

Our earlier position, which still holds, is that marital love is not an abstract fact but a human reality. It embraces the good of the person as a totality (GS 49). It is "something far beyond mere erotic attraction which, selfishly indulged, quickly and miserably vanishes". Paul VI (1968 [HV] 9) describes married love as fully human, a compound of sense and spirit. Then it is a love which is total, faithful and exclusive of all others, and this until death. It is also creative of life. It is a response to the love that God has first shown. Within our earthly experience it is the highest form of love.

A True marital love is outgoing by its very nature. It is personalistic. Love surely means, something that one gives. Christian love means: "what have I to offer you, my beloved spouse," rather than, "what is in it for me." In other words, one must enter into marriage with something to give, rather than to expect something from the marriage. True love and real consent are one and the same in a true marriage. The personalist view of marriage reveals to us that marriage intimacy is at the very heart of marriage relationship. It is primary force based on self-sacrificing love, which has the potential to grow and develop and so will the couple who share this love. It simply an expression of Christian love being understood as a self-emptying process and not a self-centred possession (Burke, 2006). It draws us deeper into the mystery of our creation and provides a foretaste of the heavenly marriage between Christ and his Church, where man and woman are no longer given in marriage. In heaven, the

eternal wedding feast, men and women have now arrived at their ultimate destination and no longer have need of the Sacrament (or sign) of marriage.

Self-assessment exercise

How do you mean that marriage intimacy is at the heart of marriage relationship?

3.3.2 Procreation

"The intimate union of marriage, as a mutual giving of two persons, and the good of the children demands total fidelity from the spouses and requires an unbreakable unity between them" (GS 48). The spouses have a loving, perpetual and exclusive right over each other for acts, which are of themselves capable of begetting children. It is a divine right that should not be limited by time or persons. Children are not "*something*" or appendages to marriage and conjugal love. They are *persons* that spring in fact from the very heart of that mutual giving, as its fruit and fulfilment. Fecundity is a good, a gift and an end of marriage. It is also a special divine privilege that the married couples are counted as co-operators with God in procreation and continuation of the race by giving life and thus participate in God's fatherhood (CCC 2398).

So, you may not be surprised that the Church, which is "on the side of life," teaches that "it is necessary that each and every marriage act remains ordered per se to the procreation of human life." "This is based on the inseparable connection between the unitive and the procreative chain, established by God himself, which are both inherent to the marriage act, which humans on their own initiative may not break (CCC 2366).

Again, besides the creative role of marital fecundity, it is also redemptive. It assures the world that God has not forsaken humanity. The punishments consequent upon human sin, "pain in childbearing" and toil "in the sweat of your brow," also embody remedies that limit the damaging effects of sin. In short, marriage helps to overcome self-absorption, egoism, pursuit of one's own pleasure, and to open oneself to the other, to mutual aid and to self-giving (CCC 1609).

Consequently, the intentional exclusion of children undeniably contradicts the very nature and purpose of marriage, which is ordained by their very nature for the procreation and education of children, and find in them (children) their ultimate crown (GS 48). Such exclusion also does untold harm to humanity, whose survival and existence is at the mercy of human selfish judgement. However, spouses to whom God has not granted children can nevertheless have a conjugal life full of meaning, in both human and Christian terms. Their marriage can radiate a fruitfulness of charity, of hospitality, and of sacrifice (CCC 1654).

Self-assessment exercise

Do you think that a childless family in African context can be fulfilled?

3.3.3 Education of the children

Our emphasis in this section is that fidelity and indissolubility attached to the personal union of married couples is not just to the institution of marriage itself but also the good of their children (Burke 2006). It creates among members of the same family personal relationships and primordial responsibilities (CCC 2201). The primordial responsibilities include the fruits of the moral, spiritual, and supernatural life that parents hand on to their children by education. Parents are the primary evangelizer, the principal and first educators of their children (CCC 1653), and therefore should not abdicate the moral responsibilities of initiating their children at early age into the mysteries of the faith of which they are the "first heralds". They should associate them from their tenderest years with the life of the Church. In other words, a wholesome family life can foster interior dispositions that are a genuine preparation for a living faith and remain a support for it throughout one's life (CCC 2225).

Self-assessment exercise

How does a child in a family benefit from the fidelity and indissolubility in the marriage of the child's parents?

3.3.4 The good of family and society

Marriage and procreation strengthen the institution of marriage and family, thus reinforcing the society and its other social institutions. As Burke (2006:19), in his interpretation of GS 48 and 52, argues that of highest importance of all the ends of marriage is the continuance of the human race and of human society as a whole. "Families will generously share their spiritual riches with other families," while they remain the basis of society. This good of marriage assumes great importance more on a cultural level than on a global level, in that different societies or cultures may see it differently. Generally both Church and State acknowledge that stable marriages make for stable societies. It is in the interests of the State to "actively contribute to furthering the cause of marriage and the family" (GS 52).

Self-assessment exercise

Explain how family and society are beneficiaries to marriage.

3.4 Kinds of unions and marriage

Following the analysis of Burke (2001) and in line with the theology of marriage (cf.), the union between a man and a woman can be described strictly speaking as marriage when the proper procedures are followed. Otherwise they are "de facto unions", a term used to qualify a whole series of many heterogeneous human relations in the forms of cohabitation (Pontifical Council for the Family, 2000; Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004). These forms of union cannot be regarded in any form be regarded as Christian marriage because they are not. Such unions precisely ignore, postpone or even reject the conjugal commitment, but come along with grave consequences (cf. Pontifical Council for the Family, 2000).

It is for you to classify the following forms of unions and marriages, and then identify what is really Christian marriage. You should also have your reasons for the classification.

a) *Ratified marriage*

A ratified marriage is a sacramental marriage which takes place between two validly baptized persons, Catholic or non-Catholic, but which has not been consummated by conjugal act.

b) *Ratified and consummated marriage*

This is a married that is both sacramental (between two baptized persons) and consummated by the sexual act. The 1983 code of canon law states that the sexual act consummating the marriage must take place in a human manner.

c) *Public marriage*

This is a marriage celebrated in the external forum or in some public way recognized by the Church as being a valid celebration.

d) *Non-sacramental marriage*

This is a marriage between a baptized and a non-baptised person. It is not a sacramental marriage because the sacrament of marriage cannot exist in one person only, it must exist in both spouses. The sacramentality of marriage is an added spiritual quality to help the couple relate to one another and to God.

e) *Putative marriage*

This is an invalid marriage that was contracted in good faith by at least one of the spouses. It remains putative until the parties become aware of its invalidity. A marriage contracted by a Catholic outside the Church, e.g. in an Anglican Church, cannot be called putative, even though the Catholic seemed to be in good faith (No one is excused of ignorance of the law).

f) *Attempted marriage*

This is an invalid marriage when at least one party knows that there is present an invalidating impediment e.g. previous bond or lack of form.

g) *Clandestine marriage*

This is a marriage contract without the presence of the parish priest or authorized person and two witnesses.

Secret Marriage: This is a marriage contract before an authorized priest and two witnesses for some very grave reason e.g. laws against race. Special permission is needed for this.

h) Natural marriage

This is a marriage between two nonbaptised persons. (Remember it is the teaching of the Church that all marriages, whether between the baptized or nonbaptised, are permanent).

i) Civil law marriage

This is marriage that takes place according to the civil law of the country one lives in.

j) Customary law marriage

A marriage that is celebrated according to the tradition and customs of one's race. This is also called a traditional marriage.

Self-assessment exercise

List some of the consequences of “de facto unions.”

3.5 Marriage and the goods of marriage across the cultures

Ideally, faithful love is the core of the marital union and the heart of its meaning. But you will discover that there are various forms of expression of this love across different cultures and/or generations. It thus assumes a universal and natural sign of the goodness of God in the midst of humanity. This common presence in all cultures and to all peoples regardless of cultural or spiritual orientation makes marriage a primary and universal symbol. (Martinez, & Brignoli 2001).

But the trouble starts when Christianity insists on a love that is exclusive and permanent. This is the greatest challenge that Christian marriage can offer other cultures. It is for African cultures to assimilate the Christian ideal of the good of the spouses while at the same time making marriage culturally and psychologically fulfilling and meaningful. In particular Christian teaching insists on the equality of the partners (Burke 2006). The catchword in the partnership is “helpmate.” One cannot do with the helpmate what one wishes. It is not less equal, not a deputy but something more. God is the helper of man and woman, so also is the woman to the man, and the man to the woman. This is an area of emphasis for the theology of marriage, to which African cultures should listen.

Another area of immediate attention is the Christian teaching that marriage is also by its nature ordered towards the procreation and education of children. The Christian theology of marriage is also challenged by the contemporary culture of ‘murder’ and human race annihilation, which manifests themselves in various forms anti-children movements.

The other side is the challenge of a childless marriage in cultures, where having children for the family is of paramount importance. As Burke (2006, pp.18-19) critically remarks: “Because of the importance of having children in most cultures, the inability on the part of either the man or the woman to beget or to have children, is regarded as prohibiting monogamous marriage and so when it is discovered, the monogamous marriage must give way to separation or to a polygamous union.”

Many African cultures, even today, regard the begetting of a child as being more important than marriage itself. The good of children then is a higher good than that of marriage. However, it has to be said that the uppermost value in the theology of marriage is the law of love. Even when no children are born of the marriage, the unity of the marriage bond still remains. God created us out of love and not because of what we might produce. We must treat one another in the same way and not look upon one another, whether in marriage or not, as objects to produce something (Burke 2006).

Self-assessment exercise

1. What is the Christian ideal of conjugal love? Do you think that an average African will accept that as ideal?

2. Do you think that African theology has any significant contribution to make in the development of theology of marriage?

4.0 Conclusion

The teaching of the Church on marriage and the grace of God that comes to every couple that puts such teaching into practice is at the disposal of every Christian couple. This is a means of helping couples to enjoy the real fruits of married life for themselves, for their children and for the whole of Society. This applies in particular to the two foundation pillars of Christian marriage, namely, unity and indissolubility. It is within this divine framework of personal dedication between two persons of opposite sex, and an acceptance of God's eternal law on the indissolubility of the marriage bond that the relationship, which we call marriage, has the opportunity to grow and develop. This divine plan is for the good of every couple, for their children and for the society. It brings with it both spiritual, marital and personal fulfilment. We must accept nothing less than what God has ordained (Burke 2006).

5.0 Summary

Marriage in the Christian understanding is more profound. It is a covenant relationship initiated by God himself, hence sacred and divine. It is therefore a subject of divine law.

We stressed that though the nature of marriage is divine in origin, it is natural in purpose. It remains sacred, personal and social, and therefore, should be treated as such. Its essential properties, by virtue of its divine origin, are unity and indissolubility; and its natural purpose includes companionship, helpmate, procreation, the training and education of children (Osa, 1992:4-19). Helpmate in the context of marriage strictly refers to opposite sex, and that must be held sacred as well.

In our attempt to address the question: “why marriage?” we discovered that the various reasons for marriage cannot be separated from one another: companionship and assistance, marital love, procreation, and the training and education of the children. Marriage is simply for the good and health of the family, the Church and the society.

You are now equally aware of some areas of challenges for African theology of marriage. Such areas which include the appreciation of the ideal Christian concept of conjugal love, the equality of partnership, prolife and respect to children, the challenge of childless marriage.

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignment

1. What are some of the implications of defining marriage as a covenant?
2. Will you consider a union between a man and a man, or a woman and a woman as marriage? Give reasons for your position.
3. What is the teaching of Christianity on divorce?
4. Discuss the essential properties of Christian marriage.
5. List four challenges facing African theology of marriage. Discuss two of the issues with the intention of highlighting the areas of difference between the Christian teachings and the African traditional practice.

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1.0 Introduction

The idea of family is so elastic and all inclusive that the danger is to end up making everybody a member of that one family. And where everybody is everything, nobody is anything. This is the challenge that is facing the Christians of our day. They want to know if there is anything peculiar about Christian family. They want to know why the Church must always speak in defence of family rights. They want to know whether the Christian family has any relevance to the individual, society and State. In short, they want to know if ‘family’ is worth dying for. Consequently, you are encouraged to diligently follow the discussion with the intention that at the end, you will come appreciate what it means and takes to be a member of a Christian family.

2.0 Objective

- Describe the nature of Christian family;
- Identify the specific qualities of a Christian family;
- Discuss the significance of family in the life of individuals and the State;
- Explain why family should always take precedence over society and State.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Christian family

We commence this lecture by referring you to our recent discussion on marriage. We anticipated this unit when we argued that that family is formed by the conjugal union of a *man* and a *woman* who become *husband* and *wife* and then parents, whether by blood or adoption. We also mentioned that the foundation of family is marriage. Thus as God institutes marriage, so it is with family. The first family is constituted with God’s first blessings to humanity. Thus Kiura (2003) writes: God willed that there be families by blessing the first couple: And God blessed them and God said to them, "Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth" (Gen. 1:28).

