

The Latin Catholic Church's View of Marriage and Family in Relation to African Culture

Fr. Chrispinus Kakai Mutondo, CECC

Abstract:- It is a useful exercise in this thematic issue to study the African view of marriage and family life, the Catholic position on marriage and family life, the Church's early doctrine on marriage and family life, Vatican II, Post-Vatican II and current considerations, more Post-Conciliar teaching. In this article the author intends to study the evaluation in treating about the Latin Catholic Church's view of marriage and family in relation to African culture. The article will pay attention to the way marriage and family in relation to African culture has been described in the texts by the Catholic magisterium. Consequently, the evaluation and pastoral recommendations are suggested.

Keywords:- The Latin Catholic Church; Scripture, Marriage and Family, African Culture, Doctrine; Vatican II; Laity, Evaluation and Pastoral Recommendations.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the introductory part of this article, it is noted from the well-known author Karl H. Peschke that to be human is to be born of a man and a woman.¹ There is need for a man and a woman for a family to be created. The beginning of a new human life is a sacred moment of God's wisdom and powerful work in humanity. God's continuing creative power is especially evident in marriage and family (Gen 2: 24; Mt19: 6).² A child is born in cooperation between human beings and God, whereby humans remain the co-creator, not the author of life. Any marriage between husband and wife is instituted by God, who is forever the author of life.³ The power to cooperate with God is bestowed on parents as they give new life to a child. This cooperation begins with conception and birth and is completed in the education of the child. God nourishes, loves and guides the new human life through its parents who have a serious and joyful responsibility as a consequence.⁴ According to Karl H. Peschke,

At the beginning of a new human life stands the affection and utter love of two people, father and mother. This love and its fruitfulness is based on differences of sexes. The differences of sexes, however, are not only of significance in the creation of new life. (Wo)Man's sexual differentiation permeates his/her whole person always and forever; it stamps all [of a person's] ... actions and is creative also under aspects other than procreation.⁵

Today, marriage and family are facing many challenges that call for great attention. In *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope John Paul II writes that "as much as and perhaps more than any other institution (marriage) has been beset by the many profound and rapid changes that have affected society and culture"⁶ The goal of this paper, then, is to look at Christian marriage and family in the modern world and in the context of African culture. Some realities that affect Christian marriage and family are of critical concern. According to St. Augustine, as quoted by Pope John Paul II, "history is not simply a fixed progression towards what is better, but rather an event of freedom, and even a struggle between freedoms that are in mutual conflict. It is, according to the well-known expression of St. Augustine, 'a conflict between two loves: the love of God to the point of disregarding self, and the love of self to the point of disregarding God.'"⁷ The Pope asserts that "only an education for love rooted in faith can lead to the capacity of interpreting 'the signs of the times,' which are the historical expression of this twofold love."⁸ In the same way, Pope Benedict XVI also says that "humanity today is unfortunately experiencing great division and sharp conflicts which cast dark shadows on its future."⁹ All of this is a call to pastors and people of good will to pay attention to the reality of the human family.

It is the Church's responsibility to look at this situation in a critical manner. The concern should be to maintain those values that constitute the foundation of the institution of Christian marriage and family. It is important to help Christians and others to become aware of the ultimate meaning and truth of marriage and family life. As the Second Vatican Council asserts, "the Church offers her

¹ Cf. K. H. Peschke, *Christian Ethics: Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican, Vol. II* (Bangalore Theological Publication in India, 1987), 372. Peschke (SVD) was born on the 12th August 1932 in Breslau, Schlesien. He is the Professor of Moral theology, who has written many works on theological and moral teachings

² Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, no 19

³ Ibid

⁴ Cf. K. H. Peschke, *Christian Ethics: Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican, Vol. II*, 373. See also, The "Dutch Catechism" for Adults: *A new Catechism. Catholic Faith for Adults* (London: Burns and Oates, 1967), 381ff., quoted in Peschke's works in the same text of *Christian Ethics*

⁵ K. H. Peschke, *Christian Ethics: Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican, Vol. II*, 373.

⁶ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 1981, no. 1

⁷ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 5; Cf. also St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, XIV, 28; CSEL 40, II, 56-57

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace (2008), no. 14

services to every person who wonders about the destiny of marriage and the family.”¹⁰

This paper is concerned with these issues. It tries to study the African view of marriage and family life and to survey the Catholic position by looking at shifts in her teachings and the ethical challenges that are shaped by it. In a special way, it will offer pastoral recommendations for a way forward for her followers, especially in Africa.

