

Marriage as an Institution of Love and Forgiveness

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Abstract— *Marriage is a family affair though it requires the participation of so many people such as friends, well wishers, priests, imams and community people. This article has been written as a result of my social interaction with friends, students, colleagues and couples in the institution of marriage. Every society has certain forms/ways of arrangements which is referred to marriage. However, remaining single or pairing without marriage that is living together is now fast been accepted as marriage. The maintaining of an unmarried lifestyle is now as a result of the growing economic independence of young people and the negative influence of peer grouping the communities. Some people remain single as they do not want to limit their sexual intimacy to one lifetime partner or the burden of children. For a very long time now living alone has increased rapidly. The single life for both men and women is no longer a taboo but a show of independence and self-controlled. Marriage is a sacrament of trust, spiritual bond for better and for worst, prayer and forgiveness in their matrimonial life time challenges in relationship. It must include being best of friends, forgiveness, effective communication, consideration for one another, exposure to good things of life, making time for your partner, making time to have fun, making time for good love making, being team mate to achieve your goals, praying together and working together in the home and lastly confronting all problems together.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The word ‘marriage’ is derived from Middle English marriage which first appeared in 1250-1300 CE. This in turn is derived from old French, [to marry] and Latin maritare, meaning to provide with a husband or a wife and maritare meaning to get married.

In a 1997 article in Current Anthropology, Duran Bell describes marriage as ‘a relationship between one or more men[female and male] in severally to one or more women that provides those men with a demand-right of sexual access within a domestic group and identifies women who bear the obligation of yielding to the demands of those specific men’.

Marriage is an institution that is historically filled with restrictions. From age, race, to social status, to gender, restrictions are placed on marriage by society for laws banning and race mixing which were enforced in certain North American jurisdiction from 1691 until 1967 in Nazi Germany. Societies have often placed restrictions on marriage to relatives, though the degree of prohibited relationship varies widely. Marriage between parents and children, or between full siblings with few expectations, have been considered incest and forbidden. However, marriage between more distant relatives have been much more common, with an estimate of 80% of all marriages in history between cousins or closer.

Marriage is a socially or ritually recognized union between two people called spouses and it is called matrimony or wedlock. In this relationship rights and obligations are established between them. They are also allowed to have children or adopted. The definition of marriages varies around the world and not only in culture and religions or as a social construct. In some cultures, marriage is recommended or obligatory/ compulsory before pursuing any sexual activity. A marriage ceremony is known as a wedding. Marriage is based on cultural, religious and personal factors as defined by different writers or scholars.

Anthropologist Jack Goody’s comparative study of marriage around the world utilizing the Ethnographic Atlas found a strong correlation between intensive plough agriculture, dowry and monogamy. This pattern was found in

a broad swath of Eurasian societies from Japan to Ireland. The majority of Sub-Saharan African societies that practice extensive hoe, agriculture, in contrast, show a correlation between ‘bride price’ and polygamy.

Marriage is a formal union, social and legal contract between two individuals that unite their lives legally, economically and emotionally. This means that the agreement is that the couple has legal obligation to each other throughout their lives or until they agree to divorce. This also gives legitimacy to sexual relations within the marriage. It is often understood as to have key roles in the preservation of morals and civilization. Marriage is recognized by the families, organizations, religious authorities, tribal groups, communities and peers. It is always viewed as a contract between two individuals. When it is performed or carried out by the government in accordance with the marriage laws of the jurisdiction, without religious content then it is civil marriage, which creates the rights and obligations intrinsic to matrimony before the state. Marriage that is performed with religious content under the auspices of the religious institutions is a religious marriage, which creates the rights and obligations intrinsic to matrimony before the religion. It is known as sacramental marriage in Catholicism, in Islam and various other names in other faith and traditions each with their constraints as to what to establish as rules and regulations binding the marital rites.

The act of marriage creates legal obligations between the individuals involved and any children that they give birth to or may be adopted. Some cultures allow dissolution of marriage through divorce or annulment. The UN World Fertility Report of 2003, reports that 89 percent of all people get married before age 49 but child marriages are most common in Sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia. In some areas, child marriages and polygamy may occur in spite of national laws against the practice.