The loyalty of Christianity to the divine injunction and the recognition of 'nuclear' and 'extended' family system are obvious. While Christianity acknowledges the extended family system and its overarching inclusion of all human race as a family, it presents the Holy Family (Joseph, Mary and Jesus) as an ideal and perfect Christian family. It is important you note at this point that the nuclear family finds its place within the extended family character (African Family Life Federation 2010). Christianity teaches that family is the living cell of the universal family. It is the smallest unit of two human beings, with their children, bound together by the most intimate union. John Paul II describes it as 'the domestic church', which extends to the universal Church including all the baptised as members, and in all, Christ is the head. It is the basic school of humanity where children learn to be human, to be Christian, to love and to be responsible citizens (Kiura, 2003). It is and ought to be a place where every member achieves happiness and fulfilment. In the African context, it includes close relations who live with the man (husband) and woman (wife) and their children. (Okechukwu, 2002).

Self-assessment exercise

How would you describe a Christian family to a child in primary school?

3.2 Characteristics a Christian family

Little reflection will reveal to you that Christian family is multi-dimensional. A lot can be said regarding this. Therefore, whatever is said in this section is only an introduction, while you are expected to think out more of the qualities that make the Christian family different from any other kind of family system. Some of the characteristics will include:

3.2.1 Christocentric relationship

Christian family is Christocentric, that is, Christ oriented. Every Christian family affair proceeds from Christ, and it is directed towards Christ. Christ is always seen as the head of the family (cf. Eph. 5:21-6:6). The idea of the headship of Christ in Christian family is further captured in the common inscription you can easily find in many homes:

Christ is the Head of this house (family);
the Unseen Guest at every meal;
the Silent Listener to every conversation

The man, as the head of the family, still understands his role as subordinate to and modulated by Christ. He recognises the headship of Christ over the family. Under Christ, the husband is the head of the wife and children (cf. Eph 5:23; 6:1). Imitating the footstep of Christ, the husband is expected to exercise authority in love, loyalty and service. It is only through this that he commands the respect of the family members and also be at peace with his god.

On the other hand, the wife is the helpmate of her husband (cf. Gen 2:18). She has shared authority with the husband over the welfare of the entire family including the education and evangelisation of the children. They (husband and wife) act in conjugality. As parents they owe their children love and care. Children should be conscious of the place of the family in their life. They should understand that the family 'name' is a gift and blessing from God, which springs out from the conjugal love their parents. Consequently, they are in loving obedience under the authority of their parents (cf. Col 3:20). In this established order, the members of the family inspired by the love of Christ who is their head, will be able to form a community of life whose interpersonal relationship will be enhanced by Christ's love. Husband and wife will be able to relate in loving relationship as spouses and in loving relationship as parents of their children. (cf. Kiura, 2003)

Self-assessment exercise

Who do you think is the most important person in a Christian family, and why?

3.2.2 Trinitarian and communion

Family embodies spiritual union. The expression of unity and intimate relationship is obvious in the affairs of the family. The family symbolizes communion and the community of life and love, where every member is expected to be happy and experience optimal fulfilment. This should not be a surprise to you because God, the author of family, has from eternity lived the

mystery of 'family' (community), the Trinity. God is love and out of love he created us human beings and gave us the role of creating a community. It is as a result of our being created in God's image and likeness that human persons are given the capacity and responsibility for love and communion and the ability to live in loving partnerships as husbands and wives (Kiura, 2003).

3.2.3 Holy

In our discussion on "the domestic church and the call to holiness", you will come to appreciate more that the vocation to marriage and invariably to family life as a call to holiness. The family has a holy structure in the plan of creation (Vatican Council II, 1988, *Gaudium et Spes* [GS] 48). The very meaning of family is holiness, hence the Christian family is always looked up to as sacred and holy. It is the sanctuary of holiness, where children are brought up in the fear of God, and learn to accord respect not only to the divine, but also to human and the society. A holy family is a healthy nation.

Holiness in the family is a sign of God's presence amidst His people and of His relationship with them at a very personal level, a relationship of intimacy and closeness (cf. Hos. 2:4-10). The way for the family to grow in holiness and in the love of God. So, growing into the vocation to holiness is the first call of the family because it is the growth into the image of God as His children. And sanctity in family life means the radiance, the communication, the sanctifying presence of Christ in every moment of time.

3.2.4 The fruit of marriage

You must have noted that time without number we continue to emphasise the fundamental place of marriage in the formation of family. Family starts with marriage. That is to say, Christian marriage is the foundation of Christian family. This is well articulated in the mind of the author of Genesis, where the notion of family and its formation is made a focus. Thus: "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body" (Gen. 2:24). In short, marriage and family are interconnected, and remain always inseparable. You cannot conceive one without the other. It is marriage that gives birth to the family (African Family Life Federation 2010), and family sustains marriage. Family is the fruit of marriage. Marriage charts the course, and family actualizes it.

3.2.5 Multi-relational

There are about four basic relationships identified with a healthy Christian family. These include:

- i. Wife-husband
- ii. Parents (father and mother)-children
- iii. Children-children (brother/sister-brother/sister), and
- iv. Christ-family.

The common tie that holds all these together is not necessarily blood relation but love.

The relationship implicates our relationship with the wider society both within and outside the Church circle.

3.2.6 Inter-personal and public (social)

You have already seen that Christian family derives its existence from marriage and also manifests the same interpersonal and social character as marriage. It takes more than one to make a family. It is the same very idea that is expressed in its communitarian character as already discussed. Christian family also shares the same goods of marriage: the community of life and love of the spouses, the total welfare of the children, which includes their physical, spiritual, psychological well-being etc.

3.2.7 Mutually and collectively

Mutuality, intimacy and togetherness is another quality of a Christian family. This is where parents should consider their life as a unifying factor that contributes to the building up of the family. Hence every effort should be put in place to avoid any thing that could break the family: work conditions, disharmony, materialism, and try as much as possible, to spend a lot of their time together. It is essential for a family to live together as a unit. (Kiura, 2003).

3.2.8 Child-friendly

In many communities, the family is seen as an important instrument for progeny. It is important for the survival of the clan and the entire community. It is the health of the society. And God, who has established the family, gives Christian couples the graces they need to do their part in making their family both in essence and in existence. Couples perform their God-given duties by shunning the 'culture-of-death' and other anti-child movements such as the intentional exclusion of procreation from the goods of marriage. This does not, however, exclude the relevance of birth regulation and child spacing. Couples need to address this question considering each other's interests, their faith and the well-being of the children they already have. Parents should understand the needs of each child and see how they can meet their respective needs. They must also provide their children with a decent education. For this reason, family finances should be so managed to ensure that all the members of the family are provided for. (Kiura, 2003).

Self-assessment exercise

1. Among the qualities of Christian family discussed which one do you think is the most important, and why?
2. Is it possible to have a holy Christian family with a bad child? State the reason(s) for your answer.

3.3 The significance of family

You must have discovered in your bible that the importance and centrality of the family with regard to the person and society is repeatedly underlined by Sacred Scripture (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004 [PCJP] 209) It reminds you that the first form of communion between persons (GS 12) is the creation Adam (male) and Eve (female) as one flesh (Gen 2:24; cf. Mt 19:5-6; also John Paul II, 1996 [CCC] 1605) in order the couple should complement each other (cf. Gen 2:18). This very first family is also charged to be a participator in the work of procreation which makes them co-workers with the Creator (PCJP 209). In other words, the family is presented in the Creator's plan as "the primary place of 'humanisation' for the person and society" and the "cradle of life and love" (John Paul II, 1989 Dec.30, 40).

It is in the family that one learns the love and faithfulness of the Lord, and the need to respond to these (cf. Exod. 12:25-27, 13:8, 14-15; Deut. 6:20-25, 13:7-11; 1 Sam 3:13). It is in the family that children learn their first and most important lessons of practical wisdom, to which the virtues are connected (cf. Prov. 1:8-9, 4:1-4, 6:20-21; *Sir* 3:1-16, 7:27-28) (PCJP 210).

You can also see the family as the first natural society, with underived rights that are proper to it, and places it at the centre of social life. The family is born of the intimate communion of life and love founded on the marriage between one man and one woman (GS 48). It possesses its own specific and original social dimension, in that it is the principal place of interpersonal relationships, the first and vital cell of society (Vatican Council II, 1988b *Apostolicam octuositatun*, [AA] 58). The family is a divine institution that stands at the foundation of life of the human person as the prototype of every social order (PCJP 211).

3.3.1 Family for the person

The family has central importance in reference to the person. It is in the family, therefore, that the mutual giving of self on the part of man and woman united in marriage creates an environment of life in which children "develop their potentialities, become aware of their dignity and prepare to face their unique and individual destiny" (John Paul II, 1991 May 1, 39).

The family is the home of natural affection, where the members are united, persons are recognized and learn responsibility in the wholeness of their personhood. It is the first and fundamental structure for 'human ecology'. It is in the family that human receives the first

formative ideas about truth and goodness, and learns what it means to love and to be loved, and thus what it actually means to be a person (John Paul II 1991, May 1, 39).

Self-assessment exercise

What is the value of the family to the individual?

3.3.2 Family for society

The family is the natural community in which human social nature is experienced, makes a unique and irreplaceable contribution to the good of society. It is born from the communion of persons. “‘Communion’ has to do with the personal relationship between the ‘I’ and the ‘thou’. ‘Community’ on the other hand transcends this framework and moves towards a ‘society’, a ‘we’. The family, as a community of persons, is thus the first human ‘society’“(CCC 2210; John Paul II, 1994 Feb.2, 7).

The Church tells us here that a society built on a family scale is the best guarantee against drifting off course into individualism or collectivism, because within the family the person is always at the centre of attention as an end and never as a means. Without families that are strong in their communion and stable in their commitment peoples grow weak. In the family, moral values are taught starting from the very first years of life, the spiritual heritage of the religious community and the cultural legacy of the nation are transmitted. It is in the family that you can learn social responsibility and solidarity (CCC 2224). That is the beauty of family.

You will then appreciate the insistence of the Church on the priority of the family over society and over the State. Family is the condition for the existence of the society and the State. It possesses inviolable rights and finds its legitimisation in human nature and not in being recognised by the State). It does not exist for society or the State, but society and the State exist for the family. Every social model that intends to serve the good of human must, as a matter of fact, not overlook the centrality and social responsibility of the family. In their relationship to the family, society and the State are seriously obligated to observe the principle of subsidiarity (PCJP 214). One of the implications of this is that society cannot freely legislate with regard to the marriage bond by which the two spouses promise each other fidelity, assistance and acceptance of children, but it is authorized to regulate its civil effects.

Self-assessment exercise

How does the family guarantee the society? Give some concrete examples.

3.4 Social subjectivity of family

3.4.1 Love and the formation of a community of persons

The family is a place of communion. It is the place where an authentic community of persons develops and grows (John Paul II 1981 Nov. 22, 18). You can see this in the endless dynamism of love within the family circle. This love is the fundamental dimension of human experience. As John Paul II puts it: “Love causes man to find fulfilment through the sincere gift of self. To love means to give and to receive something which can be neither bought nor sold, but only given freely and mutually” (John Paul II, 1994 Feb. 2, 11). It is love that defines family and makes it a place of where every human person is recognized, accepted and respected in his/her dignity. It is from love that selfless relationships arise, which “by respecting and fostering personal dignity in each and every one as the only basis for value ... takes the form of heartfelt acceptance, encounter and dialogue, disinterested availability, generous service and deep solidarity” (John Paul II 1981 Nov. 22, 43). The existence of families living this way exposes the failings and contradictions of a society that is for the most part, even if not exclusively, based on efficiency and functionality. By constructing

daily a network of interpersonal relationships, both internal and external, the family is instead “the first and irreplaceable school of social life, and example and stimulus for the broader community relationships marked by respect, justice, dialogue and love” (John Paul II, 1981 Nov. 22, 43).

The Church also emphasises the need and urgency to make the same love felt in the attention given to the elderly members of the families. They are not liability but assets. Their presence in a family can take on great value and make a good great lot of difference (cf. John Paul II, 2002 April, 24, 6). They constitute an important school of life, capable of transmitting values and traditions, and of fostering the growth of younger generations, who thus learn to seek not only their own good but also that of others. We are therefore cautioned to treat them with care and love (cf. John Paul II, 1981 Nov. 22, 27; PCJP 222).

Self-assessment exercise

Do believe that an old person, especially at 90s and 100s has any significant role to play in the structuring of the family? Give reasons for your answer.

3.4.2 Family as the sanctuary of life

You are once more reminded at this point that the family founded on marriage is truly the sanctuary of life, and not a cemetery of death. It is “the place in which life — the gift of God — can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed, and can develop in accordance with what constitutes authentic human growth”(John Paul II, 1991 May 1, 39). Its role in promoting and building the culture of life (John Paul II, 1995 March 25, 92) against “the possibility of a destructive ‘anti-civilization’, as so many present trends and situations confirm” (John Paul II, 1994 Feb. 2, 13), is decisive and irreplaceable.

