

Promoting Chastity in Marriage through Marital Counseling In The Light Of *Amoris Lætitia*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a gift from God and it is intended to perfect the well-being of the couples and the good of the society. This important institution which is crucial for human survival is under threat due to challenges such as extreme individualism, domestic violence, infidelity, divorces and anti-life programs. The current reality of marriage as a community of life and love which involves mutual self-giving of the man and the woman has called for discussion on how to promote chastity in marriage through marital counseling. The Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Lætitia*, by Pope Francis is timely since “it represents an invitation to Christian families to value the gift of marriage and to persevere in a love strengthened by the virtues of generosity, commitment, fidelity and patience.”¹ Pope Francis believes that “we cannot encourage the path of fidelity and mutual self-giving without encouraging the growth, strengthening and deepening of conjugal and family love. Indeed, the grace of the sacrament of marriage is intended before all else to perfect the couples love”² whereas the contrary is to a good extend always the case. One of the causes of this infidelity is erosion of Christian values. Couples in many marriages do not experience the love and purity they desire. The Pope therefore, calls for fidelity between husband and wife during marriage. Therefore this work will endeavour to make recourse to Pope Francis in promoting chastity in marriage through marital counseling.

This lecture is structured into three main parts. The first part deals with themes as presented by the Apostolic Exhortation and their significance to the Church and the society. It also attempts to bring out a clear understanding of the concepts of chastity and marriage. Part two delves into explaining marriage as a sacrament; it also gives an overview of what human sexuality is and how the conjugal act is perceived from the Christian perspective. This part will lead us into part three where we look at what constitute marital counseling. In this section we endeavour to expose and critically examine the teaching of *Amoris Lætitia* on marital counseling. This section also attempts to give practical counseling approaches to concrete and real experiences and challenges in marriages. This process involves transforming the various family and social situations which contribute to infidelity, divorce, marital separation and domestic violence.

1.0 SIGNIFICANCE OF *AMORIS LÆTITIA*

The significance of the Exhortation is accentuated by the need to respond to the challenges of marriage experienced today in the Church and society. The study will make use of the document in the process of proposing practical counseling in order to promote chastity in marriage. Apart from being an invitation to Christian families to value the gift of marriage, the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Lætitia* “seeks to encourage everyone to be a sign of mercy and closeness wherever family life remains imperfect or lacks peace and joy.”³ In cognizance of the imperfections in marriages and family, Pope Francis encourages Christian families to proclaim the Gospel of the family. Thus, given the complexity of the current realities affecting marriage, Francis proposes dialogue⁴ as a means to achieve a peaceful and loving married life. The dialogue the Pope proposes in

¹ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Lætitia, The Joy of Love* (19 March 2016), No. 5.

² Ibid. No. 89.

³ Ibid. No. 5.

⁴ <https://cathnews.co.nz/2016/04/08/pope-francis-amoris-laetitia-focus-dialogue/>. Pope Francis uses the term to mean that we must not take what we ourselves think for granted, nor what the other thinks. For the culture of dialogue, the inclusion of everyone is essential. The Pope suggests that we explicitly dwell on this way of understanding the Church, as the faithful people of God. The Pope’s vision of society is inclusive. Such inclusion involves the effort to accept diversity, to dialogue with those who think differently, to encourage the participation of those with different abilities. Cf. Pope Francis, *Amoris Lætitia*, No 136.

a way reflects the sharing of ideas and experiences during the Synod on marriage and family. He therefore, recommends dialogue in the spirit of synodality to be the *modus operandi* and style of life not only addressing the challenges and problems affecting marriages today but also in living the 'Joy of Love' experienced by families.

By proposing reverential dialogue in the spirit of synodality, the Exhortation is not giving answers to the problems and challenges in marriage and family, rather it exhorts an approach towards appreciating the Joy of Love experienced in families as also the Joy of the Church. The Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* invites all to engage in dialogue towards living the 'Joy of Love' experienced by families in the Church and indeed in our society.

It can rightly be noted that the Apostolic Exhortation ascribes the first concern to the challenges of marriages and family. In chapter one, *In the Light of the Word*, Pope Francis first looks at marriage and family in the light of scripture. Pope Francis alludes to marital chastity when he cites biblical references which paint a splendid portrait of a couple joined together. "The man shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one" (Mtt 19:5; cf. Gen 2:24).⁵ The marital union is the profound harmony, a closeness that is both physical and interior.

In the second chapter, *The Experiences and Challenges of Families*, Pope Francis discusses current problems and challenges facing families and how the Church should understand and interpret the diverse situations of families in today's world. It is along this line of thought that Pope Francis recommends a continued honest, realistic and open dialogue. He also proposes that "the Church must be particularly concerned to offer understanding, comfort and acceptance rather than imposing a set of rules that only lead people to feel judged and abandoned."⁶

In the following chapters; chapter three, *Looking to Jesus: The Vocation of the Family*, chapter four, *Love in Marriage*, and chapter five, *Love made Fruitful*, he discusses how we can identify the nature and the mission of the family in the ever changing world. In chapter three he recalls some essential aspects of the Church's teaching on marriage and family. The Pope vehemently argues that marriage is a gift from the Lord; he strongly emphasizes the need to safeguard this gift. "Let marriage be held in honour among all and let marriage bed be undefiled."⁷ The aforementioned argument is clearly in defense against infidelity in marriage and therefore strongly supports our pursuit of promoting chastity in marriage. Pope Francis discusses the significance of love in marriage and love made fruitful in the two subsequent chapters respectively.

In chapter six, *Some Pastoral Perspectives* and chapter seven *Towards a better Education of Children*, Pope Francis concentrates on highlighting areas where pastoral care can contribute to the well-being of couples in marriage and family and the upbringing of children. In chapter eight, *Accompanying, Discerning and Integrating Weakness* and chapter nine, *The Spirituality of Marriage and the Family*, Pope Francis proposes that the Church should be preoccupied with family life particularly in relation to the preparations of the engaged couples for marriage, accompanying their first years in married life and casting light on crises, worries and difficulties. Pope Francis urges the Church to built sound and fruitful homes in accordance to God's plan. This involves better education of children, accompanying, discerning, integrating witness, and promoting the spirituality in marriage and family. The contribution of this work aims at realizing the 'Joy of Love' experienced by married couples as a result of promoting chastity in their marriages through marital counseling.

1.1 THE CONCEPT OF CHASTITY

In our endeavour to promote chastity in marriage through marital counseling it is fitting to give an overview of the concept of chastity.⁸ Chastity is the moral virtue which inclines man and woman to moderate the use of appetite for venereal delectation or sexual pleasure according to the norms of right reason.⁹ E. R. Hardy agrees with Palazzini in his definition of chastity. He understands chastity as "the preservation of sexual

⁵ Cf. Reginald C. Fuller et al., *A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd, London, 1953, p178, 937. There is no doubt that the inspired writer of Genesis, though he lived in a society that permitted both polygamy and divorce, taught that monogamous indissoluble marriage was not what Yahweh intended in the creation of man and woman. Jesus on his authority perfects this Law in Mtt. 19:4-6. He corrects the interpretation of Moses and on his authority cancels the exceptions.

⁶ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, No.49.

⁷ Ibid. No. 62.