Major social changes since the last twentieth century in the western countries have led to changes in the demographics of marriage such as age of first marriage is increasing, fewer people are getting marriage and more couples have chosen to cohabit rather than marry which they considered as the best

way of getting settlement has no legal or cultural limitations with codification of documents like in the registry or state marriage which is constitutional safe and protected. In most cultures, married women have few rights of their own that are considered along with the children and property of the husband.

In the 21st century marriage has undergone legal changes that aim at improving the status and rights of women. Some of these changes include giving women legal identities of their own, abolished the right of husbands physically torturing and disciplining their wives, giving wives property rights, providing wives with reproductive rights of their own and requiring a wife's consent when sex relations should occur. Pierre Bourdieu however notes that, very few marriages ever followed the rule, and that when they do so, it is for 'practical kingship' reason such as the preservation of family property rather than 'official kingship'. There continue to be controversies regarding the legal status of married women, legal acceptance towards violence within marriage especially sexual violence, traditional marriage customs such as dowry and bride price, forced marriage and criminalization of consensual behaviors such as premarital and extramarital sex.

Surveys by UNICEF have shown that the percentage of women aged 15-49 who think that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife under certain circumstances is as high as 87 percent in Mali, 86 percent in Guinea and 80 percent in Central African Republic. Detailed results from Afghanistan show that 78 percent of women with a beating if the wife 'goes out without telling the husband and 76 percent agrees if she argues with him.

According to Edward Sarty Mansaray in his book 'Marriage as a Sacrament', in the Catholic Church, marriage is an important institution and a sacrament. It is a covenant / agreement between a man and a woman with God which is very sacred. It is not a contract that can end at any time or does not have time limitation, but it is forever. It is an institution ordained by God by which the grace of God is received. It is the exchange of rings and vows proclaimed by the man and woman to each other. The Ring is the symbol of love, trust, forgiveness, affection, total dedication of the heart through communication and prayer. Marriage was long since ordained by God right from the creation story of Adam and Eve in the Holy Bible. Mary Wollstonecraft, in the 18th century, described marriage as a 'legal prostitution'. This does not mean that the woman sells her body but rather sells it out of wedlock which is a life time union or a short term union by divorced as a result of uncontrollable circumstances between husband and wife.

The book of Genesis chapter 1 verse 18 – 25 following, in marriage which is a covenant with God, the couple receive a special blessing and grace from God. It is done in the presence of the priest representing God and the congregation as witness. The Catholic Church believes that marriage is a sacred union between a man and a woman joined together by God and considered as one body living together till death. This is the main reason why the Catholic Church is totally against divorce. That is why a man / woman make up his /her mind

willingly to be joined to each other permanently for as long as they live.

The teaching of Jesus tells us that God's love for us is unconditional. This is the type of love that must exist between a husband and a wife.' Jesus said; if you love me keep my commandments'. Jesus summoned the commandments into two. To love God and to love your neighbor. Married couples should love one another as Christ loves his church. As God guides and protects his church so also the man should guide and protect his wife against any internal or external strife or aggressions.

In Judaism, marriage is based on laws of the Torah and is a contractual bond between spouses in which the spouses dedicate to be exclusive to one another. This is called Kiddush in. Though procreation is not the sole purpose, a Jewish marriage is also expected to fulfill the commandment to have children. [Genesis 1 verse 28]. The main focus centers round the relationship between the spouses. Marriage is therefore understood to mean that the spouses are merging into a single soul. This is why a man is considered to be incomplete when he is not married, as his soul is only one part of a larger whole that remains to be unified.