It is important to note here that the Christian families as a sanctuary of life have peculiar mission that makes them witnesses and proclaimers of the Gospel of life. They have to work for the protection of life including the weak: the unborn and the elderly weak ones.

The family contributes to the social good in an eminent fashion through responsible motherhood and fatherhood, the spouses' special participation in God's work of creation (GS 50; CCC 2367), and parents must consider themselves as ministers of life, co-workers with God the Creator. It is therefore necessary to rediscover the social value of that portion of the common good inherent in each new human being. Every child is “a gift to its brothers, sisters, parents and entire family. Its life becomes a gift for the very people who were givers of life and who cannot help but feel its presence, its sharing in their life and its contribution to their common good and to that of the community of the family” (John Paul II, 1994:11).

Self-assessment exercise

Do you think that the right of the child must be protected at all cost, even when the child poses danger to the family?

3.4.3 The task of educating

The family is uniquely suited to teach and transmit cultural, ethical, social, spiritual and religious values, essential for the development and well-being of its own members and of society (Holy See, 1983). You will notice that the family by exercising its mission to educate contributes to the common good and constitutes the first school of social virtue, which all societies need (cf. GS. 3; GS 52; John Paul II, 1981 Nov. 22, 37, 43; CCC 1653, 2228). In the family, persons are helped to grow in freedom and responsibility, indispensable prerequisites for any function in society. Fundamental values are communicated and assimilated through education (cf. John Paul II 1991 May 1, 43).

The Church further teaches that the family has a completely original and irreplaceable role in raising children (Vatican Council II, 1988c *Gravissimum educationis* [GE] 3; GS 61; Holy See, 1983:Art. 5; CCC 2223; John Paul II, 1983 [CIC] cann. 793-799, 1136). The right and duty of parents to educate their children is “*essential*, since it is connected with the transmission of human life; it is *original and primary* with regard to the educational role of others, and it is *irreplaceable and inalienable*, and therefore incapable of being entirely delegated to others or usurped by others” (John Paul II 1981:36). Parents have the duty and right to impart a religious education and moral formation to their children (Vatican Council

II, 1988d *Dignitatis humanae* [DH] 5; John Paul II, 1994 Jan. 1, 5), a right the State cannot annul but which it must respect and promote. This is a primary right that the family may not neglect or delegate.

Another interesting point for you to consider is the teaching that parents are the first educators but not the only educators of their children. It belongs to them, therefore, to exercise with responsibility their educational activity in close and vigilant cooperation with civil and ecclesial agencies. The family has the responsibility to provide an integral education to the children. In achieving this, the role of the father and that of the mother are indispensable (GS 52). And the right of the rights of children must be legally protected within the juridical systems.

Another issue worth of reflection is the positive assertion of the Church that it is necessary that the social value of childhood be publicly recognized in all countries and the right of the child to be duly accord to the child. And the first right of the child is the right to “be born in a real family” (John Paul II, 1979 Jan. 22, 5), a right that has not always been respected and that today is subject to new violations because of developments in genetic technology (PCJP, 244).

Self-assessment exercise

Evaluate the contributions of the Church to child’s rights? Do you think that the Church has done much in this direction?

3.5 Family in social life

3.5.1 Solidarity in the family

The social subjectivity of the family is also reflected in social and political life of the wider society. You will discover that the solidarity found among family members is often extended to the wider circle of the less privilege and the weak of the society. It is a solidarity that opens itself in various forms to acceptance, to guardianship, to adoption. It also plays the role of advocacy, thus bring every situation of distress to the attention of institutions so that, according to their specific competence, they can intervene (PCJP, 246).

The family is also an active subject working to see that the laws and institutions of the State not only do not offend but support and positively defend the rights and duties of the family. In this vein, the Holy reminds us that the rightful role of families and family associations, on the economic, social, juridical and cultural levels, must be recognized in the planning and development of programmes which touch on family life (cf. Holy See, 1983:8a-b).

Self-assessment exercise

How is family solidarity reflected in the wider society?

3.5.2 The family, economic life and work

The Church recognises the relationship existing between the family and economic life. She further advises that the must rightfully be seen as an essential agent of economic life, guided not by the market mentality but by the logic of sharing and solidarity among generations (PCJP 248).

It will be of interest if you can observe here how family and work are connected by a very special relationship. Work is essential for family because work makes it possible for the sustenance of a family. The means to maintain family is through work. Hence we can think of the intrinsic relationship between family and work. In order to protect this relationship between family and work we must equally appreciate the fact that a platform of social justice of fair family wage must be created; a wage sufficient enough to maintain a family and allow

it to live decently (GS 67; John Paul II, 1981 Sept. 14, 19). The society should equally appreciate the unpaid labour coming from the family sector, mostly from women and mothers, like house-keeping, which, of course, should also be a co-responsibility of men and women.

Self-assessment exercise

1. Can you read from this section a protest by the Church against unemployment, underemployment and misemployment? How does it go with Nigeria?
2. Do you agree with the Church that duties like house-keeping should be a co-responsibility of husband and wife, men and women in the family? How then can you share such responsibility in your own family?

3.6 Society at the service of the family

We have already established the primacy of the family over the society in terms of origin and function. It is on that strength that we emphasise that the correct and constructive relationship between family and society is the recognition of the subjectivity and the social priority of the family (PCJP 252). This in concrete terms means that the society has the fundamental task of respecting and promoting the right of family (cf. Holy See, Oct. 22, 1983; John Paul II, 1981 Sept 14, 45, 46). The Society is therefore called to guarantee and foster the genuine identity of family life and to avoid and fight all that alters or wounds family life. This requires political and legislative action to safeguard family values ranging from the promotion of intimacy and harmony within families to the respect for unborn life and to the effective freedom of choice in educating children. The Church tells us then that no one, be it the society or the State may absorb, substitute or reduce the social dimension of the family. They must honour it, recognize it, respect it and promote it according to the principle of subsidiarity (CCC 2211). The society and State are consequently challenged to accepting the family dimension as the indispensable cultural and political perspective in the consideration of persons. They ought to defend the very rights that people have as individuals and also in relation to the family nucleus to which they belong (PCJP 254).

Self-assessment exercise

Give some reasons that make it incumbent on the society and State to respect and promote the right of the family.

4.0 Conclusion

From the foregone discussion, you can now appreciate the Church's bias for family, which is loud and irrevocable. The Church is always on the side of family. She is an unrepentant advocate of family, thus insisting that the right of the family be upheld in its totality. She univocally tells us that love defines Christian family and makes it a place for all. You must have found out that a true Christian family life stands out as a critique to the failings and contradictions of our contemporary society, where efficiency and functionality have idolised at the expense of the family value of love and solidarity. The Christian understanding of family then reminds us that the family is "the first and irreplaceable school of social life, and example and stimulus for the broader community relationships marked by respect, justice, dialogue and love" (John Paul II, 1981 Sept 14, 43).

5.0 Summary

We have raised many issues in the course of the discussion. And there is no doubt you must have made some notes along the line. But it may still be necessary to highlight some of the points made stressed in this lecture.

i. In our effort to describe what Christian family is all about, we come to the conclusion that it is the smallest unit of the human society, initiated by two baptised persons of opposite sex united in Christian marriage, and subsequently with their children. These children are fruits from their free conjugal love, and/or children adopted but by the free decision of the couple. Family is thus 'the domestic church', which extends to the universal Church, where all the baptised as members, and in all, Christ is the head.

ii. Consequently, we agree that marriage is the foundation of family, and that God, the author of marriage is also responsible for family.

iii. We further emphasised the multi-dimensional characters of the Christian family system, which include Christocentric, Trinitarian, holiness, fruit of marriage, multi-relational, mutually and collectively, and child-friendly.

iv. You must have also noted that the need for family is not only a necessity for the individual persons, but also for the society. Family makes the individual, and remakes the society. It is the most natural stage where the individual can attain his/her fulfilment. A wholesome family is also a wholesome society. At this point we saw the justification why the Church insisted on according family precedence over society and State.

v. In the sense of the social subjectivity of family, the emphasis was that every member of the family irrespective of age, state or status counts. The measure for Christian family is love manifested at the levels of recognition, acceptance and respect for every member of the family. Also the social subjectivity of the family is expressed in solidarity and sharing, not only among families themselves but also in various forms of participation in the wider society, in the social and political life of the society.

vi. We finally examined some of the challenges facing family, society and State, and maintained that each party has the obligation to assume its proper role, and at the same time respect the rights of the other.

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignment

1. What makes a Christian family different from other kinds of family system?
2. Discuss the Christocentric quality of a Christian family.
3. Evaluate the statement that the right and duty of parents to educate their children is “essential, original and primary, irreplaceable and inalienable.
4. Explain the concept of unpaid labour in the family. What is the position of the Church on the issue? How do you relate it to the current labour situation in Nigeria?

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1.0 Introduction

In the last two lectures we discussed the teachings of the Church on marriage and family. We viewed marriage, first of all, as a human experience, as well as one that takes place in a particular historical and cultural context, but now sacredly raised to the level of divine. This is based on the conviction, as earlier noted by Theodore Mackin (1987:34), that the matrix of marriage sacrament cannot be adequately appreciated without recourse to the complex human experience. Many theologians have tried to bring this experience together and interpret them in the light of the teachings of the scripture and the Church. Consequently, we shall in this unit examine the positions of some of these theologians of Christian marriage of the 20th century: their understanding and interpretation of some of the Church’s teachings. The three main theologians, on whom we shall focus our attention are: Matthias Joseph Scheeben, Edward Schillebeekx and Karl Rahner.

2.0 Objective

At the end of the discussion in this unit, you should be able to:

- Describe sacrament and the sacramentality of marriage;
- Explain how the Christ faithful through the sacrament of marriage participate in the Trinitarian communion;
- Evaluate the modern understanding and interpretation of permanence and indissolubility in marriage
- Appreciate the meaning of marital grace and its effect in married union;
- Discuss the relationship between the union of love in the Church and in marriage;
- Relate husband-wife relationship to the Christ-Church union.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Mathias Joseph Scheeben

3.1.1 Christian marriage as sacrament

Mathias Joseph Scheeben is the first among the modern theologians to come up with the idea that marriage has never been a mere secular relationship but religious, and even more profoundly sacramental. Marriage is, for him, the most significant institution. God has designed into it a primary goal, which is to bring children into the world and to nurture them. It is only by acting as the instruments of the Creator will couples find true happiness. For him, marriage belongs to God, hence couples are not free in the matter of realizing the

purpose of marriage or to end it before death. It is only God alone who can morally and legitimately decide on such issue (Scheeben, 1953).

For Scheeben, marriage is not merely a natural sacrament. It is *the* sacrament in Christ's new Dispensation. You may observe here that Scheeben is making a difference between natural sacrament and Christian sacrament. However, his understanding of Christian sacrament is clue from the theology of the Mystical Body of Christ, that a baptised man and woman are not free to marry one another in a merely natural, pre-sacramental union, because as sacrament, it is basically related to the saving work of Jesus (cf. John Paul II, 1981 Nov. 2, 13).

Self-assessment exercise

What is the difference between natural sacrament and Christian sacrament?

3.1.2 Incorporation of marriage in the body of Christ and in the Trinity

You may also notice that Scheeben argues that it is Christ who makes the joining of a man and a woman in marriage a sacrament. This union is taken into Christ union with the Father and the Spirit and therefore into his own union with the Church. This is done even when the couples concerned are unaware of this. As you haven been informed earlier, only marriage between a baptised man and a baptised woman is considered sacramental by Scheeben for two main reasons:

- i. Only the baptised have been taken as it were by Christ in baptism and singly joined to himself in the Church;
- ii. The incorporation of even a single person in Christ and in the Church makes of this person, a singular living sign of Christ's presence in the Church and therefore in the world.

So, only when the baptized persons join in marriage can they sign forth Christ's union with the Father and the Spirit, as also his union with the Church. The reason is that it is only they who live as single persons clearly manifesting the Body of Christ in his love (Scheeben 1953). Once marriage, a Christian family is formed. It is the family of God and the 'Domestic Church' because it is a community integrated into the unity of Christ, the head of the Church, and the Church is His Body. This community offers itself in prayer and shares in the universal priesthood of the laity. The Christian family has also the mission of evangelizing the world (Vatican Council II, 1988 *Lumen gentium* [LG] 7).

Self-assessment exercise

1. Explain the meaning of sacrament using your dictionary. Compare the meaning given in the dictionary and in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Compare this further with the claim of Scheeben that only Christian marriage can be considered sacrament. Make a list of your observations.
2. How does Christian marriage mean a participation in the communion of the Trinity?

3.1.3 Marital love and the sacrament

The sacrament of marriage supposes the spouses' love for one another. What the sacrament does to this love is what it does to the marriage. It surely integrates it in the love of Christ for the Church, elevates it, and empowers it beyond its natural capacity. The sacrament makes possible the integration of sexuality into the sanctification that baptism begins and continues. It rescues it from remaining always a vagrant element. It elevates the human love to the level of sanctifying grace, which in fact raises the marital union to a higher level of the union of Christ and the Church (Chundelikkatt, 2013).