⁸ <https://www.etymonline.com/word/chastity>, (accessed on 26.2.2018). The words "chaste" and "chastity" stem from the Latin adjective *castus* meaning "cut off, separated; pure". The words entered the English language from old French *chasteté*, around the middle of the 13th century. At that time they meant virtuous or pure from unlawful sexual intercourse thus referring to extramarital sex. This definition includes but not limited to virginity or celibacy

⁹ Palazzini Pietro (ed.), *Dictionary of Moral Theology*, Westminster, The Newman Press, 1963, p 215.

purity according to one's state of life- virginity for the unmarried, continence for the widowed, loyalty to husband or wife for the married. Violation of chastity is fornication for the unmarried, adultery for the married.¹⁰ Chastity as a virtue plays a crucial role in practical Christian life. It preserves man and woman from concupiscence of the flesh and those passions which disturb the faculties of intellect and will. B.W. Grant introduces slightly different definition of chastity. According to him "Chastity as a virtue is an attitude in which sexual desire, though present in the human person, is in the service of a balanced and committed love of God and the real or potential partner."¹¹ This clearly illustrated the fact that chastity is the state of the spirit that, though movable by sexual passion, invests the passion heartily in one committed and satisfying relationship seen as a gift of God. Chastity is not primarily a matter of physical purity but an aspect of all-encompassing virtue of love. It is an expression of respect and dignity for other human beings as children of God. The chaste person is so focused on the partner that there should not arise temptation towards another sexual involvement.

1.2 CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF MARRIAGE

Marriage is bilateral contract by which a man and a woman give and reciprocally receive a perpetual and exclusive right to reach other's body for performance of those actions which of their very nature are directed to the procreation of children.¹² This contract lasts as long as both parties are alive. It is strictly bilateral as it serves a life in common for both parties since they have the same rights and duties (1Cor. 7:9).¹³ Apart from marriage being between two parties it also affects wider relations in society. Herbert Waddams argues; "Marriage regulates relations between the sexes in all forms of society and governs the status and education of children within the community. It also extends its influence to the wider group of those related to one another by marriage or consanguinity."¹⁴

1.3 Marriage: A Natural Institution

The idea of natural law as a guiding principle in sexual ethics has been undeniably influential factor shaping the understanding of sexuality in traditional catholic thinking and teaching. Recognizing the finality or purpose of the sexual faculty is seen as a critical reference point for sexual morality. It is respect for this finality which ensures moral goodness provided the desire for, and openness to, procreation is shared with someone to whom the individual is committed to in marital union.

In order for us to appreciate Pope Francis' defense of the institution of marriage it is necessary for us to have recourse to the argument raised whether marriage is a natural institution necessary for human race or only the prevailing convention we have grown to accept as a matter of course. Historically some evolutionists assumed that the human person gradually developed from primitive promiscuity¹⁵ through various forms of polygamy to the monogamous marriage. This implies that future evolution will probably lead to a more advanced arrangement in marriage. But there is no evidence that a completely promiscuous society has ever existed. This research takes the position of marriage as natural institution. A system of ethics on natural law, as ours is, has to establish the connection between marriage and the natural law in order to show that marriage is no mere convention but a natural institution. Pius XI in the encyclical *Casti Connubii*¹⁶ vehemently defends marriage as a natural institution:

¹⁰ Hardy E. R, "Chastity" in John Macquarrie (ed.), *Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1967, p 53.

¹¹ B.W. Grant, "Lust and Chastity" in Rodney J. Hunter (ed.), *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1990, p 669.

¹² Palazzini Pietro (ed.), *Dictionary of Moral Theology*, p 731.

¹³ Dianne Bergant & Robert J. Karris, *The Collegeville Bible Commentary*, The Liturgical Press, Minnesota, 1998, p 1114. Marital relations are a "duty" owed to one who has authority over the other's body. Paul goes on to justify marriage at the expense of celibacy by reasoning that marital fidelity is better than sexual promiscuity. He explains that those who choose celibacy must be faithful and vigilant. Likewise those who choose marriage are to be faithful and respectful of one another.

¹⁴ Herbert Waddams, "Marriage" in John Macquarrie, *Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, p 206.

¹⁵ Karl H. Peschke, *Christian Ethics: Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican II*, Bangalore, Theological Publications in India, 2010, p 504.

¹⁶ "Casti Connubii", <https://embryo.asu.edu/pages/casti-connubii-1930-pope-pius-xi>, (accessed on 16.4.2018), "Casti Connubii," is a papal encyclical given by Pope Pius XI on 31 December 1930, it served primarily as a reaffirmation and expansion of the issues discussed in *Arcanum*, an encyclical written by Pope Leo XIII. It was released to address new threats to marriage and conjugal unity, and indeed is translated "On Christian Marriage" or "On Chastity in Marriage." The document explores the meaning of Christian marriage and

And to begin with that same Encyclical, which is wholly concerned in vindicating the divine institution of matrimony, its sacramental dignity, and its perpetual stability, let it be repeated as an immutable and inviolable fundamental doctrine that matrimony was not instituted or restored by man but by God; not by man were the laws made to strengthen and confirm and elevate it but by God, the Author of nature, and by Christ Our Lord by Whom nature was redeemed, and hence these laws cannot be subject to any human decrees or to any contrary pact even of the spouses themselves.¹⁷

Aristotle's sagacious words deserve some reflection as they give a clear understanding of marriage as being ordained by nature. According to him;

Nature intends the continuance of the human race because nature has given human beings the faculty and instincts for reproduction. Nature intends that this occur by union of man and woman because human beings are made to reproduce in the sexual manner. Hence in nature's plan the first and the fundamental purpose of sexual relationship is the child. People may marry for a variety of motives, for love, for companionship, for money for position. The idea of begetting children may be very secondary perhaps only tolerated rather than desired, in the minds of many marrying couples; it need not be psychologically uppermost in their minds. But there is no doubt that it is primary in nature's design. In race-preservation nature has not trusted to logic by which man might reason to his duty in this regard, but has implanted an instinct so strong that most human beings follow it.¹⁸

The preceding argument presupposes a question that ethics has to struggle with. The question is: What about childless marriages? Fagothey attempts to solve this problem by arguing that "the begetting and rearing of children remains the primary end of marriage even if through default of nature no child arrives. Nature sets the end but does not guarantee that it will be attained in every case. Childless couples form a family in its conjugal relation even though the parental relation never becomes actualized."¹⁹ It is therefore the duty of the parents to care for their children since they are the cause of the child's existence.

Austin Fagothey, the renowned author in Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophical ethics complements Aristotle's argument. He also looks at marriage from a natural point of view. He argues; "marriage may be considered as the act of getting married (wedding) or as a state of being married (wedlock)...as an act marriage is a contract by which a man and a woman give and receive rights over each other's body for performance of the generative act. As a state, marriage is a society of lasting union of man and woman resulting from such a contract."²⁰

The argument in favour of marriage as a natural institution is given a new dimension by Pope Francis. Emmanuel Wabanhu discusses Pope Francis' search of sexual ethics from naturalism to personalism. He rightly argues: "When one reads *Amoris Laetitia*, one cannot fail to see the kind of sexual ethics and the family Pope Francis wishes to propose. Pope Francis faithfully and creatively looks at neo-Aristotelian-Thomistic natural law-based sexual ethics. His goal is to reconstruct it and go beyond it; and ultimately to move it from being a naturalistic law-based ethics to personalist sexual ethics,²¹ which adequately safeguards families and marriages in their particularities and historical concrete realities."²² The aforementioned argument is a shift from understanding sexual morality in terms of immutable natural law to the person-centred ethical model which

emphasizes its threefold purpose as borrowed from St. Augustine: to produce offspring, to grow in conjugal faith, and to show benefit from the sacrament.