The Hebrew Bible [Christian old Testament] describes a number of marriages, including those of Isaac [Genesis 24, 49-67], Jacob [Genesis 29 verse 27 and Samson [Judges 14 verse 7-12] Today Ashkenazi Jews are prohibited to take more than one wife because of a ban instituted on this by Gershom Ben Judah [Died 1040] Divorcing a woman against her will was also banned by Gershom Ben Judah. Divorced couples were permitted to get back together, unless the wife had married someone else after her divorce. [Deut 24 verses 2 -4]

The African customary idea about marriage is attributed to maturity in manhood in particular. Consideration is not given to how old a man is. It is as long as he can earn a living by making a farm, planting and harvesting and bring back the proceeds home, he is known to be a matured man and therefore he can be given a girl in marriage. In the case of a girl, as soon as her breast develops/ or starts developing and initiated into the Bondo society, she is ready for marriage. The age of the girl does not matter, she can be as young as 10 years, and she is forced to accept any man that is willing and ready to marry her. Age and love is out of the question for the girl. From birth a girl child is born into a family, a man as her future husband starts to pay her dowry or bride price to her parents. The man may even stay with the in-laws to be, to hunt, farm, and fishing and do so many things to win the trust and confidence of the family. At the time of initiation of the girl into the Bondo society, the man pays all the necessary bills towards the ceremony in cash or in kind. Soon after the initiation, the girl is forced or under pressure to marry the man. The decision for the girl is made by the parents when it comes to marriage matters. The girl either complies accepts or she is sent out of the home for good.

As of 2019, same- sex marriage is performed and recognized nationwide or in some parts of the world. Same – sex marriage is also due to soon become performed and recognized by law in Costa Rica and Taiwan. Furthermore, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights has issued a ruling

which is expected to facilitate recognition in several countries in the Americas. The introduction of same- sex marriage has varied by jurisdiction and has being accomplished through legislation change to marriage law and court ruling based constitutional guarantees of equality or direct popular vote. This form of marriage is seriously opposed by groups but is supported by Civil Rights and Human Rights organization and the medical and scientific communities.

Research Objectives

- [i] Examine the main types of marriages in Sierra Leone.
- [ii] Identify the three basic forms of polygamy.
- [iii] Discuss some factors responsible for breakages in marriages.
- [iv] Suggest solutions to breakages in marriages. Methodology

The research was carried out in Makeni, Northern part of Sierra Leone. The study was conduct in the Ropolon community. The target group comprised of 50 legally married couples. The couples selected provided the necessary information on marriage as an institution that differs from all other institutions.

The data collection tools used were interviews, face to face discussion and questionnaire. The questionnaires developed contained items on the different aspects of the objectives. Information was solicited on items developed while conversation /discussions were also held with different categories of respondents. The results of the analyses were presented qualitatively.

II. RESULT AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The financial aspects of marriage vary between cultures and have changed over time. In some cultures, dowries and bride price continues to be required today. The fact is that, the financial arrangements are usually made between the groom or his family and the bride's family, with the bride often not being involved in the negotiations, and not having choice to participate in the marriage.

It is certain that every society/ culture has some forms of paring /arrangements which is called marriage. To remain single or pair without marriage that is living together is fast emerging as acceptable or a form of lifestyle in modern world. The method of maintaining an unmarried lifestyle is most common among the economic independent of young people. To be single has been very attractive for people who do not want to limit their sexual intimacy to one life partner. This also indicates that they did not want to have the burden of children. Living alone has become one of the most rapidly increasing issues in society. The single life for both men and women is no longer frond at but as a pride of self-independence.

In many western cultures, marriage usually leads to the formation of a new household comprising the married couple, living together in the same house, sharing the same bed. Among the Minangkabau of western Sumatra, after marriage, the husband moves into the house of the wife's mother or wife's father. There are different types of marriages that are recognized by society. However the main types of marriages

that are commonly recognized by culture and society are discussed below.

Monogamy is a form of marriage in which the individual has only one spouse during his or her life time or at any one time. It is a form of marriage in which one man is married to one woman at a time. It is when one woman is allowed to have just one husband in her life time or till death or only divorce separates them apart. This form of marriage is the only one that is universally recognized is the most predominant one in societies where other forms of marriages exist. Therefore a person, who is still being lawfully married, marries to another commits the crime of bigamy and that second marriage is considered legally null and void. The bigamist is liable to other penalties which vary between jurisdictions.