Marriage as sacrament gives *eros* a place in holiness which surely brings in fidelity and permanence into the sacrament of matrimony. It is in a way a growth from *eros* to *agape*. Here true marital love is seen accurately in the perspective of God's own creative love as well as the self-emptying and redeeming love of the Only Son of God. When this true imitation happens in the love of the married couple, they are able to give completely to others (cf. von Hildebrand, 1991). It demands continual self-renunciation that fructifies in charity, the continual death the self for the 'other' that invariably results to the resurrection of the same self (Chundelikkatt, 2013).

The grace of the sacrament is therefore produced by the incorporation of marriage in the sacramental character of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ. One of its effects is to give the spouses the right to the actual grace needed to live married life well and holy (Scheeben 1953). In short, Christ graces the spouses precisely as the members of his body, so that they may do the work of his body. In other words, the sacramental grace assists them to live that grace in their daily living without fail.

Self-assessment exercise

Describe the effect of the sacrament of marriage on human sexuality.

3.1.4 The sacramentality of marriage (Eph. 5:21-33)

Scheeben reminds us that the union between Christ and his Church is not a reflection of human marriage; rather, human marriage takes to the Christ-Church union. When, therefore, the bride and the groom stand at the altar, they stand for Christ-Church. So, when the author of Ephesians (5:32) writes that this is a 'great mystery', it refers primarily to the mystery of the union between Christ and his Church, which is mirrored now in the union of a Christian husband and a Christian wife. But why is a Christian marriage a mystery? He then tells you that the issues goes back to baptism that makes Christian man and woman the individual members of the mystical body of Christ. It inserts them into Christ's union with the Church. Consequently when they get married the mystery of Christ's union with the Church is found in their own union with one another.

Self-assessment exercise

How do you understand Christian marriage to be a mystery?

3.2 Edward Schillebeekx

3.2.1 The sacramentality of marriage

Schillebeekx is one of the Christian marriage theologians, who agree with Scheeben that a Christian is by the seal of union in baptism incorporated into Christ. The Christian is then joined in action to the life and work of the Risen Christ, and thus to the mystical body of Christ. The joining is activated proximately by the person's sense of faith, hope and love. As a consequence the person collaborates with Christ in his work in this world. (cf. Chundelikkatt, 2013).

According to Schillebeekx, sacrament is a personal act of God in Christ, an act that enters the sensate conduct of men and women. It draws them into the mystery of his redemption and has them participate there. This mystery is his effort to rescue human beings from their sinfulness and bring them into unending union with himself. He confirms that Christ is God's sacrament. His essential sacramental action is to carry out God's love relationship with human beings; which is done by his own self-giving through his death on the Cross.

You will see here how Schillebeekx makes the connection between the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and matrimony. According to him, Christ's Church is the community of men and women engaged in the same self-giving in order to forgive and to heal. These Christ faithful act sacramentally in the Church in its ritual cults in which Christ takes the most active part. The Father responds in this work by sending always the Holy Spirit in a sacramental way. Since the sacrament of marriage is a sacrament of the living - a sacrament of persons already drawn into union with the living and active Christ - it requires not only the objective condition of having been baptized but calls also for a baptismal life in its external fullness, namely, the reception of the sacrament of confirmation.

You will find Schillebeekx going back to Eph. 5 to argue his case. For him, since the Church exists in a marital relationship with Christ, a person's baptism takes him or her into this marital relationship and thereby his or her subsequent marriage becomes a specific manifestation and working out of this relationship. Their marriage participates in the Father's love of the entire human race by receiving it through Christ. They participate too in Christ's reciprocal love of the Father, and thus made holy in their marital union. The grace of the sacrament sanctifies the husband in his relationship with his wife and her, in her relationship with him. Indeed it is their marital relationship itself which is the sacrament. As a sacrament marriage makes visible Christ's love for the Church and her love for him.

Because the grace of marriage is the grace made possible by Christ's redeeming work the spouses can cooperate with him only sacrificially. The sacrament of marriage, therefore, challenges the spouses to enter into the mystery of the Cross, into Christ's self-giving death. It is on this note that Schillebeeckx's argument on the sacrifice and love of Christ will appeal more. According to him, as Christ is broken so also the marriage of spouses can break a man and a woman through grievous disappointments, infidelity and death. But Christ's love is so great that the infidelity of his friends did not destroy it. It prompted him to go to his death in the effort to forgive and heal this infidelity. Their sacrament takes all the suffering of the spouses into Christ's suffering. Thus the love that the sacrament demands of the spouses is an oblation or sacrificial love.

Self-assessment exercise

1. Do you agree with Schillebeeckx's description of sacrament? Give reasons for your position.
2. How is Christ God's sacrament?
3. What do you think Schillebeeckx mean by the expression 'sacrament of the living'?

3.2.2 The indissolubility of the sacramental bond of marriage

Schillebeeckx explains the firm theological interpretation of Christian marriage based on biblical writings as well as on the teachings of the early Church Fathers and various Christian theologians in Church history. The fact that marriage is now understood as a man's and a woman's relationship of self-giving love makes it inconsistent to hold on indissolubility as a fixed and given characteristic of a marital institution. It is a condition to be attained in love relationship. It is the duty of the couple to make an effort to put the condition into practice in order to make it a living reality in their sacramental life.

Schillebeeckx also observes that the anthropologic reality of a marriage is created and sustained by interpersonal self-giving and caring love. And to speak of indissolubility is another way of stressing the reality of love that exists in such relationship. Thus, marriage is amenable to manifesting and even imaging God's relationship to the human race in their respective dialectical relationships. Marriage is dialectical because it is the interaction of human will and emotion. God's relationship with humans is also dialectical because God interacts freely with human beings to elicit their free response of belief and love. From this you will now see Schillebeeckx arguing that it is the spouses' consent itself which constitutes the heart of permanence in marriage. It is the irrevocable commitment to love one another that is the soul of indissolubility, which is further expressed in their marital expression in sexual union. It would seem Schillebeeckx could take his argument to its local conclusion. If the irrevocable commitment to love one another and live together as spouses is *really* irrevocable, then marriage cannot but be permanent and indissoluble.

According to him, marriage is first and foremost human sign (sacrament) of love but radicalised when the spouses enter *deliberately* into the working out of Christ's redeeming action in the Church, thus transforming their self-giving love to redemptive love. But such radicalisation is only possible if the spouses do enter the sacramental action of God through Christ in the Church. In other words, both the Church and the spouses are beneficiaries of the sacrament of matrimony. Likewise, indissolubility in the sacrament of marriage is not the *a priori* and given. The spouses put it there by their decision and their work.

The Christian character of marriage shows itself in two forms, first of all in the interpersonal relationship of the couple, if this is born of faith and hope, and if the human element in the love is radicalized to a total giving of oneself to the other modelling of Christ. Secondly the form that Christian marriage takes is sociological. This is so not merely for the anthropological reason that marriage is part of the social ethos but because society helps them to believe, hope and to love. So both these aspects are very important according to Schillebeeckx (cf. Chundelikkatt, 2013).

Self-assessment exercise

Do you agree with Schillebeeckx that indissolubility is not the *a priori* and given? State your own view on the issue.

How does the society contribute towards the sustenance of the permanence and indissolubility of marriage?

3.3 Karl Rahner

3.3.1 Sacramentality of creation and history

The theology of marriage of Karl Rahner is constructed on the theology of redemption, and also on ecclesiology, which presents the Church as Christ's instrument of redemption. But it is good for you to take note of the fact that Rahner holds to two assumptions:

- i. Nothing in creation escapes God's indwelling presence. Nothing is merely secular in that sense. No creature goes its own autonomous way. God is present and active in all humans. Therefore, creation is sacred. Every part of creation can equally be sacramental in that sense.
- ii. Just as there is no purely secular domain in creation neither is there a purely secular history of the human race whether collective or persons taken singly. In other words God is at work in every human person all through. Its end, its goal for all is a union of love with Christ, a union in the eschatologically triumphant Church.

Precisely as an expression and a reaching of God's will to be with human beings and to bring them to Himself in salvation, a sacrament is always efficacious, is always *opus operatum*, a work carried out integrally. But the success of this work depends on human free cooperation.

Self-assessment exercise

What are the two basic assumptions in Rahner's theology of redemption?

3.3.2 Marriage as a sacramental

Rahner, unlike Scheeben, holds that any *marriage* is a sacrament because any marriage is of its very nature a sign or a manifestation. It is the sign of man's and woman's wills, to be spouses to one another and to love one another. This sign is authentic when it really does contain and manifest the spouses' love for one another. But it can also be empty or unauthentic when it no longer contains and manifests their love (Rahner, 1991). It is through an examination of this love that Rahner in fact enters his consideration of the sacrament in marriage.

According to Rahner, two persons who truly love one another seek the depths of one another's being. There they may find their fundamental dependence on God and their orientation to God. Such a love must be sustained by God's grace. The self-surrender that is essential to love can be made only if its reason and its goal are God. In doing so he raises this love and opens it to his own personal entry (Rahner, 1991). God always enters into them and orients them to himself. Important for us to note is that in all these the initiative is completely from God Himself. It is also good for you to note Rahner's insistence that the love of the couples is not something personal or private to them alone, rather it has to go out of themselves to the others. It is only in this sense that Christian marriage becomes truly a sacrament (Rahner, 1991).

Self-assessment exercise

Do you see any difference between Rahner and Scheeben in their thinking about the sacramentality of marriage?

3.3.3 Marital grace

The societal dimension of seemingly private marital love is better understood in light of grace, which enables and sustains the love of spouses. It is a covenantal grace because through this God enters into the life of every human person as well as the whole of the universe. It is also the same God that capacitates the spouses to live in total self-giving to everyone like God Himself in a marital way. When the person accepts and works with this grace, it frees the person from the limitations of merely human love and enables him or her to love all whom God loves and draws all to Him (Rahner, 1991). Thus a couple's marital love and their marriage are a sensate manifestation, even an indication of obedient participation in God's covenantal work in the world, and of His gracing the couple to take part in this work. This grace in fact destroys egotism, even the egoism-for-two of a self-enclosed marriage (cf. Chundelikkatt, 2013).

Self-assessment exercise

Discuss marital grace in the theology of Rahner.

3.3.4 Marriage and the church

Karl Rahner argues that our appreciation of marriage will depend so much on our understanding of the inner unity of the Church. He will then compare marriage and the Church. Rahner will tell you that marriage and Church have something in common. It is love. The relationship between Christ and the Church is defined within the context of love. The same can be said of the union between the man and the woman. In other words, the bond that unites the persons is a love that is capacitated by God's covenantal self-giving and his calling, which are His grace. This is why according to him the Church is a sign of interior love, just as a marriage is a sign of such love. But the difference between the two is that while marriage can be a façade where it embodies neither the spouses' love nor God's love, the Church on the other hand taken as a whole cannot be such a false sign. God is the cause of its authenticity. It is for this reason that even the perishable love of two human beings in marriage can be the sign of an imperishable love in the society of human beings that is the Church (Rahner 1991). In fact the union of love in the Church is the basis of and model for the love union in marriage. Marriage taken as a whole is a manifestation of love which in turn helps to create the love that is the human reaction to God's self-giving. And this love unites human beings to one another as well as to God. This bond is a sacrament, for in it the spouses make sensately evident this love at work in the Church. They express the love of God and man visibly. It is a sacrament because in the spouses the Church brings its own nature to reality (Rahner, 1991).

Self-assessment exercise

What is the difference between the union of love in the Church and in marriage?

3.3.5 God's covenant and marriage

The relationship of God's creation to His covenant is that God puts humans into existence, while His covenant orients humans, calls them back to Him. Creation makes the covenant possible; and covenant is the reason for creation. Christ is the point at which God and humans meet in covenant. In this sense Christ is God's grace (Rahner, 1991).

Spouses are joined in a sacrament wherein their union is oriented to the end that God intends for all human beings. This orientation is toward a goal that is eternal. When spouses join in this union of love they manifest God's gracing effort to bring all human beings into union with Him. This is the effort that forms the Church; it seeks for the union of all human beings within the Church in union with Christ. Therefore there is not merely an outward similarity of the husband-wife relationship with that of Christ and the Church. He would say that the two unions are internally related and they condition one another. By reason of this cause-effect relationship of the two unions, the spouses' marital union achieves its full manifestation in the union of Christ and the Church (Rahner, 1991).

Self-assessment exercise

How do you understand the statement: Creation makes the covenant possible; and covenant is the reason for creation?