¹⁷ Pius XI, Encyclical Letter, *Casti Connubii*, On Christian Marriage, AAS 22 (1930), P 547 & 548 (no. 5).

¹⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, bk VIII, ch 12, 1162a 16-28.

¹⁹ Austin Fagothey, *Right and Reason, Ethics in Theory and Practice*, (2nd ed.), Charlotte, Tan Books, 1959, p 359.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p 364.

²¹ Emmanuel Wabanhu, "Amoris Laetitia, and Sexual Ethics: A call to Rediscover the Relational Personalist Ethics of the Family and Marriage" in *Good Shepherd*, Vol.1 No. 2, 2016, p 81. Personalist sexual ethics is a type of ethical model of sexual ethics and the family which places the human person at the centre of all things and at the beginning and the end of morality. Wabanhu argues for Personalist sexual ethics in relation natural law based ethics where the focus of the latter is natural law.

Cf, <https://www.google.com/search?q=natural+law+based+sexual+ethics&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&client=firefox-b>, (accessed on 19.4.2018). Natural law is a philosophy asserting that certain rights are inherent by virtue of human nature, endowed by nature, traditionally by God or a transcendent source and that these can be understood universally through human reason.

²² Austin Fagothey, p 86-87.

emphasizes on the human person as a relational moral subject. It is in this context that Pope Francis sees marriage as a communion of persons.

People get married in order to live in the married state. In marriage there are four main conditions:

First, there must be a union of *opposite sexes*. This is because marriage has to do with reproduction of human race. Therefore marriage is opposed to all forms of unnatural sexual behaviour. Second, marriage is a *permanent* union. It must last at least as long as necessary for fulfillment of its primary purpose, the begetting and rearing of children. Third, it is an *exclusive* union. The partners must agree to share relations with each other, so that extra marital acts are a violation of justice. In this case adultery is a crime against marriage. The fourth and final condition is that its permanence and exclusiveness are guaranteed by contract.²³

Mere living together without being bound by contract does not constitute marriage. Contract makes the difference between marriage and concubinage. As already seen, the primary end of marriage is the begetting and rearing of children. On this account the marriage covenant has been elevated by Christ into a sacrament.²⁴ The term covenant replaces contract generally used in 1917 code and related literature to describe the nature of marital consent.²⁵

1.4 THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE

The Vatican Council II called for a renewal of understanding, approach, and practice within the total life of the Church. No other area of Church life was affected by this focus on renewal than those parts of ecclesial life associated with sacramental life, hence sacrament of marriage. The theology of marriage has experienced steady growth owing to the reframing of Christian marriage in *Gaudium et Spes*.²⁶ What occurred in

²³ Ibid., p 360. See also Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, bk VIII, ch12, 1162a 16-28 and St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, III, Supplement q.41, a.1. St Thomas analyzes Aristotle's understanding of marriage. He argues that according to Aristotle, we derive three things from our parents, namely existence, nourishment and education. Now a child cannot be brought up and instructed unless it have certain and definite parents, and this would not be the case unless there was a tie between the man and the definite woman and it is in this way that matrimony consist.

²⁴ Cf. "Sacrament", <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/sacrament>, (accessed on 16.4.2018). Sacrament is an ecclesiastical term which refers to a visible sign of an inward grace, especially one of the solemn Christian rites considered to have been instituted by Jesus Christ to symbolize or confer grace. Cf. also W.S. Adams, "Sacramental Theology and Pastoral Care" in Rodney J. Hunter (ed.), *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1990, p 1097. See also Bernard Cooke "Sacraments" in Peter E. Link, *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, The Liturgical Press, Minnesota, 1990, p 1116. Sacraments are a means of communication with God. The sacraments are signposts which guide and provide reference points. In and through sacraments human existence is brought into contact with the divine and thus transcends its own fallen nature. Thus, the sacraments are the perfect expressions of pastoral care in the Church.

²⁵ James A. Coriden, Thomas J. Green & Donald E. Heinstchel, *The Code of Canon Law, A Text and Commentary*, New York, Paulist Press, 1985, No. 1055, p740, see also Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Nairobi, Paulines Publications Africa, 2005, No. 219.

²⁶ Cf. Flannery Austin, (ed.), *Vatican Council II, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Bombay, *Gadium et Spes*, 7th, December 1965, Nos.47-52.

Cf. also *Gadium et Spes*, ><https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/publications/gadium-et-spes-joy-and-hope-pastoral-constitution-on-the-church-in-the-modern-world>, (accessed on 16.4.2018).

This document was promulgated on the final day of the Second Vatican Council. Addressed to the whole of humanity, the encyclical praises scientific achievement but cautions against an attitude of total dominion over nature and a belief that technology can solve all earthly problems. The document characterizes poverty as a grave threat to freedom, and it decries abortion, genocide, torture, slavery, and prostitution as assaults upon human dignity. All forms of discrimination are rejected as contrary to Christian principles. See also, *Gadium et spes*, ><http://www.cacatholic.org/teachings/catholic-social-teaching/social-encyclicals/gadium-et-spes-hope-and-joy>, (accessed on 16.4.2018). In these transforming times, the Second Vatican Council sought to clarify the role of the Church in the world by turning to Scripture in the Church's social teachings. The encyclical emphasizes the dignity of each human being as created in the image of God which comes from their call to communion with God.

Vatican Council II was the development of a new model of describing Christian marriage. This shift is one which moved from viewing marriage primarily as a biological and juridical union to one which is more interpersonal, spiritual and existential.

The total physical self-giving would be a lie if it were not the sign and fruit of a total personal self-giving, in which the whole person, including the temporal dimension, is present: if the person were to withhold something or reserve the possibility of deciding otherwise in the future, by this very fact he or she would not be giving totally.²⁷ This new theology provides a more integrated description of the faith of married Christians.

The *interpersonal* life between the wife and the husband implies that marriage is a living together, the sharing of life-supporting tasks between the couples in the eyes of the Church and the community. Earlier views of marriage concentrated exclusively on producing and caring of off springs. The code of canon law of 1917²⁸ described the primary purpose of marriage as procreation and education of children. The goal of achieving a higher degree of emotional closeness, friendship and a sense of shared life was not prohibited but it was not stressed. Current theology and Church teaching affirms the value of human sexuality because it is part of each spouse's identity as a sexual person, and from this shared life, as sexual persons in marriage. The interpersonal qualities of fidelity (being with) and forgiveness (being for) are the hallmarks of Christian marriage. Marital fidelity establishes an interpersonal structure where one's spouse holds a place of exclusive preeminence among others. Fidelity includes a lifelong intent to be of service to one's marital partner.

Marital *spirituality* in marriage as a new focus in theology as regards marriage seeks to determine where the presence and power of God are situated in conjugal life. This focus considers spiritual development as central to marriage itself. The spirituality proper to marriage is a relational spirituality. It emphasizes love of neighbour where the role of proximate neighbour is taken by the spouse. Christian marriage is the life cell of the Church as it develops a life and spirituality genuinely communal. Thus, recent conciliar and papal teachings refer to the Christian family as the domestic Church. "The sacrament of marriage gives to Christian couples power and commitment to live their vocation as lay people and therefore to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God."²⁹ Thus, in this manner, besides offering each other mutual help on the path of holiness, Christian spouses become a sign and instrument of Christ's love in the world.