Polygamy is a marriage which includes more than two partners or when a man is married to more than one wife at a time. In this type of marriage, there is no bond between the wives. Some cultures allow an individual to have more than one spouse at a time that is having more than one marriage partner at a time. This type of marriage is practiced is most of the societies of the world but now the trend is towards monogamy. However as anthropologist George Murdock [1959] found 80 percent of societies had some type of polygamy.

There are basically three form of polygamy. The first one is known as polygyny and it is allowed in Islam. Judaism and Christianity have mentioned practices involving polygyny in the past, however outright religious acceptance of such practices was not addressed until its rejection in later passages, and today it is prohibited. It refers to plurality of wives or having more than one wife at the same time. In many societies, having several wives is a mark of prestige, distinction and status. It is very common among Muslims in Africa and in the Middle East and Asia.

The second is polyandry a marriage in which a woman can have several husbands or two or more husbands simultaneously. This is very rare form of marriage. Wherever it is practiced, the co- husbands are usually brothers, either blood brothers and are of the same generation. This is known as fractural polyandry. The Todas [South India] and Khasa [North India] are the famous examples of polyandry. The motive of this kind of marriage is the maintenance of land and property within one family.

Lastly is the group marriage in which several or many men marry to several or many women. It is practiced in some Indigenous societies.

It is fact that all marriages are affected or influenced by problems. These marital problems do cause couples to seek a divorce on a daily basis. A marriage may survive when a problem hits depends on the problem and how a couple decides to deal with the problem. It is certain that couples who are not able to work together to resolve their problems are most likely to be not able to keep their marriage. Couples who lack the proper skills to resolve their problems may find themselves in divorce court for things that could be easily solved on their own. Here are some marital problems that may cause divorce that could better be dealt with to save marriages.

- Money problems-----this brings about argument among couples over bills, debt, spending and other financial issues in the home. Deciding how to deal with money problem in your marriage will determine if the problem has negative or positive effects on the marriage. If a husband has a low income and the wife has taste for expensive things, the couple is going to have to resolve the money issue of the woman. The wife is going to be disappointed in the husband.

- Children—this includes feeding/ diet, discipline and other parenting issues can be a source of disagreement between most couple. Children are mostly the primary stressor in marriages. There are differences in beliefs on issues like how to discipline, who is responsible for most of the child care or what educational options to choose for them. There is also a matter of who has to change dirty diapers, wash them, and run after them when they start to walk and the cost of daycare. It is easy to see who children can put a strain on even in the best marriages.

- Sex—is a very big problem in marriages. Withholding sex to punish a spouse may break the marital bond. Also frequency, quantity, quality and infidelity are all common sources of stress and disharmony in a marriage. Cheating on a spouse destroys trust and peace in the home. Sex can be a very huge issue when it comes to undoing the vows you took before God and man. Sex is a wonderful thing until it no longer exists.

- Time apart--lack of quality time together and time apart cause couples to become out of love, trust and harmony. Participating in activities on regular basis and sharing interests can help couples to stay connected. Most workers fall victims to such problems of long deployments and constant temporary assignments away from home that brings about separation. Couples would have to have a special bond for a marriage to last.

- Household Responsibilities—the problem of equitable distribution of household work and how to do it has been the argument between many couples .Instead of them to sit down and divide the household chores fairly, they argue or complain over petty /minor issues over who does this or didn't do that or what. It is important as adults to see something that needs to be done and do it. Decision can be taken together to spilt household chores based on what each person enjoys doing or can tolerate the best.

- The issue of friends-not all friends are helpful in relationships. It is essential to know a good friend who can enhance the relationship must be keep and one who will break it must be avoided completely.

- Irritating habits- some people are married to someone who has one or more habits they unacceptable and undesirable. This can be things like my ex never shouted or got angry with me. There can be pretence for sometime but will not last. This means that one must not be afraid to point out habits that are irritating about you're your partner but do it in a non defensive way.