II. THE AFRICAN VIEW OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE

Sexuality, marriage and family are inter-related. Sexuality is a vital area of the life of the individual and community.¹¹ In African culture, sexuality and marriage are for the good of the community as indicated in communal courtship, marriage in stages and rituals and ceremonies. Laurenti Magesa explains that “marriage in Africa is not merely a contract to be signed and done with; rather, it is seen as a step-by-step, progressive development undertaken in a community framework.”¹² Marriage is valid only when there is possibility of conception. As such, marriage is for procreation and indissoluble. There was no divorce except in cases of witchcraft, sorcery or infidelity.¹³ In African cultures, marriage has transcendental aspect because it is molded by God.

Most African cultures are patriarchal. Therefore virilocality (when the married couple lives at the homestead of the husband’s family) was practiced. Conversely, in the few matriarchal communities in the continent, uxoricity (when the married couple lives at the homestead of the wife’s family) was also practiced.¹⁴ The issue of polygamy remains a kind of perennial problem in the Church whereas in many African cultures, it is practiced as a value. As Margaret A. Farley explains, “traditionally polygamy was used to protect women and to assure stability in marriages where childlessness might have led to adultery.”¹⁵ Men marry many wives, and polygamy is preferred as a social ideal.¹⁶ Against monogamy marriage, it is not a problem when a married man has relations with other women, but it is a moral issue if a married woman is found to have an

affair with another man; she is condemned and punished for engaging in adultery, which is perceived as an offence against just and fidelity on the part of a wife.¹⁷ In Kenya, unlawful secret relationships or unofficial marriages, which are called “mpango wa kandos” are expected among the married couples since men are perceived to be polygamous by nature.¹⁸

But today, African feminists have strongly stood against polygamy, since it tends to oppress women; it expresses man’s superior status and power. Sr. Ann Nasimiyu-Wasike, a Kenyan theologian, argues that “even ... traditional rationales for polygamy show it to be an arrangement for the sake of men and harmful to women.”¹⁹ Polygamy, though seen as a remedy to divorce and adultery in the African setup, remains a paradox because it causes rivalry among the co-wives and even children. As the saying goes, “the tongue of co-wives is bitter.”²⁰

Many African women theologians have arisen as a voice for African women to fight against this and some other traditional beliefs and practices. They object to such perspectives as “women’s bodies belong to men” and “women belong to the kitchen.” They are also against practices like “no formal school education for the girl child”; “forced marital inheritance”; “female genital mutilation (FGM)”, and so on.²¹ This struggle of African women theologians aims at protecting and promoting the inherent dignity of women and their need for some degree of economic and social control over their own lives. African theologians and feminists worldwide call on women to be a voice against any injustices applied to women. There seems to be a new dawn as some feminist women applaud Pope John Paul II for his remarkable work on defending women’s dignity. Pope Francis also recognized women and named five to the International Theological Commission. Hence, According to a Vatican statement, women now constitute 16 percent of the commission’s members which, is “a sign of growing female involvement in theological research.”²²

¹⁰ *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 52. In Austin Flannery. Ed. *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents New Revised Edition* (Pasay City: Paulines, 2006), no. 52

¹¹ Laurent Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (New York: Orbis Books 1997), 115

¹² *Ibid*, 125

¹³ Magesa, *African Religion*, 115.

¹⁴ William A. Haviland, *Anthropology* (10th ed.) (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2003); cf., <https://www.purplemotes.net/2014/08/24/virilocality-polygyny-evolution-communication/> (accessed on 20/12/2016)

¹⁵ Margaret A Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (New York and London: Continuum, 2006), 83

¹⁶ Eugene Hillmann, *Polygamy Reconsidered: African Plural Marriage and the Christian Churches* (New York: Orbis Books, 1975), 88

¹⁷ William G. Blum, *Forms of Marriage: Monogamy Reconsidered* (Nairobi: AMECEA Gaba Publications, 1989), 112

¹⁸ *Ibid*; see also Aylward Shorter, *African Culture, An Overview: Socio-Cultural Anthropology* (Kenya, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998), 91

¹⁹ In Farley, 87

²⁰ In Farley, 87

²¹ J. Simister, “Domestic violence and female genital mutilation in Kenya: effects of ethnicity and education.” *Journal of Family Violence* (2010), 25(3):247–57.