The *existential* dimension stems from marriage as a human relationship, it is necessarily developmental. The Christian family exists first as intention and moves towards accomplishment. Earlier theologies focused on the wedding itself, the initial public exchange of vows along with consummation as essential for establishing the validity of marriage. The new approach seeks to present Christian marriage which is not only acceptable, but which when accepted, will itself encourage stability. "When the marriage vows are publicly exchanged the partners commit themselves to a growing sacramental reality, the task of living out an indissoluble relationship that shares even more fully in the stability of covenant between Christ and his Church."³⁰

²⁷ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio*, No.11. Cf. also, *Familiaris Consortio*, >https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Familiaris_consortio (accessed on 16.4.2018). *Familiaris Consortio*, *On the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World* is a post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation by Pope John Paul II promulgated on 22 November 1981. The document, describes the position of the Catholic Church on the meaning and role of marriage and the family, and outlines challenges towards realizing that ideal. It refers to marriage as one of the most precious and most urgent tasks of Christian couples in our time as the foundation of the wider community of the family, since the very institution of marriage and conjugal love are ordained to the procreation and education of children.

²⁸ <http://canonlawmadeeasy.com/2015/11/12/divorce-remarriage-and-excommunication/>, (accessed on 19.2018).

²⁹ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Nairobi, Paulines Publications Africa, 2005, p 124. See also John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 13 AAS (1982), 139.

³⁰ Benezeri Kisembo, Laurenti Magesa & Aylward Shorter, *African Christian Marriage*, Nairobi, Paulines Publications Africa, 2010, p 43-44.

2.0 DIGNITY OF HUMAN SEXUALITY

Sexual ethics has a famous history from conceptual, metaphysical and normative perspectives. Our interest in this presentation is to look at sexuality from conceptual point of view. Thus, contemplation of the place of sexuality in human nature is central to Christianity. It is therefore necessary to understand the following terms and their logical relationships. These are terms like: Sexual desire, sensation, pleasure, sexual act, arousal and satisfaction. Understanding these terminologies will help us in our quest towards possibility of maintaining chastity in marriage among married couples. Alan Soble in his essay on philosophy of sexuality argues thus; “the morality of human sexuality has been understood by some in terms of its procreative function. Sexual acts on this view are those having procreative potential in virtue of their biological structure.³¹ The principal case of such an act is heterosexual intercourse. Therefore homosexuality and masturbation which are not procreative in nature turn out not to be sexual acts though they involve sexual organs.

St. Thomas Aquinas in handling this issue argues from natural law point on view. According to him any act that of its nature is incompatible to the purpose of procreation the result is unnatural vice. He gives four examples of sexual acts that are unnatural because they are not procreative. These are the sin of self-abuse, intercourse with a thing of another species, acts with a person of the same sex, and acts in which the natural style of intercourse is not observed as regards the proper organ or according to rather a beastly and monstrous technique.³² In Thomistic ethics, if some sexual acts are unnatural they are morally wrong for just that reason since they violate God’s plan of creation. In arguing that sexual behaviour ought to conform to human nature within God’s plan Augustine and Aquinas thought that God wanted sexuality to be the mechanism of procreation. Aquinas displays confidence in his account of human nature:

It is evident that the bringing up of a human child requires the care of a mother to nurse him and much more the care of father under whose guidance and guardianship his earthly needs are supplied and his character developed. Therefore indiscriminate intercourse is against human nature. The union of one man with one woman is postulated and with her remains not for a little while, but a long period, or even for a whole lifetime.³³

2.1 CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF CONJUGAL ACT

The Church embraces natural law ethics and therefore the use of contraception devices makes husbands ‘lose respect’ for their wives. Using contraception implies the act is primarily for pleasure, the husband sees his wife as a mere instrument of selfish enjoyment, and no longer as his respected and beloved companion.

In his encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, Paul VI argued against permissibility of the use of contraceptive devices. The pope exhorts: “Nonetheless the Church, calling people back to the observance of the norms of the natural law, as interpreted by its constant doctrine teaches that each and every marriage act must remain open to the transmission of life.³⁴ This argument has its basis on Church’s teaching recalled by Vatican Council II, that “the acts by which husband and wife are united in chaste intimacy, and by means of which human life is transmitted, are, ‘noble and worthy’³⁵ and they do not cease to be lawful if, for causes independent of the will of husband and wife, they are foreseen to be infecund, since they always remain ordained toward expressing and consolidating their union, and therefore conjugal acts made intentionally infecund are immoral.³⁶ From these arguments we can rightly conclude that in the arguments of Paul VI and Vatican Council II the Church agrees that sexual act should not be intended primarily for pleasure. It is therefore an error to think that a conjugal act which is deliberately made infecund could be made honest and right by the ensemble of a fecund conjugal act.

In 1975, The Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith issued a “*Declaration on Certain Questions concerning Ethics*” in which sexuality is acknowledged as one of the factors which give to each individual’s life the principal traits that distinguish it. The declaration continues to affirm that;

³¹ Alan Soble, “Philosophy of Sexuality” in Edward Craig, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, London, Routledge, 1998, p 718.

³² Alan Soble, p 721, See also St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIa IIae.154.1.

³³ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIa IIae.154.2.

³⁴ Paul VI, Encyclical Letter, *Humanae Vitae*, On Human Life, Paulines Publications Africa, Nairobi, 1986, No. 17.

³⁵ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, Nos. 50-51.

³⁶ *Humanae Vitae* No. 14.

...it is from sex that the person receives characteristics which, on the biological, psychological and spiritual levels make that person a man or a woman and thereby largely condition his or her progress towards maturity and insertion into society.³⁷

This argument is supported and complemented by The Pontifical Council for the Family, on *Guidelines for Education within Family*, the council notes: "Femininity and masculinity are complementary gifts, through which human sexuality is an integrating part of the concrete capacity for love which God has inscribed in man and woman."³⁸

Sexuality can only be understood in relation to God's love. Humanity has been created out of love, we are made for love. We live because God loves us. Christian living is an extension of the incarnation, a continuation of Christ's embodiment of God's love for us. Sexuality plays a very important role if we have to answer our call to love, for it is sexuality which reveals both our completeness and our relatedness. Sexuality is in fact God's ingenious way of calling us into communion with others through our need to reach out and touch and embrace emotionally, intellectually and physically. Therefore sexuality is simply essential both to our human existence and to our becoming fully human.

Vincent J. Genovesi, in the article "Sexuality" lays considerable emphasis on the relationship between sexuality and God's love. He argues:

"God's selfish and unconditional love is eminently revealed in the history of his creative and faithful covenant with us, and it is this covenant which serves as the model for the creative and faithful love that is necessary and desired context for human expressions of physical sexuality. This is to say that human sexual love is both open to procreation and intent upon permanence. Sexual expression is meant to communicate both life and love. Sexual love's characteristics of procreativity and unitive fidelity are highlighted in the creation stories of Genesis."³⁹

Man and woman are created in the image of God and they are given a mission of being fruitful (Genesis. 1:27-28). The Genesis account suggests that sexuality is a good gift of God's creation and in no way is it a cause for shame. The Jewish prophets like Hosea (Hosea Chapter 1-3) and Ezekiel (Ezekiel Chapter 16) portray the marital relationship of man and woman as a living symbol of God's union with his people.⁴⁰

The New Testament affirms that the marital relationship is a reflection of the union of Christ with the Church (Ephesians 5:31-32).⁴¹ God's covenant with humanity and a man and woman's marital commitment are so much alike. God is as close to us as a husband and wife are to each other and a husband and wife are to be as loving and faithful to each other as God is to his people. With God's creative and faithful love as a model for human love, scripture endorses heterosexual, monogamous, permanent and procreative marital relationships as the normative context for physical sexual expression.