- Family-in-laws, siblings, children and step- children can all create stress in a marriage. In every marriage our spouses should come first but most times this is not what happens. We take the backseat and bite our tongue and pay

attention to other trivial matters and allow our in laws to control our homes for us.

- Expectations-People go into marriage for certain reasons and great expectations. Unfortunately, for most of the time, marriage is the opposite of what the expectation. We view marriage in a romantic way and later become disappointed when what is expected is not met. These unmet expectations become major reasons and sources of conflicts and problems in marriages.

- Personality conflicts- there are some personality traits that can ruin or doom a marriage to failure. Some of these traits are you do not please your spouse, do not avoid conflict, neglect your spouse and do not attend to your spouse's needs. We need to work on our negative personality traits.

Here are some solutions /remedies to broken marriages.

- Accept that your spouse is human just like you. You know that your husband or wife is human. When you think about all of the things that frustrate you, then you now realize that it's about them not who you want or expect them to be. Human beings have flaws and that they make mistakes. But if one does not accept this as a reality the more disappointed you will be with your spouse. Therefore, patience, forgiveness, understanding, encouragement and love is the answer. The more you are willing to give what you want in your marriage, the better chance to avoid divorce.

- Spend more quality time together time together. A lot of couples who are happy in marriage is simply that they relate to one another very well. This can happen when the couples are able to compromise their financial issues/spending, satisfy their children's needs and spend time with one another. They go on dates, take vacations and make sex a priority and not the luxuries of life. In order for a marriage to last and be healthy these necessities must be present. It is important for couples to spend quality time with one another.

- Talk about your needs- if for some reason you have problems communicating with one another, it is good to see a marriage counselor. But if both of you are able to talk and listen pretty well, then share your needs. Sometimes couples resent each other simply because they feel their needs are being ignored or unmet. Sharing the same house or sleeping on the same bed does mean you can read each other's minds so it is important to share your needs.

- Get some accountability—your spouse should be your main accountability partner, but look for some other married couple who can help to hold you accountable as well. It means to be accountable to the vows that you took on your wedding day before God and man. Every human being needs friends and mentors to serve as support system and this is especially the case when it comes to married people. Sometimes couples see divorce as their only solution because they do not have people around them to remind them that there are other solutions to divorce that usually prove to be better than the divorce.

- Go for counseling is one of effective solutions to divorce. It is advisable that the couple do not wait until they feel totally hopeless in the relationship before seeing a professional marriage counselor. The fact of the matter is it's healthy for couples to seek counseling as many times as they

can per year. This will empower them with the requisite skills to make their marriages stronger. Marriage counseling will improve the emotional, spiritual, physical intimacy, increase communication and better connection between spouses.

III. CONCLUSION

Decrees on marriage of the Roman Catholic Council of Trent [twenty-fourth session of 1563] made the validity of marriage dependent on the wedding occurring in the presence of a priest and two witnesses. The absence of a requirement of parental consent is no longer paramount. Since the late twentieth century, major social changes in some western countries have led to the demographics of marriage with the age of first marriage increasing, fewer people marrying and more couples choose to cohabit rather than marry. The act of marriage usually creates legal obligations between the individuals involved and any offspring they produce or adopt. The international laws and conventions recognize the need for consent before marriage. People must not be forced though some are forced to do so against their will which is a violation of human right. Some countries do not recognize locally performed marriage on its own and require a separate civil marriage for official purposes. Civil marriage does not exist in some countries governed by a religious legal system. It is accepted that that wives must be submissive to their husbands and this is a natural thing in many parts of the world.

Recommendations

From the research, the following recommendations were made

1. There must be respect for each other, trust, open communication, forgiveness and tolerance for happy marriage.

2. Couples must respect marriage as a divine sacrament ordained by God.
3. Divorce must not be the option for any marriage but prayer and patience as the key solution to any problem.
4. Every couple to keep and obey the sixth commandment--- Thou shall not commit adultery.
5. Couples must never withhold sex as a form of punishment for any wrong done. Sex is a bond that must exist between couples to strengthen the relationship.
6. Couples to seek for regular counseling in their marriages.
7. Couples must carry out their obligations in the marriage.

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