²² Catholic News Service (September 23, 2014); see also, <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/pope-names-five-women-international-theological-commission> (accessed, 09/09/2021)

III. THE CATHOLIC POSITION ON MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE

In the Old Testament, the sacredness of marriage is rooted in the creation narrative (Gen 2:18-24; 1:28; 24:60; Ps 127:3). Polygamy and monogamy as forms of marriage are also evident there (Gen 4:19; 1Sam 1:15; 1Kgs 11:13). Childlessness is seen as a misfortune (Lev 20:20; Is 47:9). Adultery is forbidden (Ez 16:53-63; Ex 20:14). From the beginning, in Genesis, marriage is identified as a union of one man and one woman becoming one flesh (cf. Gen 1:28; 9:7; 17:2-5, 16; 28:3; 35:11; 48:3-4).²³ In the New Testament, marriage is a state created by God (Mt 19: 1-12; Mk.10:6-8).²⁴ Monogamy is the only form that God willed as is explicitly demonstrated by Jesus and St. Paul (Mt 19:1ff; 2:27-32; Mk10:2-12; Rom 7:2-3; Eph 5:22-23; Rom 1:24-27; 1Cor 7:2-16; 6:9; 6:12-18; Eph 4:19).²⁵ Other forms of marriage are repudiated. Marriage places sexuality under the firm basis of love (1Cor.7)²⁶ and is portrayed as a symbol of Christ's union with His Church (Eph 5:21-33, 1Tim 3:3-5).

However, one should take care to avoid fundamentalism and oversimplification of the biblical passages. A balanced and critical approach is needed in the use of scripture to tackle moral issues regarding ethical situations.²⁷ The language of scripture demands hermeneutics in order to apply scriptural texts to issues of sexuality and marriage, for example.

IV. THE CHURCH'S EARLY DOCTRINE ON MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE

In the first centuries, Christians were busy defending the goodness of marriage against various claims of Gnosticism, namely, the Gnostics, Ascetics and Encratites. For that purpose they referred to several scriptural texts (Gen 1: 2), where the bond of husband and wife is confirmed by the Creator. This can also be seen in Mt 19:1-12 and Mk 10:1-12 where Jesus speaks of marriage according to the original intention of the Creator. However, some Christians interpreted the scriptural data according to the rigid conception of the stoics, permitting marriage only for the sake of procreation and not for pleasure.²⁸ They were

against anything that prevented the procreative purpose in marriage and family.²⁹

An example is St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD). He lived in the declining years of the Roman Empire. According to him, marriage is characterized by *tria bona* (or three goods),³⁰ namely, first, there is the *bonum prolis*, (the good of offspring). In the natural order, this good serves the human race and its survival. The direct result of marital intercourse is the procreation of offspring. The one, sole justification for engaging in intercourse in marriage is to achieve this goal, the good of procreation. Second, there is the *bonum fidei* (the good of fidelity that excludes adultery). It is primarily the human experience of friendship and the formation of a community as a direct result of human social nature. It is a remedy to all sorts of sexual tendencies and feelings. Third, there is the *bonum sacramenti*, (the good of durability or the indissolubility of the marital bond that forbids divorce). Christian marriage is a sign, a holy symbol of the relationship between Christ and the church. For this it cannot be dissolved.³¹ Augustine believed in the good of marriage and openly praised it, just as Paul did when he wrote: "Let marriage be honorable among all." Augustine assumes the teachings of Paul further by defending marriage and the positive aspects of it, and in trying to restore its honor. "Marriage, I say, is good, and can be defended by right reason against all charges."³²

Thomas Aquinas (1225–74 AD) focused on three characteristics of marriage, known as three *officium*.³³ The

manuscripts containing works of Augustine or ascribed to him in order to make time-consuming research in this field easier.

²⁹ For instance, St. Justin the Martyr, Athenagoras, Marcus Minucius Felix, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, St. Jerome, St. Ambrose, St. John Chrysostom, St. Augustine of Hippo, and St. Thomas Aquinas.

³⁰ Cf., Roy J. Deferrari, "Introduction". In *The Fathers of the Church, Volume 27: Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects* (America: The Catholic University of America Press, 1955), 4; cf., Russell Shaw, ed., "The Goods of marriage". In *Encyclopedia of Catholic Doctrine*, Our Sunday Visitor, 1997.