In marriage the pleasures of sexuality are to be enjoyed mutually by spouses who must resist any inclination to use sex as a weapon against the other. St. Paul in his pastoral exhortation to Christian communities of Corinth taught them that our bodies are sacred and therefore must only be used for the glory of God in a way that is holy and honourable. In his letters to the Thessalonians and Ephesians he cautions them against fornication or impurity or promiscuity.⁴² Scripture in general offers numerous specific condemnations of deviation from the norm of loving and life-giving marital expressions of sexuality.

³⁷ The Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *Declaration on Certain Questions concerning Ethics*, Rome, 29th December, 1975, No. 1.

³⁸ The Pontifical Council for the Family, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality, Guidelines for Education within Family*, Vatican City, 8th December 1995, No. 10.

³⁹ Vincent J. Genovesi, "Sexuality" in Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins & Dermot A. Lane (eds.), *The Dictionary of Theology*, Collegeville, The Liturgical Press, 1981, p 948.

⁴⁰ Cf. Raymond E. Brown et al., *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Theological Publications in India, Bangalore, 1994, p 219-221, 317.

⁴¹ Raymond E. Brown et al., *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Prentice Hall Inc., New Jersey, 1968, p 348. The text in Genesis 1:26-28 which expresses the sacred nature of marriage foreshadowed in the bond of husband and wife the union of Christ and his spouse, the Church.

2.2 The Relationship between Sexuality, Chastity and Love

Theologians today are proposing a sexual morality that makes sense in terms of spousal relationships. More and more, it is acknowledged that sex does not create relationships; rather it expresses a relationship that already exists. The question being asked is whether or not the physical sexual relationship corresponds to the depth of intellectual, emotional and interpersonal commitment that is shared by two people. Genovesi argues that “Chastity is honesty in sex; it implies that we have physical relationships that truly express the degree of personal commitment that is shared with another.”⁴³ It is in this sense that chastity is a virtue that accepts a person striving for pleasure and attempts to put that striving in the service of other human and Christian values. It should also be explained here that premarital chastity and marital chastity are two different things. Premarital chastity means total sexual abstinence, even in one’s thoughts. Marital chastity, on the other hand, admits of sexual acts that are good and blessed by God. A “holy” sexual act is one that fulfills the purpose intended for it by God.⁴⁴

Chastity moderates one’s sexuality and enables a person to place genitalia’s intense physical pleasure at the service of love. Chastity is a “renunciation of genital sexual relationship. It witnesses to the deeper possibilities of personal communion latent in all human relationships. Chastity to which some are freely called, thus witness to the authentic chaste relationships to which all, whether married or unmarried are called.”⁴⁵ Chastity is the joyous affirmation of someone who knows how to live self-giving, free from any form of self-centred slavery. This presupposes that the person has learnt how to accept other people, to relate with them, while respecting their dignity in diversity. The chaste person is not self-centred, not involved in selfish relationships with other people. Chastity makes the personality harmonious. It matures it and fills it with inner peace.

This purity of mind and body helps develop true self-respect and at the same time makes one capable of respecting others, because it makes one see in them persons to reverence, insofar as they are created in the image of God and through grace are children of God.⁴⁶ Chastity includes a process of training in self-mastery in human freedom. This is an attempt to help the human person govern his/her passions in order to find peace. Through experiences every person knows, that chastity requires rejecting certain thoughts, words and sinful actions, as Saint Paul was careful to clarify and point out.⁴⁷ In this case therefore married love thus becomes a power which enriches persons and makes them grow and, at the same time, it contributes to building up the civilization of love in society.

2.3. MARITAL COUNSELING FROM CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Marriage counseling in other words called couples therapy is that type of psychotherapy involving both partners. This counseling helps couples to recognize underlying conflicts and improve their relationship. Counseling is defined by Philip Lawrence Harriman as “the psychotherapeutic relationship in which an individual (the client) receives direct help from and advisor (directive counseling) or finds an opportunity to release negative feelings and thus clear the way for positive growth in personality.”⁴⁸ It can help married couples make thoughtful decisions, overcome differences and enhance mutual communication.⁴⁹

In order to understand relationship between individuals, it is important to recognize and acknowledge that each person, including the counselor, has a unique personality, perception, set of values and history. Individuals in the relationship such as marriage may adhere to different value systems. Institutional and societal uniqueness like the religious and cultural groups which shape a person's nature and behavior are considered in the process of counseling and therapy.

2.4 THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE COUNSELING

Marriage is a source of great joy and happiness to married couples, their children and indeed the wider family. *Gaudium et Spes* rightly puts:

...Christians today are overjoyed, and so are all who esteem conjugal and family life highly, to witness the various ways in which progress is being made in fostering those partnership of love and encourage reverence to human life; there is progress too in services available to married people and parents for fulfilling their lofty calling. However this happy picture of the dignity of this partnership is

⁴³ Vincent J. Genovesi, “Sexuality” p 952.

⁴⁴ http://www.loamagazine.org/nr/christian_family/marital_chastity_part_one.html (accessed on 19.3.2018)

⁴⁵ Brian V. Johnstone, “Evangelical Counsels” in Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins & Dermot A. Lane (eds.), *The Dictionary of Theology*, Collegeville, The Liturgical Press, 1981, p 357.

⁴⁶ The Pontifical Council for the Family, No. 17.

⁴⁷ Cf. *Romans* 1:18; 6: 12-14; 1 *Corinthians* 6: 9-11; 2 *Corinthians* 7: 1; *Galatians* 5: 16-23; *Ephesians* 4: 17-24; 5: 3-13; *Colossians* 3: 5-8; 1 *Timothy* 1: 8-11; 4: 12). See also Raymond E. Brown et al., p 804.

⁴⁸ Philip Lawrence Harriman, *The New Dictionary of Psychology*, New York, Philosophical Library, 1947, p 89.

⁴⁹ <https://www.marriage.com/advice/counseling>. (accessed on 26.2.2018)

not reflected everywhere, but is overshadowed by polygamy, the plague of divorce, so-called free love and similar blemishes: furthermore married love is often dishonoured by selfishness, hedonism and unlawful contraception practices. Besides, the economic, social, psychological and civil climate of today has severely disturbing effect on family life.⁵⁰

It is on this account that we endeavour to introduce marital counseling as a remedy to stabilize marriages that may be going through turbulent times. Marital counseling is the process of accompanying couples in the married life with the presumption that the couples had the chance to go through pre-marital counseling. The importance of counseling is due to the fact that marriage life is a risk venture with a great chance of divorce, yet many people get into it assuming that theirs will last a lifetime.