3.4 A reflection on the sacramentality of marriage

Rahner tells us that in our Christian orientation the concept of sacrament cannot be separated from its broader *natural* meaning. That is, Christian sacramentality emphatically rejects the false dichotomy between the sacred and profane; instead, it acknowledges the presence of "the holy" in whatever has secular value (cf. the sacramentality of creation and history). Therefore, all the mundane tasks of marriage are holy in and of themselves because the central focus of marriage is in fact God's creative and redemptive action in Christ in which both spouses share. Divine grace permeates all of human existence. It follows that the life of every Christ faithful, indeed of every couple, is sacramental – a holy union of the divine and human. Consequently, Christian marriage is a genuine sign/symbol/sacrament that God's presence, love, and power are present in the real world, and that the married can, if willing, make God quite real in bed, board, babies, and backyard (Thomas, 1983). Herein lies the

wider natural meaning of the sacramentality of Christian marriage (Martinez, & Brignoli, 2001).

Again, the marriage relationship embodies both human and divine realities, not only because all creation is potentially sacramental (Rahner), but because marriage itself both signifies and makes mystery present (Martinez, & Brignoli, 2001). Kasper (1980) views it from a biblical perspective, "the grammar that God uses to express his love and faithfulness." In fact, marriage is a sacrament not because it is a sign of Christ's love for his church. It is a sign of Christ's love for his church because it is, in itself, a sacrament; that is, a natural sign of salvific actualization and self-transcendence that can express the core of the Christian mystery.

Self-assessment exercise

What do you think that justifies the claim that all the mundane tasks of marriage are holy in and of themselves?

4.0 Conclusion

We have tried in this unit to bring to light some of the opinions, understanding and interpretations of the teachings of the Christian teachings by some of the theologians. There is no doubt you have come to appreciate the difference between the official teaching of the Church and the efforts of the various theologians in their own respect to internalise these teachings, evaluate and elucidate for a better understanding. It must, however, be said that their opinions, though in a larger extent may agree with the teaching of the Church, do not represent the official Christian teachings. While we may not fully submit to all the teachings of these theologians, there is no doubt that their efforts have taken us to a point of having a deeper understanding of the sacramentality of marriage.

5.0 Summary

i. You must have observed some of the contributions of the theologians of Christian marriage to understand and interpret the teachings of the Church on marriage and family. Prominent among them are Scheeben, Schillebeeckx and Rahner. Scheeben tells us that marriage has always been religious and even more profoundly sacramental. Schillebeeckx is more vocal in linking the sacramental quality of marriage to baptism and confirmation. While Scheeben accepts that only marriage between the baptised persons (male and female) are sacramental, Rahner extend these quality to any marriage because marriage by its very nature a sign or a manifestation.

ii. The true and full meaning of marriage sacrament is based in the person of Christ and his salvific acts. The individuals come to participate in this through their incorporation into the body of Christ through the sacrament of baptism, further strengthened by the sacrament of confirmation. Consequently, they have the privilege to participate in the communion of the Trinity.

iii. You could have noticed a shift in emphasis on their explanation of permanence and indissolubility in marriage. Although their position could demand further inquiry, but their agreement on the subject goes a long way to elucidate and affirm our earlier knowledge on the essential elements of marriage.

iv. We also observe that none of them place marital love and grace in doubt. For marriage to exist and function properly, we must count on the grace of God. We must also play our part to sustain the marriage through the nurturing of the marital love existing in this union, and which through the grace of God is given to us.

v. You might have also observed the agreement of the theologian on the relationship between the union of love in the Church and in marriage, and how they relate husband-wife relationship to the Christ-Church union.

6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment

1. Following the argument of Scheeben, how do you explain that Christian marriage is a sacrament?
2. How do we mean that Christian marriage is a sacrament that gives *eros* a place in holiness?
3. How does Schillebeeckx theologially justify marital sacrifice? Do you think it is a worthy sacrifice for people to choose?
4. Discuss the nature of the permanence and indissolubility of marriage in line with the theological thinking of Schillebeeckx.
5. How does Rahner explain the similarity of the husband-wife relationship with that of Christ and the Church?

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1.0 Introduction

You can affirm from the foregone lectures that marriage is a dynamic process of sacrifice, self-giving in service, loyalty, fidelity and love, and above all, a lifelong partnership. The discussion in this unit will stress further the contemporary vision of the core components of the sacramentality intrinsic to marriage, seen through the lens of the metaphor of *worship*, and through the use of *models*, which allows us to expand considerably the depth and breadth of our perspective (Martinez, & Brignoli 2001). Accordingly, I am proposing to you the following predominant models that express the inherent symbolic nature of marriage: worship, vocation, communion covenant, sacrament and partnership. You will find that this unit could serve to greater length as a summary of what we have been discussing right from the beginning of this course.

2.0 Objective

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Identify the ultimate end of marriage;
- Understand that married life is vocation *par excellence*;
- Recognise and discuss some possible models of marriage in contemporary theology of marriage;
- Distinguish the different aspects of Christian marriage;
- Appreciate the role of love and Christian faith in Christian marriage;
- Relate marriage to other sacraments in the church, and explain the sacramentality of marriage.

3.0 Main Content**3.1 Marriage as worship**

We have already discussed the celebration of marriage in Christian marriage liturgy. The *analogy of worship* in this section allows you to glimpse of the deeper reality and the rich

complexity of the marital experience. It reminds you of the underlying *meaning* of tangible signs and symbols of ritual, an authentic, transcendent experience, which reveals equally the sacramental reality of marriage. In short, marriage is a mystery that you cannot completely described. But the metaphor of worship provides you a foundation for a genuine Christian theology and spirituality of marriage. You are therefore to note that worship is not only the true setting of the sacrament of marriage (cf. Mod. 2:5), it is the very context of the sacrament of marriage, for at the heart of worship lie the day-to-day struggles and aspirations of human life lived out in the mystery of God's presence (Martinez, & Brignoli, 2001).

The pledge of the old Anglican wedding rite clearly brings out the rich meaning of the metaphor: "With my body I thee worship." Like worship, which etymologically means "ascribing worth to another being," marriage is the total validation of the other in the devotion and service, celebration and mystery of a relationship (White, 1981). In the manner that a true worship experience engages the whole human person, so too marriage is the *total gift of self to the other without any reservation*. Like the ritual of the Mass, which connects us to all people of faith (in all time), these household tasks connect the spouses with *all* married people.

The authentic experience and 'celebration' of marriage, reveals to us, through its symbolic gestures and the mysteries applicable to them, that even when a crisis arises in marriage, the spiritual foundation, or the *transcendent* undergirding of the marriage is not "lost" or diminished. It can be celebrated for healing, for winning back the distorted love, and even for greater joy as the finding the lost sheep, the lost coin and the prodigal (cf. Lk. 15:1-32).

In specific Christian terms, the bestowal of the marital embrace and the sharing of one Eucharistic cup and bread intersect in the mystery of the cross, which is the paradigm of Christian worship. Certainly, the salient feature of the analogy points to an inherent sacramentality in marriage that is both rich and diverse. Whether in worship or in marriage, sacramentality in the full sense begins with human experience. Thus, marriage sacramentality is anchored primarily in the conjugal love relationship. While friendship, as well as passion and unconditional love, intimacy and communication, respect and forgiveness, self-control and responsibility, and the totality of a committed partnership are all part of the experience of the couple, these experiences are not unique to Christian marriage. Nevertheless, Christians have a privileged opportunity to live in a way that allows them to be constantly renewed because of God's liberating love poured forth in Christ, even if the sacramental or transcendent potential of the relationship may not always be realized (Martinez, & Brignoli, 2001).

You have observed, at least to some extent, how we have applied the metaphor of worship to marriage. There are many other dimensions to the comparison that can be played out in all aspects of the relationship.

Self-assessment exercise

Explain the relationship between marriage and worship.

3.2 Marriage as vocation

The word *vocation* means *call*. Theologically, vocation means a call or invitation given by God to the Christian life or to some particular service or state. And the vocation of marriage in itself is God's plan for majority of men and women (Gbuji, 2006). It is the divine call by which spouses are fitted and empowered to form an intimate community of persons able to love and serve. In fact, marriage is the vocation par excellence, for humans receives here the greatest privileges of becoming a co-creator with God by the gift of new life and the first teacher of love to human born into human family. Marriage is simply a specific call to holiness and to a supernatural function in the Mystical Body of Christ.

John Chrysostom (*Homily 9 on 1 Timothy*, PG 62:546) speaks of the sacramentality of marriage as a *vocation* of spiritual sacrifice where husband and wife are each ministers in their priestly vocation offering life and love to each other. The mutual decision to marry, the gift of life and love to each other, are precious gifts from God. Consequently, it is a demanding vocation, but also enriching and rewarding (Gbuji, 2006).

Christian tradition teaches us two important lessons:

- i. The entire ongoing process of marriage is a rite of passage (an anthropological reality).
- ii. The nature of the marital union and conjugal life as a whole is sacramental (a theological reality), which stems not from the wedding rite, but from the consecration of the bridal pair at baptism.

The whole thought brings in the idea of marriage as a kind of sacrament of initiation that calls for "constant renewal" and just as the renewal of baptismal consciousness and the profound consequences that will flow therefrom not only for the life of the family, but for the structures of the Church itself. You see us coming back to the full circle of the baptismal foundations of 'marriage in Christ' with which the Church's theology of marriage begins (cf. Searle, & Stevenson, 1992). You are, therefore, to note that marriage is not just an event coinciding with the wedding ceremony; it is a whole way of life: The grace of Jesus Christ is not exhausted in the actual celebration of the sacrament of marriage. It rather 'initiates'. It accompanies the married couple throughout their life.

This brings to mind an awareness of the baptismal foundations of marriage, that is, as being a "marriage in Christ," requires a shift in mentality and style that will depend to a great extent on the church to provide a kind of support and insight required before, during and after wedding bearing in mind that marriage is larger than wedding. Thus Stevenson (1987) suggests "a three-stage marriage liturgy" which the church today needs to create a new process of phased initiation, thus beginning with engagement, wedding and continuing through the years of marriage. Pope John Paul II echoes the same view in his insistence that marriage is a "journey of faith, which is similar to the catechumenate," and thus the pastoral care of the family is to be regarded as a progressive action" step by step in the different stages of its formation and development." (John Paul II, 1981 Nov. 2, 65). Consequently, solemnization of the wedding in the Church (the rite of incorporation) is not enough, because it is only part of the longer process of *realizing* the marital vocation.

Self-assessment exercise

1. Explain the idea that marriage is a sacrament of initiation.
2. If marriage is a vocation ordained by God himself, do you know of other vocation(s) that could take the place of marriage, but serve almost the same purpose as marriage?

3.3 Marriage as communion

Time without number you have been reminded of the fact that marriage is the mutual sharing of the gift of the self. It is "the intimate community of life and love." (Vatican Council II, 1988 [GS] 47-51). A contemporary perspective of biblical revelation provides the foundation for such a theology of "marriage as communion." Thus the archetypes in Genesis where man (and subsequently woman) is created in the "image of God" point to the interpersonal nature of the man-woman relationship, as well as to the "goodness" of the body and of the sexual relationship. The scripture witnesses in a unique way not only to the transcendent quality of the origin of human beings. The individual is both "other" and yet completely dependent on the creator. Consequently, a dialogue with God becomes the only hope of liberation from the primordial chaos (Martinez, & Brignoli, 2001). In this way *God-agape* is the source of life and goodness in the marital communion, which is dynamically enclosed by, and moves toward the ultimate mystery. God himself "extended, the lines of relationship intersect in the eternal you" (Buber, 1970, p.123).

Marriage is the communion of love, the intimate union of the spouses as integrated in the eternal redemptive mission of Christ' (cf. John Chrysostom, *Epistola I ad Cor.* 9.3, 51:230; Crouzel, 1973). For Tertullian (*Ad uxorem* 2, VIII, 6, CCL 1:395), the spirituality of this communion between the marriage partners is concretely observed in the following manner: "They are brother and sister, both servants of the same master; nothing divides them, either in flesh or in spirit. They are, in very truth, two in one flesh; and where there is but one flesh, there is also but one spirit." You can see here communion explained in the Trinitarian concept: a woman and a man united in the Lord to form a union, where Christ is always the head, the modulator and sustenance of the union.

Again, communion between husband and wife points to the innate sacramentality, to the saving reality of marriage at its very core. Van der Leeuw (1959) reminds us that the old primitive world knew marriage as a sacrament in the literal sense of the word. This implies that in some ways the end of marriage is not mutual comfort or procreation, but salvation to be found through it (cf. Leo XIII, 1879 Feb. 10, 392). You are taken back to the marital "cup," which in a real sense like the Eucharistic chalice. It is a "communion" of lifeblood through which the transcendent love of God infuses the ordinary circumstances of life. It tells you that marriage is a graced relationship where and whenever those marital realities of happiness or sadness are lived authentically. God is hidden in them (Martinez, & Brignoli, 2001). The chalice is the joy and sorrows, the likes and dislikes of the other that must be accommodated and carried along not only as cross but also grace.

Marriage further tells you that communion and sacrament imply one another; neither is complete without the other. The church's current theology of marriage, which stresses the intrinsic connection, can be summarized as follows: marriage is God's creative reality raised to the dignity of a *sacrament*; established as a covenant of intimate communion of life and love; by which the spouses *signify* and *share* in the mystery of love and fidelity between Christ and the church (*Ordo celebrandi matrimonium*, 1991).