³¹ Cf., Roy J. Deferrari, *The Fathers of the Church, Volume 27: Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects*. "Introduction," (The Catholic University of America Press, 1955), 4; see also, <http://www.cormacburke.or.ke/node/339>; see also, accessed, 30/02/2017

³² St. Augustine, "De bono coniugali". *The Fathers of the Church, Volume 27: Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects* (America: The Catholic University of America Press, 1955), 39

³³ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 91, a. 2; see also, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* on "The Effects Of The Sacrament Of Matrimony" (nos. 1638-1642), and "The Goods And Requirements of Conjugal Love" (nos. 1643-1654). Augustine's most extensive writing on marriage, at 30 years of age, is found in his *Scriptum*, or *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, much of which was later edited and published after his death as

²³ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Second Edition, (Nairobi: Paulines Publishers, 1994), no. 1602; see also, Gen 1:26-27; Rev 19:7-9

²⁴ Cf., Darton, ed., *The New Jerusalem Bible* (Study Edition) (London: Longman and Todd Ltd, 1994), which explains Jesus' teaching when he was challenged by the Pharisees and the Scribes on the issue of marriage (see, Mathew 19: 1-12; Mk.10:6-8)

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Karl H. Peschke, *Christian Ethics: Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican II* (Birmingham: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1997), 395

²⁷ Stephen E. Fowl and Jones L. Gregory, *Reading in Communion: Scripture and Ethics in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 45

²⁸ These writings are found in CSEL The CSEL publishes special catalogues for the large extant corpus of medieval

first, the *officium naturae* concerns marriage as an institution for procreation and education. As such, it is a good in so far as it achieves its natural biological ends, procreation and parenting of offspring. Second, the *officium societatis* concerns marriage as a community of friendship and mutual help. It achieves human finality which satisfies our social nature. Marriage serves as foundation of family, community of persons. Thirdly, the *officium sacramenti* relates to the spiritual aspect of marriage as a sign of the union between Christ and his Church. It is a means of perfection.

V. VATICAN II, POST-VATICAN II AND CURRENT CONSIDERATIONS

Vatican II is a major shift in the understanding of marriage in the Catholic Church. Before Vatican II, Catholic teaching was based on the primacy of procreation of children against sexual pleasure.³⁴ The relationship between spouses was perceived to be of secondary importance.

In line with previous teaching, however, the conciliar document *Gaudium et Spes*, God Himself is the author of matrimony, which is ordained to transmit life through authentic conjugal love.³⁵ Any attempt to go against the meaning and nature of marriage and family destroys the plan of the Creator. It suppresses the plan of God in creation whereby God Himself is the author of matrimony, endowed as it is with various benefits and purposes.³⁶ Therefore, the institution of matrimony itself and conjugal love are ordained for the procreation and education of children, and find in them their ultimate crown.³⁷ Thus, a man and a woman, who by their union of conjugal love “are no longer two, but one flesh” (Matt. 19:1ff), render mutual help and service to each other through an intimate union of their persons and of their actions.³⁸ Through this union they experience the meaning of their oneness and attain to it with growing perfection day by day. As a mutual gift of two persons, this intimate union and the good of the children

impose total fidelity on the spouses and argue for an unbreakable oneness between them.³⁹

The Council stresses as well that marriage and marital love are by nature ordered to the procreation and education of children. Married couples should regard it as their proper mission to transmit human life and to educate their children. But they must fulfill this sublime mission with responsibility, thoughtfully considering their own good and the good of their children, already born and yet to come. This involves the ability to read the “signs of the times” and their own perspective on their material and spiritual level, taking into account the good of the family, of society and of the Church. *Gaudium et Spes* affirms, however, beyond the Church’s traditional teaching that coital expressions of conjugal love have substantial value independent of procreation.⁴⁰ Marital acts of love are noble and worthy. In their truly human expression, they signify and promote that mutual self-giving by which spouses enrich each other with a joyful and a thankful will.

In *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul VI reaffirmed the traditional Catholic teaching on birth control and abortion. Today, the encyclical is regarded by many as prophetic as the destruction of the family that Paul VI predicted is evident.⁴¹ The encyclical is criticized in that its core teaching is based on natural law, which the Church insists all men/women should follow, prohibiting homosexuality, direct abortion, sterilization euthanasia, contraception and artificial insemination in humans.⁴² It also maintains the unitive and procreative purposes of marriage but in all this, sometimes the pragmatic dimension is missed, especially, when issues concerning the laity are left to bishops to decide.⁴³