The process of counseling involves engaging the couples in an exercise of opening up themselves to look at their past and see what the future holds for them. This will enable them to foresee the kinds of challenges and problems that may be awaiting them in their marriage. In any counseling process the counselor aims at achieving a certain motive which is mainly to prevent a couple from drifting into problems in their marriage. On the other hand the couples hope that through counseling their marriage and indeed their family will always remain happy.

Marriage counseling is an opportunity for the counselor to create an in-depth friendship with the couple which will eventually lead to an on-going relationship. The rapport cultivated and established during counseling sessions will enable the counselor to be fully involved in the married couples through their lifetime. Marriage counseling will also provide information that would correct faulty or mis-advised information concerning marriage relationship and issues that arise in marriage such as communication breakdown, finances, in-laws, sex among others. Thus, providing information in counseling is an area whereby more teaching occurs. Part of this teaching involves helping partners in marriage to understand themselves and their contribution to the marriage, to discover their strengths and be realistic about adjustments they must make to have successful relationship.

For marital counseling to bear fruit, the process should have at least three essential components. According to Teresia Njonge the three components are: First,

The couple should take some inventory and receive feedback on the results. This inventory increases the couple's knowledge of the strengths and potential problem areas in their relationship. Secondly, a couple should receive training in communication and problem solving skills. These skills will help the couple to deal with various relationship issues. Finally, a couple should participate in a group which married couples share their feelings.⁵¹

These components are of great significance in counseling since they help the counselor and the couples to establish a long term relationship where the couples can consult should they need further assistance. It will also increase the couples ability and willingness to share with other married couples and therefore learn from them how they relate and deal with marital issues and foster friendship with other married couples.

3.0 POPE FRANCIS' APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *AMORIS LAETITA*-THE JOY OF LOVE POPE FRANCIS

Throughout his public life, Pope Francis has been noted for his humility, emphasis on God's mercy, concern for the poor and commitment to interfaith dialogue. He is credited with having a less formal approach to the papacy than his predecessors; Francis maintains the traditional views of the Church regarding abortion, marriage, ordination of women, and clerical celibacy.⁵² He opposes consumerism, irresponsible development, and supports taking action on climate change, a focus of his papacy with the promulgation of *Laudato si'*.

Pope Francis has published two encyclicals *Lumen Fidei* and *Laudato Si'*, the former is a collaborative writing with Benedict XVI and talks about faith, complementing Benedict's previous encyclicals on charity and hope while the latter talks about care for the planet. The others are apostolic exhortations namely *Evangelii Gaudium*, with his views on faith and evangelization. On 8 April 2016, Pope Francis published his second Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, remarking on love within the family.

⁵⁰ *Gaudium et Spes* No. 47.

⁵¹ Teresia Njonge, "Pre-Marital Counseling and its Contribution to Stability in Marriage" in *African Christian Studies*, Vol.27, No.1, March 2011, p 61-62.

⁵² Pope Francis, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_Francis, (accessed on 18.4.2018).

3.1 THE APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *AMORIS LÆTITIA*

Background of the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Lætitia*,

Pope Francis has brought to fruition the intense two-year process of the Synod on The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and contemporary World with the publication of the Apostolic Exhortation: *Amoris Lætitia*, “On Love in the Family”. On 8th October 2013 Pope Francis announced that in October 2014 there would be III Extraordinary General assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the theme: “The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of the New Evangelization.” Later on this III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops was followed by the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Bishops in October 2015, on the theme ‘The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and the contemporary World, October (4-5. 2015).⁵³ Following the successful conclusion of the two Synods of Bishops, Pope Francis issued an Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Lætitia*, the Joy of Love.

The purpose and approach of the Synod was pastoral, recognizing that the Church can do more to help and support marriage and the family in their joys and sufferings. Aware that countless challenges face families today, this document expresses hope and faith in families, and is written in a spirit of encouragement and accompaniment by the pastors of the Church. In his final speech to the Synod Pope Francis said: “The Synod was not about settling all the issues having to do with the family, but rather attempting to see them in the light of the Gospel and the Church’s tradition and two-thousand-year history, bringing the joy of hope without falling into a facile repetition of what is obvious or has already been said.”⁵⁴ The document was issued in Rome, at St. Peter’s Basilica during the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy on the 19th March 2016, the Solemnity of St. Joseph.⁵⁵

3.2 APPLICATION OF THE TEACHING OF *AMORIS LÆTITIA* ON MARITAL COUNSELING

Pope Francis’ Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Lætitia* calls for a concrete and practical understanding of real experiences and challenges in marriages. *Amoris Lætitia* recognizes the fact that the institution of marriage is being faced with many challenges and current problems. This calls for analytical and diversified approach. “The Church must accompany with attention and care the weakest of her children, who show signs of wounded and troubled love by restoring in them hope and confidence like the beacon of a light house in a port or a torch carried among the people to enlighten those who have lost their way or who are in the midst of a storm.”⁵⁶ The pope also notes that with all the difficulties marriages and families go through, in many cases “ordained ministers often lack the training needed to deal with the complex problems currently facing families.”⁵⁷

Lack of adequate marriage preparation and support mechanisms to sustain, nourish and strengthen the marriage bond have contributed to numerous challenges experienced in marriages today. The danger today is that marriage preparations are more confined to the practical aspects of the wedding, which makes many to see marriage as a festive occasion which they request more out of conformity to family traditions than out of conviction.⁵⁸

3.3 MARITAL COUNSELING AND ISSUES AFFECTING MARRIAGES

Stability and faithfulness in marriage largely depends on how exhaustively issues affecting marriages are handled through the process of marital counseling. Issues discussed during marital counseling are therefore very crucial to the stability of marriage and subsequently to the well-being of spouses and their children. If these topics are not covered well they may lead to discord and strife in marriage. Marital satisfaction largely depends on how well a couple is accompanied in marriage during marital counseling. It will suffice to critically examine some of the issues discussed in marital counseling in the light of Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Lætitia*.

⁵³ Emmanuel Wabanhu, “*Amoris Lætitia*, and Sexual Ethics: A call to Rediscover the Relational Personalist Ethics of the Family and Marriage” in *Good Shepherd*, Vol.1 No. 2, (2016), p 83.

⁵⁴ <http://catholicnews.org.uk/Home/Featured/Features-2016/Amoris-Laetitia-The-Joy-of-Love/Background>, (accessed on 13.3.2018).

⁵⁵ Nicholaus Segeja, “Brewing *Amoris Lætitia* in the African Context” in Nicholaus Segeja, & Emmanuel Wabanhu (eds.), *The Echo of Amoris Lætitia in Africa*, Nairobi, CUEA Press, 2017, p XV.

⁵⁶ Pope Francis, *Amoris Lætitia*, No. 291.

⁵⁷ Ibid No. 202.

⁵⁸ Cf. III Extraordinary General Assembly for the Synod of the Bishops, *The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization, Instrumentum Laboris*, Nairobi, Paulines Publications Africa, 2014, p75.

In-laws are a very crucial component of marriage especially in the African context. It is in cognizance of this that marital counseling ought to be concerned on how the married couple should handle their in-laws. In regard to the socio-ethical expectations of marriage Laurenti Magesa argues; “marriage involves not only interpersonal relations but also in the final analysis inter-community relations. In marriage the communities involved share their very existence, in reality they become one people, one “thing”, as Africans themselves would put it.”⁵⁹ According to Benjamin Kiriswa not all problems in marriage are caused by the couples, some emanate from other people, in this case, in-laws. He notes that: “In family context, problems could also be caused by other people such as in-laws, children, and friends whose expectations on the couples could easily degenerate into conflicts between spouses.”⁶⁰ The aforementioned arguments affirm the principles of African religion that the couple should understand that through marriage their families and clans are united by marriage so that what is done to one of their members is done to all. The marriage bond also means that the partners’ responsibilities are not limited to themselves alone but have a much wider application.