Self-assessment exercise

1. How does communion between husband and wife point to the innate sacramentality?
2. Do you agree that the scripture presents human as both the "other" and yet completely dependent on the creator? Use some scriptural passages to explain this.
3. How do you mean that communion and sacrament imply one another?

3.4 Marriage as covenant

Marriage, for Christ faithful, is fundamentally a *covenant*. It is the grace and intimate personal encounter between God and his people, finally fulfilled in Christ. Covenant is the foundation of Christian sacramentality including the sacramentality of marriage. And Marriage itself is *the sacramental covenant*. It is a human mystery and a way of holiness, and in a true and proper sense a journey toward salvation, (John Paul II, 1981 Nov. 2, 11), which is expressed by the ritual celebration and living out of the sacrament "in spirit and in truth." It is on this strength that you been earlier informed that marriage is both symbolic and real. When it is lived as mutual self-giving and intimate sharing between a man and a woman in faithful love, marriage exemplifies the ideals of the biblical concept of covenant. Moreover, because the union of the two partners goes beyond any notion of a human contract, marriage is, in fact, "a paradigm of human relationship and love" (Cooke, 1983, p.20) and, thus covenantal in its core (cf. Module 3:1).

The author of Ephesian is so much inspired by the nuptial symbolism of the covenant that he sees in the marital union an image of Christ's love for his Church (Eph 5:32) (cf. Module 2:3), and uses "the language of the sacramental sign-value." (O'Callaghan, 1970, p.107). Following the same line of theological thinking, patristic theology draws insights from the biblical paradigm to describe marriage as the "image and likeness" of God's covenant with humanity, and perceives in marriage a particular way of living out the Christ-church spousal mystery. Tertullian (*De Monogamia* XA. 1-2, PL 2:994) describes the conjugal union as an image and symbol of the divine covenant.

According to (Martinez and Brignoli 2001:70), the intrinsic relationship between covenant and marriage is rooted in the history of salvation in a double sense: (i) *symbolic* and (ii) *archetypal*.

i. Marriage Covenant as Symbolic: The symbolic language opens up a new dimension to the reality of God. By God's initiative people come closer to God and are introduced into the divine mystery. In this way marriage is part of God's transcendent mystery.

But you have to be very careful not to exaggerate the symbolic aspect of marriage or to take it in the literal sense because marriage also shares in the contingencies of the ever-changing and unpredictable human journey. It provides a potentially fallible symbol of God's forever infallible love. The biblical covenant (the Aramaic word *berith*) implies in a sense the right

feeling of inequality, and also has a changing concept in Scripture (Horwath 1979). In fact, God and Israel are unequal partners. Nevertheless, *the heart of the symbolic message of the covenant*, in light of our Christian interpretative background of revelation offers us a source of meaning and strength for the contemporary partners as they live out the relationship in all its ethical demands. In this regard the life-creating and salvific message of the biblical covenant is most relevant in contemporary religious consciousness (cf. Martinez, & Brignoli, 2001).

ii. **Archetypal Model of Marriage:** You must then note that the biblical covenant represents the archetypal model of Christian marriage. Conjugal love is modelled on the faithful and compassionate initiative of God's covenantal love, whose ultimate prototype (*in the archetypal sense*) is the marriage of Christ and his bride, the church, in which Christ sacrifices everything for her, even his life. Thus, God has freely given to his people the total gift of himself. It is this event, *Christ's Pasch*, which grounds the sacramental covenant of marriage, and thus makes it the archetypal model of Christian marriage. Moreover, it is the couple's faith, as expressed in their lives that renders them a people of the covenant, and consequently makes their union a sign and a Christian sacrament of the covenant.

Speaking from the perspective of God's presence and action in creation, Rahner (1973), as we have earlier noted, is very decisive in holding to the salvific dynamics of marriage: "The unity between Christ and the Church is the ultimate cause and origin of the unity of marriage." This "great mystery" is the foundation of the marriage sacrament. Moreover, marriage, like each of the sacraments, receives its transforming power from the paschal event: The spouses find here both *the archetype* of their marital spirituality, and a source of transforming spiritual power.

It is also important that married couples should understand that they need to bring *something* into their marriage. That something is their faith on the reality of marriage as a sacred bond. The faith is that 'this' marriage *must* work and work well. It is at this point that the *covenantal* aspect of marriage becomes most significant. Courageous trust, not that a party trusts in the other as such, but the trust in the *larger meaning of the marriage* allows the party to live in the *transcendent* dimension of the relationship, believing that God is somehow present in the brokenness. It can be a time of active "waiting" for the Lord, a painful time when one often stumbles into a profound spiritual experience, even a time of healing. But without active *faith* covenant has no meaning. So, the biblical concept of covenant provides an integrated vision of the spirituality of marriage (cf. Martinez, & Brignoli 2001).

Self-assessment exercise

1. What is the relationship between covenant and marriage?
2. What are some of the difficulties in understanding marriage as covenant?
3. Describe the role of Christian faith in Christian understanding of marriage as covenant.

3.5 Marriage as sacrament

You should have noticed that a lot, but not too much, has been said about the sacramentality of marriage. The idea of marriage as one of the seven sacraments of the Church in itself is not necessarily an ecclesiastical invention. It stems from the broader meaning of the sacrament as *mystery*, proposed by the early church fathers, especially Augustine, who speaks about the three foods of marriage: *offspring*, *faithfulness*, and *sacrament* (cf. Mod. 2:5). At the same time Augustine acknowledges that marriage of non-Christians is also a "sacrament-bond" of a sacred and mysterious reality, which, nevertheless, called to mind the fullness of the revelation of the Christian mystery (compare Augustine, Schillebeeckx and Rahner on the one hand, and Augustine and Scheeben on the other hand).

3.5.1 Marriage as human mystery

The sacramental mystery of marriage is anchored fully in a human reality; it is a *radically human sacrament*. (Martinez, & Brignoli, 2001; also Schillebeeckx, 1965). It is essentially a sign, not only of life, but of the whole of life. Its meaning is the salvation of a personal community. It is important for you to note that marriage cannot be reduced to a sacred function or ritual, because it is a sign in all its human fullness and transcendent reality. In

acknowledging that all human experience is potentially sacramental, and that it is transformed by Christ, Cooke calls marriage a basic and key sacrament of the saving presence of God to human life. (Cooke, 1983).

What we are saying is that the sacramental mystery of marriage is linked to human reality, which is, nonetheless, open to the transcendent. Again, note the following: (i) while love and friendship are part of the committed partnership and not unique to Christians, Christians have *the opportunity to live in a way that allows the constantly renewing love of Christ to liberate them*, and, thus, affords them the possibility of realizing the transcendent quality of the partnership; (ii) while the centrality of conjugal love constitutes the human foundation of the sacrament, when two Christians marry, God is present within their human partnership, and thus, the partnership is subsumed by the redeeming force of Christ, who is part of creation and head of it (Col. 1:16).

Thomas (1983). extends the sacramental meaning of Christian marriage to five distinct but organically inter-related, and mutually interdependent: (i) the sexual, (ii) the creative, (iii) the loving, (iv) the ecclesial, and (v) the spiritual. From this perspective the sacramental sign-value of marriage is all embracing and life-long. Marriage is an all-embracing *symbol* and a *reality* because of the centrality of committed love, which makes it a paradigm of an interpersonal relationship. This intimate partnership establishes the couple in a mutual, faithful, fruitful, permanent, and public union. Thus, love and sexuality, procreation and caring, intimacy and communication, and all the hopes and struggles of the intimate and familial lives of the spouses are not just natural phenomenon, but are salvific mystery (Martinez, & Brignoli, 2001).

Self-assessment exercise

1. What makes Christian marriage as a sacrament of human reality different from other marriages?
2. What are the five distinct but organically related and mutually independent aspects of Christian marriage as observed by Thomas (1983)?

3.5.2 Marriage as a saving reality

Marriage is not only a radically human sacrament, it is also a sacrament of faith. The human values of the partnership constitute the "matter" of the sacrament and its sacramental root, which is fundamentally related to the experience of mystery. This mystery is called *sacrament*, a saving reality in the specific Christian sense, for "the Lord encounters Christian spouses through the sacrament of marriage (GS 48). While considering the baptismal character of marriage, Scheeben points out that there is an essential and intrinsic relationship between sacramental marriage and the mystery of the spousal relationship of Christ and the church. Marriage participates actively and effectively in that fundamental mystery (Scheeben, 1946). In this regard marriage is, in itself, a natural sacrament, that is, a radical hope of salvation and an actual means to it (Martinez, & Brignoli, 2001).

The theology of the sacramentality of marriage recognizes three fundamental dimensions of its sacramentality as Martinez and Brignoli (2001) observe: (i) *marriage is a natural sacrament* in its own right instituted by God; (ii) *marriage is a covenantal sacrament*, and as such is a prophetic symbol of the community of grace and salvation between Yahweh and Israel; and (iii) *marriage is an essentially Christian sacrament*, as revealed by Jesus, who has redeemed human beings, each to live as "a new creation."

What makes this natural sacrament (marriage) specifically Christian sacrament is not in the act of marrying itself (wedding) but in the sacraments of Christian initiation (baptism of water and the Spirit and Eucharist). It is in the newness in Christ, and by means of an ongoing relationship with Christ, that the Christian couple is, in fact, in the words of Rahner (1969, p. 7), "the very fulfilment of the Church." The "new creation" that we are "in Christ" is the essence of Christian sacramentality. The specific elements of Christian marriage stem from this Christ-church spousal relationship. Consequently, *faith*, *baptism*, and *community*, respectively, constitute the personal, ontological, and ecclesial qualifications of the Christian

sacramentality of marriage. Baptism is the foundation on which the intimate partnership of the spouses is built in the image of Christ, and through which the partnership becomes (ontologically) a "new way of being" in the church.

The sacrament of marriage is not only a public commitment, but it is also a concrete expression of the universal sacrament of the church. So when you see people celebrate the rite of marriage (sacramental sign) before the community, they celebrate not to make marriage holy (because it is already holy) but as a demonstration of their faith which demands a public and ecclesial expression. Such a symbolic and sacramental celebration does not come from outside, but from life itself, which is sustained by sharing in the divine source and the redeeming love of Christ. It is a particular actualization of the baptismal vocation; the permanent manifestation and actualization (anamnesis) of the new covenant of Christ. The sacramental reality remains in the life of the couple, who continue to represent the mystery and to be a sacrament to one another, to their family, and to the community of faith. They are the "fleshed out" sign of God's love to the world (cf. Martinez, & Brignoli, 2001). They are sacraments to one another.

So you can see that "marriage as sacrament" has two dimensions of sacramentality: the interpersonal marital relationship whose essence is *love*, and the ecclesial dimension, through which the marriage is specifically Christian – namely, in *faith, baptism, and community*.

Self-assessment exercise

1. What are the three fundamental dimensions of the saving reality of the sacrament of marriage as noted by Martinez and Brignoli (2001)?
2. What is then the true foundation of Christian marriage?
3. Do you agree that a husband and a wife are sacrament to one another?
4. Do you agree that the Christian couple is the very fulfilment of the Church?

3.6 Marriage as partnership

Partnership in our context is a symbolic model that examines the conjugal union against the background of the sacramentality of all of creation, and envision marriage as *a process*. It includes the whole of family life, which reveals marriage as a social sacrament (cf. Elliot 1990). Remember that sacramentality is not an addition to marriage, but the intrinsic part marriage (cf. Boff 1981). In other words, conjugal partnership is the anthropological foundation of marriage as well as its sacramental; for it is the sacrament first and foremost and in its own right (O'Callaghan 1970). In their total, mutual self-giving, the couple symbolizes God's life-giving gift of himself (grace), which is always available to the spouses to transform and heal their marital relationship. In this regard, the whole of the spouses' life together, including the earthy and sexual sides, is not profane, but is graced.

The partnership model, through the concept of *process* provides us a vision of the couple as a dynamic entity with a past, a present, and a future: A partnership is sustained, and it grows, and the couple inevitably lives with paradox and uncertainty in the process of growing and "becoming." In simple terms, the sacramentality of the partnership is never something fully accomplished, because partnership is a journey, an ongoing, shifting reality, not a static commodity. It makes the covenantal bond of marriage more real. It revitalizes it and reaffirms the ontological foundation of the sacramentality of marriage. It tells us that Christian marriage is indissoluble but short of the *eschaton*; it is indissoluble, and yet *incompletely indissoluble*, already realises to some degree but yet to be fully realised. The indissolubility can mirror the divine fidelity to humans, but it cannot yet lay claim to the absoluteness which will come with the fullness of the Kingdom. Similarly, two Christians, a man and a woman, can be very genuinely and sacramentally married, but they are still being married to one another; their union can become yet richer and stronger (Cooke 1993:358). In other words, the new concept of indissolubility is dynamic, not static. It has the potential of growth provided the couple is alive. As a matter of emphasis, you should note that one simply cannot *get married*, but two persons can *grow married* and *become married*. The sacramental ritual is therefore a step in a process, and the goal is to engage in the mystery of *becoming married* (Brennan, 1991).