Therefore in counseling, relationship with parents of one of the spouses can be a tricky affair. If not carefully handled they may lead to strife and strained relationships in marriage. Emonyi G. observes that “for marital satisfaction there has to be consensus among family members on their proper place within the family set up.”⁶¹ The wedding process is the first of many steps one will take towards becoming part of the extended family. In marital counseling couples are therefore encouraged to develop a healthy relationship with one’s spouse’s parents. This will involve a lot in trying to understand them especially when they come from different social and cultural backgrounds. But with time this can prove to be a fulfilling and loving connection. Marriage is an act of leaving and cleaving, yet it is often not easy for parents to let go. It is common in the first few years of marriage for parents to give endless advice and expect the young couple to follow their every suggestion and demand.⁶² This line of thought is supported by Benezeri Kisembo, he gives an example of marriage counseling by a Zulu pastor addressing a newly married couple. This is how the conversation proceeds:

The pastor says to the bride: ‘Mapule, you should bear in mind that you are not married to your husband Paul, but to his family. That means you have to identify completely with all his relatives, look after them, care for them, go out of your way to make them happy. If you do that you will have no cause to regret’. And to the groom he says: ‘You, Paul will have to do likewise with Mapule’s relatives. Her people are your people and *vice versa*. Both of you will notice that old people in your community will tend to visit you, even for a brief moment to show their interest in your welfare.’⁶³

This is an indication that African customary marriage was not a private contract between two individuals but an alliance between two family communities or lineages. Rather than being a source of discord and nuisance, at times in-laws can be of great blessings. They are always readily available and they can do baby-sitting, they can be source of time-tested advice and therefore can be of great addition to a married couple’s life and family. The responsibility of the wider family in promoting chastity in marriage is well summarized by Pope Francis as follows: “The nuclear family needs to interact with the wider family made up of parents, aunts and uncles, cousins and even neighbours. This greater family may have members who require assistance, or at least companionship and affection or consolation.”⁶⁴ This observation affirms the fact that the nuclear and the extended family are interdependent on marital and family issues. The married couples may need the support from members of the extended family as they are the ones who will likely be affected if there are problems in marriage. The extended members of the family may do require guidance from a couple that is stable in their marriage.

The other issue that should not escape counselor’s attention in marriage counseling is what Pope Francis treats as one of the challenges facing family and marriages today-*Individualism*. He observes that “equal consideration needs to be given to the growing danger represented by extreme individualism which weakens family bonds and ends up considering each member of the family as an isolated unit leading in some cases to the ideal that one’s personality is shaped by his or her desires which are considered absolute.”⁶⁵

⁵⁹ Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion, The Moral Traditions for Abundant life*, Nairobi, Paulines Publications Africa, 2011, p110.

⁶⁰ Benjamin Kiriswa, *Pastoral Counseling In Africa, An Integrated Model*, CUEA Press, Eldoret, 2014, p 95.

⁶¹ Emonyi G., *Preparing for Marriage, Practical Tips from a Pastor*, Nairobi, Uzima Publishing House, 2006, p 46.

⁶² Njonge, p 64.

⁶³ Benezeri Kisembo *et al*, p 202.

⁶⁴ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, No. 187.

⁶⁵ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, No. 33.

Individualism is the moral stance, ideology, or social outlook that emphasizes the moral worth of the individual. Individualists promote the exercise of one's goals and desires and so value independence. It advocates that interests of the individual should achieve precedence over that of a social group. Individualism makes the individual its focus. As stated earlier marriage is a covenant between man and wife who give and receive rights over each other's body for performance of the generative act. It is also a society of lasting union of man and woman resulting from such a contract. It is therefore clear that individualism is against all tenets of Christian marriage and family.

The Church expressly teaches against individualism. *Gaudium et Spes* argues that there should be concerted efforts to foster marriage and the family as a duty for all. "The family is a school for enrichment. But if it is to achieve the full flowering of its life and mission, the married couple must practice an affectionate sharing of thought and common deliberation as well as eager cooperation as parents in the children's upbringing."⁶⁶ This individualistic culture coupled with earthly possessions and pleasures may lead to problems such as intolerance and hostility in marriage. It is therefore the duty of the counselor to awaken in the couples the ability to deal with individualism. It is the duty of parents to guide young people with prudent advice in the establishment of a family; their interest should make young people listen to them eagerly. This can only be possible if parents become role models.⁶⁷ But in such circumstances experienced in some families today where each of the spouses drive themselves to work, come home in the evening and are glued to television of mobile phones, the same will be emulated by their children.

Gaudium et Spes clearly summarizes: "Let married people themselves, who are created in the image of God and constituted in an authentic personal dignity, be united together in equal affection, agreement of mind and mutual holiness."⁶⁸ In the midst of this individualism Pope Francis exhorts: "We must be grateful that most people do value family relationships that are permanent and marked by mutual respect. They appreciate the Church's efforts to offer guidance and counseling in areas related to growth in love, overcoming conflict and raising children."⁶⁹

Chastity in marriage is a very crucial component in creating and sustaining stability in families. It must therefore be guarded jealously by accompanying married couples through counseling. We must contend that certain factors may contribute negatively and thus affect union in marriages.

In marital counseling *finances* is an issue that should be handled carefully. Conflict over management of money and other economic resources can be a cause of stress in marriage. Gichinga observes that "a couple needs to decide on how the money will be spent, saved and even donated. The couple needs to combine their income and write out a budget. The budget should contain every possible expenditure that may be anticipated. Marital satisfaction may arise from the way financial matters are handled."⁷⁰ Arguing on the same issue of finances as a possible reason for conflict in families Njonge observes that, "happy couples as compared to unhappy couples have less difficulty making financial decisions, have fewer concerns about how money is handled in their marriage, have fewer debts and are more satisfied with their decisions about saving and agree more often on how to spend money."⁷¹

The Pope observes that "...we live in culture which pressures young people not to start a family because they lack possibilities for the future. In some countries many young persons postpone wedding for fear of economic resources, work or study."⁷² According to him, these reasons devalue marriages and family. These young people have also been dissuaded from starting a family because of such reasons as the desire to avoid the failures of other couples; the fear of something they consider too important and sacred, the social opportunities and economic benefits of living together, a purely emotional and romantic conception of love and the fear of losing their freedom and independence. The Pope Francis advises that: "We need to find the right language, arguments and forms of witness that can help us reach the hearts of young people, appealing to their capacity for generosity, commitment, love and even heroism, and in this way inviting them to take up the challenge of marriage with enthusiasm and courage."⁷³

⁶⁶ *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 52.

⁶⁷ Stephan Kampowski, "Challenges for the Family and the Response of Pope Francis' Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*" in *Good Shepherd*, Vol.1 No. 2, (2016), 40.

⁶⁸ *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 52.

⁶⁹ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, No. 38.

⁷⁰ Gichinga E., *Marriage Counseling: A Counseling Guide*, Nairobi, Gem Counseling Services, 2004, p78.

⁷¹ Njonge, p 66.

⁷² Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, No.40.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, No.40.

The Pope also raises concerns in how marital problems are approached. He observes that: “A crisis in a relationship destabilizes the family and may lead, through separation and divorce, to serious consequences for adults, children and society as a whole, weakening its individual and social bonds. Marital problems are always confronted in haste and without courage to have patience and reflect, to make sacrifices and to forgive one another. Failures give rise to new relationships, new couples, new civil unions, and new marriages, creating family situations which are complex and problematic to Christian life.”⁷⁴

It is against this understanding that seeks to address problems arising from marriage as a result of confronting them in haste. It has become a norm by pastors of souls to be reaction tensions in marriage instead of being pro-active by accompanying from the time of their wedding throughout their married life.

At the heart of intimate human relationships is *communication*. Marital relationships collapse if there is a breakdown of communication. In certain incidences the couples resort to silence in dealing with problems in marriage. This mainly happens when there are endless quarrels, accusations and counter accusations. Effective communication involves trust, a desire to confide and an ability to express oneself without fear of harsh judgment. For a couple to enjoy their marriage, a counselor has to ensure that there is good communication between the couples. His communication should extend to the wider family. As regards to developing good communication skills Njonge in her research on communication in marriage found out that “the primary issue expressed by the couples include the fact that spouses felt that their partners did not understand them and they wished that their partners would share their feelings. There was a desire that they would not be afraid to share negative feelings without their partner getting angry or resorting to silent treatment. The fear of being put down for one’s thoughts and comments was also a major issue.”⁷⁵ As remedy, Njonge proposes that couples should embrace the skill to listen more. This process will help one partner to develop a full understanding of the other person’s perspective. Developing and maintaining effective communication is a lifelong process. Being good at communication takes time, practice and attention. Karl Peschke agrees with this argument of creating good communication in marriage. He observes that in sexual matters there must be free communication. “A couple needs to discuss all aspects of their current and future sexual relationships. They must learn to understand their mutual emotions, reactions, anxieties, reserves and inclinations. The open discussions of these questions, which are of great concern for both partners and which are nevertheless so often silenced is generally felt as liberating, removes wrong ideas about the other and false inhibitions and contribute much to a mutual consonance.”⁷⁶

Married couples should also be encouraged and accompanied on how to handle *violence* within families. In this case a conflict resolution mechanism is to be adopted as the couples go through counseling sessions in the midst of inevitable violent situations. Pope Francis in *Amoris Laetitia*, notes that: “Drug abuse, alcoholism, gambling and other addictions are some of the scourges causing immense suffering and even breakups in many families.”⁷⁷ We see the serious effects of this breakdown in families torn apart, the young uprooted and the elderly abandoned, children, adolescents and young adults confused. The Pope cites pre-Synodal consultations where the Bishops of Mexico pointed out “that violence within families breeds new forms of social aggression. This is often the case with families where parental relationships is frequently conflictual and violent, and relationship between parents and children are marked by hostility. According to the bishops “violence within family is a breeding ground of resentment and hatred in the most basic human relationship.”⁷⁸ Bansikiza rightly observes that “the family finds itself confronted by recurring, even increasing incidences of disorder, violence, internal/external conflicts, destruction of human life and property and unfriendly environment.”⁷⁹ In this respect Bansikiza proposes that in order for families to live in harmony there is need for education for peace in the family.⁸⁰ The fruitfulness of this education for peace in family will easily be realized if married couples are accompanied by marital counseling.

In an effort to look for solutions to such challenges Pope Francis poses a question that may prick our conscience into making serious consideration on accompanying married couples with continuous counseling.

⁷⁴ Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *Message*, 18 October 2014.

⁷⁵ Njonge, p 65.

⁷⁶ Karl Peschke, *Christian Ethics*, p 497.

⁷⁷ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, No. 51.

⁷⁸ Mexican Bishops’ *Conference, Que en Cristo Nuestra Paz Mexico tenga vida digna* (15 February 2009) , p 67.

⁷⁹ Constance Bansikiza, “A Christian Family: An Educational Peace Building in Africa” in *African Christian Studies*, Vol 28, No. 2 (June 2012), p 7.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* p 11.

“But nowadays who is making an effort to strengthen marriages, to help married couples overcome their problems, to assist them in the work of raising children and, in general to encourage stability of the marriage bond?”⁸¹ This work has attempted to seek answers to this question in looking at how to promote chastity in marriage through an on-going process of marriage counseling.

Sexual intimacy is another area where marital counseling is vital. Intimacy in sex involves feeling close to and sharing oneself with another person. Although marriage is an important source of intimacy it may decline with time and sometimes it may disappear completely. Njonge contends that intimacy takes a great deal of time and effort to develop. While courting couples rarely have the problem of not being intimate. But most couples a few years down the line begin to slowly drift apart. It is important that married couples learn to maintain the fire of romance.⁸² It is therefore necessary to accompany couples throughout their married life so as not to diminish the fire of love in their marriage. Sexual intimacy can be one of the most pleasurable of painful areas of marriage. It is also an area that is rarely discussed openly and when couples have problems they rarely consult anyone for help.⁸³ Sexuality and intimacy contribute enormously to the stability and chastity in marriage. Sexual love is a crucial and binding force in any relationship. Sexuality and intimacy reassures partners that they are loved, valued and that they are still attractive.

Conclusion

The Joy of Love experienced by families is indeed the Joy of the Church. As is rightly put, the family is the foundation of the Church and formation of a family is traced to the union of two persons a man and a woman in the sacrament of matrimony. As the Apostolic Exhortation noted, for all the many signs of crises in the institution of marriage there is still the desire for people to get married and form a family. This desire must be safeguarded so that the secular dynamics which are bringing new definitions of marriage may be avoided. For the couples in marriage to be joyful and happy we must jealously protect the Joy of Love in marriages so that we get rid of the illusion that marital joy come from earthly possessions.⁸⁴

In this presentation we have attempted to show that marital counseling in marriage can be a very crucial source of stability, tranquility and prosperity in marriage. In order for marital counseling to be fruitful it was necessary that we try to understand the nature of marriage and its relation to the natural plan of God. We have therefore seen that marriage is a gift from God, and thus, this gift must be given the respect it deserves. It is on account of this that the study examined the dignity of sexuality, a component that is very important in marital life. We found out that human sexuality “is an important element of human personality, an integral part of one’s consciousness. It is both a central aspect of self-understanding as male or female and a crucial factor in one’s relationship with others.”⁸⁵

This presentation therefore highly welcomes the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, and through the document foresees the possibility of many married couples assisted through marital counseling. Pope Francis in the Exhortation clearly observed a number challenges facing marriage and family today. It is in examining these challenges and probable solutions the Pope proposed that this work has attempted to offer interventions in marriage crises through marital counseling.

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⁸¹ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, No.52.

⁸² Njonge p 67.

⁸³ La Haye, *The Act of Marriage*, Michigan, Zondorvan Publishing House, 1976, p 98.

⁸⁴ Robert Waihenya, “Understanding *Amoris Laetitia* from the Perspective of Presbyterian Church of East Africa”, in Nicholas Segeja & Emmanuel Wabanhu (eds.), *The Echo of Amoris Laetitia in Africa*, Nairobi, CUEA Press, 2017, p 378.

⁸⁵ Gerald D. Coleman, *Human Sexuality*, New York, Alba House, 1992, p 264.

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