Marriage as partnership implies the larger, indeed the lifelong *process of sacramentality*, which cannot be reduced to the wedding rites. Indeed, the process of sacramentality consists of three phases: *baptismal*, *celebrative*, and *eucharistic*. Baptism, the primary and initiatory sacrament, is the foundation of marriage, and thus constitutes the preparatory phase of the sacramentality of marriage; the wedding rite, the public and ecclesial actualization of the dignity and holiness of marriage in Christ, is the celebrative phase; and the Eucharist, "the source and climax of the Christian life," is the continuing phase, which provides nourishment for spiritual formation, "bread for the journey." While there are many other important considerations in preparing for the vocation of marriage, nevertheless, an active participation in the sacramental life, which extends to every facet of life, is the core of the specific Christian call of the couple. As in the case of each of the seven sacraments, the popular language of the church ritual conveys the deeper reality of the Christian faith: We are *made* Christians, but we are also to *become* Christians (Martinez, & Brignoli, 2001).

Self-assessment exercise

1. Compare the models of marriage as partnership and as communion?
2. What do you understand by the claim that Christians do not *get married*, but *grow married* and *become married*?
3. How can you describe the indissolubility of Christian marriage? Do you think it is real and practicable?

4.0 Conclusion

You can agree with Kasper (1980) that there is no area of human life more important for personal happiness and fulfilment and in which faith and life are so intimately connected as that of marriage. What we now need is a credible, contemporary theological perspective of marriage, one rooted in revelation, yet valid in our present world's cultures, so that we may develop new pastoral approaches to the crisis facing marriage today. It is on this note that we may equally submit to the advice of Martinez, & Brignoli (2001) that the theological perspective of marriage that will be of relevance to our situation today must integrate the full complexity of its core values into a multifaceted, *real-life experience*. That is one of the reasons we have devoted this unit to discuss the several overlapping models of marriage that taken together embrace the core values and reflect "the heart" of the sacramentality of marriage. The models allow us to approach the depth and breadth of marriage as a sacramental mystery.

5.0 Summary

You could have observed in this unit how various metaphors were in order to remodel or even expand our thinking about marriage. Some of the models proposed were worship, vocation, communion, covenant, sacrament and partnership. A critical evaluation of these models tells you that they are not new as such. You have been encountering them in one manner or another right from the inception of this course. However, the difference now is the emphasis placed on them in this unit.

You have seen how the metaphor of worship provides you a foundation for a genuine Christian theology and spirituality of marriage. You were equally told that marriage is a celebration of human experience just as worship. Marriage is also vocation per excellence; a specific call to holiness and to a supernatural function in the Mystical Body of Christ. Marriage in a special sense makes the Church. Marriage is also communion. It is the mutual sharing of the gift of the self. It is "the intimate community of life and love. While due emphasis is given to the traditional understanding of marriage as a covenant, our attention was drawn to the symbolic and archetypal models of marriage. You were also cautioned against the inherent danger in the literal application of the term (covenant) to marriage.

At every stage in the lecture, the sacramentality of marriage would seem to dominate the stage, because marriage is a sacrament. All models point at the sacramental nature of marriage both on the natural and supernatural sphere. Marriage is a human reality, and at the same time a saving mystery with eschatological orientation. The sacramental character of marriage further implicates its double-fold dimension: the interpersonal and ecclesial. This

remains always an indicator to the couples that they are human (love) and also Christians (faith, baptism and community).

The model of partnership made us place marriage in a context of process encompassing the past, present and future, hence marriage becomes real and proleptic. It also gives us the advantage to re-evaluate our understanding of permanence and indissolubility in marriage as something present but with futuristic orientation. It 'is' and at the same time 'yet to be'. This makes marriage a lived experience of *risk* that leads us to the infinite.

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignment

1. What is the advantage of presenting marriage in various interrelated and overlapping models?
2. Evaluate the statement that the solemnization of the wedding in the Church as rite of incorporation is not enough but only the early part of the longer process of *realizing* the marital vocation.
3. Do you think that an average Nigeria, even an African, will agree with you that the ultimate end of marriage is not mutual comfort or procreation but salvation to be found through it?
4. Martinez, & Brignoli (2001) argue that the intrinsic relationship between covenant and marriage is rooted in the history of salvation in a double sense. What is the double reality? Evaluate the possible implications of *any* of them?
5. How do you mean that marriage is essentially a sign, not only of life, but of the whole of life?

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1.0 Introduction

The Christian family is the image of the covenantal love between Christ and his Church. The Church knows that the Christian family as "*ecclesia domestica*" has a special role to play in bringing forth salvation into the world. The analogy "*ecclesia domestica*" has now become almost commonplace, not only because of its simplicity as a label for the Christian family, but also and especially because of the rich meaning it contains and the practical suggestions it evokes. By referring to the Christian family as the Domestic Church in its dogmatic constitution 'on the Church' (Vatican Council II, 1980a *Lumen gentium* [LG] 11), and as the 'domestic sanctuary of the Church' in the decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (Vatican Council II, 1988b, *Apostolicam actuositatem* [AA] 11), the Second Vatican Council has brought out a most significant intuition existing in the Church and in the theological reflection on marriage and family. The family, especially the Christian family, has a mission to guard, reveal and communicate the reality and of being the 'domestic Church'.

2.0 Objective

- At the end of this unit, you should be able to:
- Identify some of the characteristics that make a Christian family a domestic church;
- Prove from the NT perspective that the Church from the beginning of her existence is a domestic church;
- Appreciate the Church’s teaching that the first vocation to marriage and family is holiness.
- Explain how the family shares in the saving mission of the universal Church
- Discuss the role of the family as a sanctifying reality
- Relate the operation of Christian family to the image of the Trinity

3.0 Main Content

3.1 The Christian family: An embodiment of the church

You will hear Chundelikkatt (2013) saying that family and Church are living images to each other, and both are present in each other according to the principle of participation. The Christian family is the domestic church in the sense that it is the vital cell of the Church. It is not just a basic unit in society, but ecclesiological and theological fact rooted in the Church.

The family is *not like* the Church, *nor* is it *part of* the Church. The family is the Church. It is a genuinely ecclesial expression of God's presence among specific communities of people. The family is in fact a local church. It is also important for you to understand that local churches are not merely members of the total Church. They are an actual realization of what the Church is as a whole. That is why you can hold that the Christian family is not only ecclesial in nature. It reflects both natural and supernatural, earthly and heavenly realities. It is an embodiment of the Church.

The family is the domestic church where new life is always initiated and nurtured. Without the domestic church there can be no Church. But the activities of the Christian family are rooted in the ecclesial community.

Again, the true identity of the Christian family as the domestic church is grounded in the reality of Christian marriage, a true sacrament of the Church. The union between Christ and his disciples is not merely in terms of an external one but an intrinsic one, based on an ontological reality. Christ communicates his life, his being to us from an innermost dwelling place within our own being. Through the reception of the sacrament of marriage the couples grow into this indwelling presence of the image of God, the Trinity. God is not a community of people, but a communion of persons.

The Church and the family are basically a communion of persons. The Church is the communion between Christ and humans in this world. "By its union with Christ, the People of the New Covenant, far from closing in upon itself, becomes a "sacrament" for humanity, a sign and instrument of the salvation achieved by Christ, the light of the world and salt of the earth, for the redemption of all" (John Paul II, 2003 April 17, 22). The family as the community of love and life forms an indissoluble communion.

Self-assessment exercise

1. Do you agree the statement that the true identity of the Christian family as the domestic church is grounded in the reality of Christian marriage?
2. Can you think of a true church without family? Imagine a world without family? State briefly your impression.

3.2 The Christian family as the 'domestic church'

You can appreciate that the work of salvation, initiated by the Father, fulfilled in Jesus Christ through the sanctification of the Holy Spirit is ever present in the world through the Church; first and foremost through the Christian family, the 'domestic Church'. I therefore take you back to Mod.2:4 where Clement refers to the family as "the church in the house," and Chrysostom calls the family "Little Church."

It must, however, be said that the idea of family as a "domestic Church" is not without the Old Testament influence. In the Old Testament, the idea of "house" carries a twofold sense – building and family. The latter sense makes it possible to address Israel as house of God (Congar 1958). The concept may also include members of a nuclear (Gen. 7:1; 12:1) and extended families, family lineage (Ex 2:1) tribal group (Num. 1:2) and Israel as a nation. It connotes also Israel as religious and worshiping community committed to the covenant of Yahweh.

It is this idea of people of Israel as the household of God that the NT borrowed, and then transferred the same to the Christian community, and to the Christian family. Thus the Christian household/family becomes fully associated with the household of the Lord. This includes all the domestic affairs, wealth, possessions or family property. It will also depict the family group in the context of the Christian community.

You should take note of the significance of the strategic approach of the Apostles' missionary activities and evangelization. The mission suggestively takes place in houses (cf. Mk. 6: 10),

and sometimes even the mission of Jesus (Lk 19:5-10). Acts 2:41-42 tells you clearly that the early Christian community is a listening and celebrating church, whose businesses are conducted in houses. In other words, the Church of the New Testament community is fundamentally a faith (believing) and Eucharistic (worshiping) *house church*.

The house church of the NT is also a sacramental community, a sign of the in-breaking of God's kingdom into world history. The Good News is now proclaimed in the houses - "everyday they went on ceaselessly teaching and proclaiming the Good News of Christ Jesus, both in the temple and in private houses" (Acts 5:42). So, the gatherings of the Christians in families is not merely social. It is characterised by the teachings of the apostles and fellowship expressed in the breaking of bread, prayers and sharing not only of material goods, but also spiritual (cf. Acts 2:42).

Again, the apostolic community also defines itself as *the* new Israel, and therefore *the* saving community. As the old Israel experienced the love of Yahweh as a salvific community, the first Christians also feel the saving presence of the Risen Jesus in their daily life as a salvific family. They gather in the homes of faithful members (Rom 16:3-5) for communion and prayer and blessings in the presence of God. These *house churches* that host communion and prayers are the basis of the Church. They housed all the principal functions now *celebrated* in our local churches. The faithful gather together at home to celebrate the joys, sorrows, births and deaths in the name of God. They share what they have with those who are in need. Every Christian family becomes the model Christian community that is explained in Acts (cf. Roberts, 1996).

It is important for you to know that a house church is bigger than a domestic household. To add to this will be the double sense of the term church (*ekklesia*) by Paul. The first is the church in the homes of the believers (1 Cor. 16:19; Phil 2; Rom 16:5); and the second, the Church as a local assembly of Christians who gathered regularly for worship and fellowship. It is interesting to note here that the many women whom Paul acknowledges in his letters as playing important roles in the early communities raises the possibility that some of them also may have been householders with churches meeting in their homes (Rom 16:1; 1 Cor. 1:11). Even if one argues that the 'church' in their house' is not only a spiritual or religious community but also a social and a humanitarian gathering, one cannot deny the religious motives of the meeting, which is the primary concern. The church is therefore a community of those who gather together for worship. All the deeds were done in a fraternal way. Coming together regularly facilitated their understanding of each other and helped in their relating to one another. It is a place for private and public liturgy and worship (cf. Rom. 16:4-5; 1 Cor. 16:19), where families gather in a family house as a new family of Christ (Philem. 1:1).

Self-assessment exercise

1. Explain the Old Testament influence on the development of the concept of family as a domestic church.
2. Evaluate the statement that the house church of the NT is a sacramental community.
3. Relate the apostolic idea of new Israel to the house church. State clearly some of the characteristics of this *new* Israel.

3.3 The domestic church: A place of teaching

Paul VI (1975 Dec. 8, 71) will tell you that the families are the place of teaching and evangelization. Most conversion and dispensation of baptism and confirmation take place the context of the family. An entire household (including slaves) appropriated faith in Christ (Acts 2:42; 5:42; 10:27, 47-48; 12:12; 16:15, 31). Values inherit in the Church are mostly values from family surroundings. It tells us in another language that the Church needs family, just as the family needs the Church. Anything that affects the family affects the Church (cf. Tit. 1:11). Our stress point is that it is in a household that the first Christian community develops and spreads to different parts of the world. It is also within the context of family that you can appreciate more the role of the apostles as father, and the believers as children.

Describing family as domestic church has also further spiritual implication. It signifies the sanctity of the family. According to Saint John Chrysostom, the family is a church of the

home. It is a little church if the members read and meditate on the Sacred Scriptures, live in harmony, in obedience, in piety, sing and pray and relate to each other. Vatican Council II is equally loud to call the family *Ecclesia Domestica* in such a manner that in its own way the family is a living image and historical representation of the mystery of the Church. It is the sanctuary of the Church, the first seminary of priestly vocations. The family is the image of and, a beneficiary in the partnership of love between Christ and the Church. Seeing family in this light, Christian spouses are encouraged to evaluate their family life in virtue of the sacrament of matrimony, which signifies and also makes them the partaker in the mystery of that unity and fruitful love which exists between Christ and His Church (Eph 5:32) (Thibon 1952). The sacrament of marriage is a gift of God given to the spouses and the Church.

Self-assessment exercise

1. Can you think of those values that the church inherits from family?
2. What are those signs demonstrates that the family is a house church?
3. What lessons can contemporary Christian families draw from the idea of house church?

3.4 The domestic church: A sanctuary of faith, hope and charity

The unique reality of the family of Nazareth gives the foundational thoughts of the domestic Church in the New Testament. The identity of the Christian family as the domestic Church comes to its sublime expression in the family of Nazareth. Faith and obedience are at the core of the family of Nazareth. The evangelists Matthew and Luke mention the unquestioning faith of Mary and Joseph and of the complete surrender of their human will to the will of God (Mt 1:18-25; 2:13-24, 19-23; Lk 1:26-38; 2:41-51).

The mutual faith and the surrender of self to God's plan are the great mystery of Christian family life. The Catechism of the Catholic Church describes believing families first as "centres of living, radiant faith" as the reason why they can be understood as a "domestic Church". It describes the homes as "the first school of Christian life. Here one learns endurance, and the joy of the work, fraternal love, generous, even repeated forgiveness and, above all, divine worship in prayer and the offering of one's life. Fundamentally the Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason it can and should be called a domestic Church. Therefore the concept of domestic Church is not just a cohabiting of persons rather, in itself a community of faith, hope and charity (CCC 2204). Every particular task of the family is an expressive and concrete actuation of this fundamental mission.

May, (1995) commenting on John Paul II, tells us that the Christian family shares in the saving mission of the Church, with an original and characteristic task, linked to its very nature. Hence the family can be called the domestic Church, a living image of the very mystery of the Spouse of Christ. It is through the sacrament of marriage that couples are blessed with graces to sanctify their life, fulfil duties to overcome difficulty in married life and keep the promises of married life (Chundelikkatt 2013).

Self-assessment exercise

How does the domestic church share in the saving mission of the universal Church?

3.5 Mystery of Christ's love towards the church

The Christian family as the domestic Church inwardly participates in the mystery of Christ's love for the Church. The family can best provide the sense of intimacy, the personal touch, a human environment of ordinary affection, friendliness and lovingness. In the domestic Church parents and children together communicate and celebrate their life in the saving presence of God. Parents will pass on the values of marriage and family as the foundation of the domestic Church to their children and thus the new generation will grow up with proper attitudes about marriage and family that are very different from those of the current generation (Heaney-Hunter 1996). In the domestic Church, life conceives, nourishes and loves and within it, the nature of God's love is kept alive. It is the school of love.

According to Vatican Council II (1988c, *Gaudium et spes* [GS] 47-50), the family is the intimate community of love and life. It is the closest and most intimate of friendships. It involves the sharing of the whole of a person's life and, indeed, his/her very being with the

partner. Marital life is a call to a mutual surrender to one another. The two persons become each other as a gift to each other so as to become one in union without losing individual identity (Paul VI, 1968 July 25, 8-9). This union involves the good of both, the couple themselves and of the life of their children.

Conjugal love mirrors the divine love. It is a sharing in the covenantal love of Christ and his Church. The Church teaches that the love between man and woman is eminently human, directed from one person to another person through an affection of the will. It involves the good of the whole person. It holds the quality of Christian charity, and different from erotic love. It is the life-long giving of the self in marriage from which the whole person of husband and wife benefits. It is love-unity established by God, which presents the bodies of husband and wife each as the dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:9). It recognises equal dignity of the partners by mutual and total love. Such equality is also understood in the family context as emanating from the perfect unity of the spouses in married life and love (cf. GS. 48-52). It is their perfect and total unity.

The concept of the domestic Church does not limit itself to relations between husband and wife. It includes parent-child love and communion. Children are seen as a gift of God and the source of precious good for the family. When children are refused, say because of egoism of one or both of the partners, the family destroys itself (John Paul II (Nov. 22, 1981) [FC] 6, 14, 28, 30, 50). They strengthen the love and the unity between the spouses and are for them a source of indissoluble joy and at the same time a marvellous way for them to make a generous gift of themselves (CCC 315). For Christian spouses, human love and marriage duties are part of their divine vocation (FC, 59). This vocation is of great importance for the building up of the community of the Church and for the formation in it of all vocations family as a 'domestic Church'. Christian husbands and wives are co-operators in grace and witness of faith to each other, to their children and to all others in and around the household.

Self-assessment exercise

1. How do you understand the statement that 'the family is the first school of love'?
2. How does conjugal love mirror the divine love? Do you agree that it is a life-long giving of the self in marriage from which the whole person of husband and wife benefits?
3. Explain the importance of the human love and marriage duties in the divine vocation of married couple?

3.6 The domestic church as sanctifying reality

There is no doubt that all the discussions in this course make it clearer to you that human, already in the state of Grace occasioned by the encounter with Christ through the sacrament of baptism, is a divinized person. You should have equally noted that when a baptised man and a baptised woman are united sacramentally in marriage, that the union between the two baptized persons becomes an efficacious sign of grace, thus mirroring the union between Christ and Church. Thus in marriage, husband and wife become one in Christ through sacramental grace, and remains a means of grace for each other. It is Christ our high priest who brings His grace to us (FC 56-59, 62). Through him marriage becomes a sacrament of sanctifying grace.

You can still remember what we said earlier in the course that the Fathers of the Church have always considered marriage as a source of grace, which helps spouses live a holy life. This grace helps couples to live their life according to the symbol of union between Christ and the Church, consequently loving one another in a redemptive manner. It transforms the conjugal love to sanctifying love, for Christ himself graces the human conjugal love and merges the human with the divine.

Another interesting point for you to hold is that through the sanctifying grace of baptism, the Christian couple in forming a communion of baptised persons brings into existence the "domestic Church." This new state of life calls for special grace. Consequently, through the sacrament of marriage the spouses called to the new state of life get God's grace. The Christian spouses are fortified, and thus receive a kind of consecration in the duties and dignity of their state.

The grace of the sacrament accompanies the couples throughout the whole journey of the married life. It helps to perfect the nature of the couple in order that the couple may be assisted not only in understanding the other but in knowing the other intimately and, adhering firmly to that understanding and knowledge, willingly, effectively and successfully putting the same into practice. Needless to say, the fruit of the grace depends upon the personal co-operation of the spouses.

Self-assessment exercise

1. Scan through the past lectures in this course and identify those places where the Fathers of the Church have considered marriage as a source of grace, which helps spouses live a holy life.
2. Demonstrate how the Church accompanies the Christ faithful called to the new state of family life.

3.7 The domestic church and the call to holiness

You should have discovered from our discussion on marriage and family in the Old Testament that at the very beginning of their history, the Jewish people place the family in the context of sacredness. This sacredness is experienced during the very beginning of the people of Israel. In the eyes of Israel, the family becomes a saving mystery in the presence of Yahweh.

The OT prophets use the reality of marriage and the family to illustrate the relationship between Israel and God; they refer to God as the husband of Israel. Indeed, for the prophets there is no imagery that portrays best the relationship of God to Israel than the spousal relationship in marriage and in the family. The holiness in family life is indicative of the experience of the presence of God amidst His people and of His relationship with them at a very personal level, a relationship of intimacy and closeness (cf. Hos. 2:4-10). The New Testament and the early Fathers in a like manner always present marriage and family as sacred and holy.

The Church further teaches that the call to marriage is a call to fulfil and to grow in the image of God. The family has a holy structure in the plan of creation (GS. 48). Spouses are called to the perfection of Christian life. The very meaning of marriage is holiness (LG 34-36), "For this is the will of God, your holiness" (1 Thess 4:3, Eph 1:4). The way for the family to being the domestic Church is to grow in holiness and in the love of God. You find here that holiness has a transcendent dimension: married love is entrenched in divine love. Sanctity in family life means the radiance, the communication, the sanctifying presence of Christ in every moment of time.

You can now understand the reason for O'Connor's (1999) insistence that marriage is a supernatural vocation to holiness and into a principle of a specific apostolic mission; to follow the footsteps of Christ, the principle of Christian life. It is a vocation that illumines their whole behaviour. And it is only through the divine power can the family live the moral power. What we are saying in effect is that growing into the vocation to holiness is the first call of the family. It is so because it is the growth into the image of God as God's children amidst the daily realities of family life.

Self-assessment exercise

Identify some of the possible ways the family as a domestic Church can grow in holiness and in the love of God.

3.8 The domestic church: a community of love and life

As the domestic Church the Christian family is called to be the light of the nations (LG 11). The Christian family as a domestic church participates in the spousal union of Christ with the Church to form a community of love and life. The Christian family bears witness to the truth of the Gospel in the society, where it finds itself.

The reflection by Chundelikkatt (2013, pp. 153-56) is of great significance for your appreciation of the role of the domestic in fostering love and life. According to him, there is a kind of family life going on within the Trinitarian circle. The Father knows and loves the Son perfectly, the Son perfectly receives that love, knowing and loving the Father perfectly in

return. The Spirit is the person of that bonding love. In this Trinitarian circle there is a flow of receptivity and gratitude between three persons. The dynamism of love between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is now graciously the image of the love and communion within the family. This makes the family an image of the Holy Trinity in this world and a witness of the presence of the mystery of the Trinity. God enters into the ordinary setup of the family, and thus sanctifying its communion makes the family into a domestic Church.

You are equally reminded that that man and woman created in God's image and likeness are called to form a life-long community to reflect the very essence of the Trinity and become fruitful. This fruitfulness in the family is primarily understood in relation to the couple themselves. In their community (the married man and woman) of life they grow together as human beings, as husband and wife, as members of society and as children of God. Therefore, in family life the love between husband and wife, and between parents and children shows a dynamic power of reciprocal giving. Through love one enlarges the other's capacity for returning love and being loved. Just as the human body becomes stronger with exercise, the lover's capacity for loving is increased by the practice of love. The total self-giving in love and the absolute mutual fidelity of the spouses in the family is an integral part of God's eternal plan of salvation (Hildebrand 1968). The reciprocal and true love between parents and children help a family to grow into the image and likeness of God. The beautiful lesson that theology of the domestic Church teaches is that all that is human should be consecrated to Christ through the sacraments.

Self-assessment exercise

1. What makes family an image of the Trinity?

Evaluate the claim that the statement that the total self-giving in love and the absolute mutual fidelity of the spouses in the family is an integral part of God's eternal plan of salvation.

4.0 Conclusion

We can now say that the family is called the domestic Church when the Christian family shares in the saving mission of the Church, with an original and characteristic task, linked to its very nature. The family becomes the Church, the body of Christ when it is lived by the sacraments, especially by the sacrament of baptism and marriage. In other words, marriage is not a peripheral issue in the Christian life. It finds itself right at the heart of the Christian mystery. It is not human creation but God's. It has its foundation in the Triune God. It is created for love and communion. Anyone who changes the law of marriage changes the true meaning and truth of marriage, and thus acts against the will of the Creator (cf. Chundelikkatt 2013).

The family is so important and its role so basic in transforming the world and building up the kingdom of God. The well-being of the individual person and the well-being of society as a whole are closely related to the healthy condition of the family. The family is a part of a culture and is affected by the attitudes and behaviours associated with that culture. Only if a given culture recognises the family as a domestic Church can the family can act as the salt of the earth and the light of the world

5.0 Summary

You have already been informed that the equality of man with woman in a family is their perfect unity in married life and love. Again, you have been told that the Christian family is a community in which Christ renews the relationships through faith and the sacraments. It will also be good for you to note the following points:

- i. The family is a community of love and life. It is a reflection of the Trinity and the union between Christ and the Church. The conjugal union is therefore a sign of these two supernatural realities.
- ii. In order to attain perfect unity at home the couple must see each other as equal partners in dignity and in responsibility.
- iii. Parental love animates, inspires and guides all educational activities, enriching the couple with the values of kindness, goodness, loyalty, service and self-sacrifice. These are virtues

flowing from the most precious fruit of love. Through these virtues each member of the family helps the other to attain an integral development and maturity.

iv. The mutual love of the spouses contributes to the building up of the domestic Church and the universal Church.

v. The formation that a child receives from parents will last the whole life. Therefore, God is glorified by the growth of the family in holiness through the love of God and neighbour, prayerfulness, forgiveness, spirit of selfless service and support to the poor and the needy (cf. Jn. 13:35).

6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment

1. How do you mean that the family is *not like* the Church, *nor* is it *part of* the Church but the Church?
2. Prove from the NT perspective that the Church from the beginning of her existence is a house church.
3. Explain the Church's teaching that the first vocation to marriage and family is holiness.
4. What makes the Nazareth family so special in the consideration of family as a domestic church?
5. Analyse the statement that man and woman created in God's image and likeness are called to form a life-long community to reflect the very essence of the Trinity and become fruitful. What is the true meaning of life-life community in the statement?

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