VI. MORE POST-CONCILIAR TEACHING

After Vatican II, many issues on sexual ethics, and in particular on marriage and family life, have persisted. Therefore, different documents, such as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, *Familiaris Consortio*, *Amoris Laetitia*, and several synodal documents have come up with different approaches to these issues. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reiterates the main doctrinal points on marriage underlined by the church’s tradition.⁴⁴ These are that: marriage is willed by God; marriage is a sacrament; marriage is good; Christian marriage is a sharing in the mystery of Christ and the church; the marital bond is

the *Supplementum*, or appendix to his great but incomplete work the *Summa Theologiae*. This was a useful project because the *Commentary on the Sentences* dealt with matters he had not yet discussed in the *Summa*, including marriage as a sacrament. see, <https://www.catholicweekly.com.au/st-thomas-and-marriage-beyond-the-augustinian-impasse/> (accessed, 19/01/2017)

³⁴ Bernard Cooke, “Historical Reflections on the Meaning of Marriage,” in Charles E. Curran and Julie Hanlon Rubio (eds.), *Marriage* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009), 114; see also citation by Joseph A. Seelling, “Regulating Fertility and Clarifying Moral Language”, *The Heythrop Journal* 55 (2014), 1042.

³⁵ Vatican II Council, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et Spes*, In Austin Flannery. Ed. *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents New Revised Edition* (Pasay City: Paulines, 2006), nos. 48-50.

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Pope Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Humanae Vitae*, nos. 8-10

³⁹ Ibid., 50

⁴⁰ *Gaudium et Spes*, nos. 48-49

⁴¹ Francis, the Pope of “*Humanae Vitae*”, Chiesa.Espressonline.it, Article By Sandro Magister, (1 May 2014); see also, Paul’s encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, nos. 12-13, 18

⁴² Kilian Dwyer, Peter Butterfield and Fr. O’Callaghan, ‘The Furrow’. *journal article, Humanae Vitae* (with Comments), Vol. 28, No. 7 (The Furrow, 1977),. 426-434

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Second Edition (Africa: Paulines Publishers, 1984), nos. 1601-1602; see also, *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 20

exclusive; marriage is indissoluble; and marriage is a partnership of love in fidelity, uniquely expressed through the conjugal act. The conjugal act is by its nature ordained to procreation resulting in the increase of the people of God. Christian marriage is a way to perfection, and the Christian family is the primary cell of the church.⁴⁵

The *Code of Canon Law*, among other Church documents, maintains that the most prominent properties of marriage are unity and indissolubility.⁴⁶ Marriage is designed by its very nature to be exclusively by one man and one woman, which means that the creator intends monogamy to be the rule in marriage.⁴⁷ It is for the good of children that the union of parents be indissoluble. Marital love demands permanence and constancy, in which the conjugal act is a sign and symbol of this deeper love: a union of total self-surrender.⁴⁸

Familiaris Consortio 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."⁴⁹ Marriage is "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, in whom they find their crowning."⁵⁰

The document of Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, is of great importance on the issue of marriage and family. In this document, the Pope discusses the family as well as many other moral-pastoral challenges facing marriage and family today.⁵¹ Pope Francis dwells on conjugal love as related to procreation and education of children, who are the ultimate crown of this love. Children, who are the supreme gift of marriage, contribute very substantially to the welfare of their parents. Pope Francis affirms this when he says that:

Love is made fruitful, for children are a gift. Each one is unique and irreplaceable ... We love our children because they are children, not because they are beautiful, or look or think as we do, or embody our dreams. We love them because they

are children.' 'Mothers are the strongest antidote to the spread of self-centred individualism... It is they who testify to the beauty of life.'⁵²

The Pope indicates that "a society without mothers would be dehumanized, for mothers are always, even in the worst of times, witnesses to tenderness, dedication and moral strength."⁵³ Consequently, marriage in the Post-Vat II period can be considered firstly, as an inter-subjective union, where the emphasis on marriage is on personal experience, a love relationship unique to the two spouses who share it, incommunicable to anyone else.⁵⁴

Currently, new challenges have emerged that threaten Christian marriage and family life as a result of the impact of society's higher mobility. Notable among these factors of change in understanding and valuing marriage and the family are the reproductive technological developments. The possibility of having babies without sex is an example. Thus, as Pope Francis remarks, "the life of every family is marked by all kinds of crises, yet these are also part of its dramatic beauty. Couples should be helped to realize that surmounting a crisis need not weaken their relationship; instead, it can improve, settle and mature the wine of their union."⁵⁵

VII. EVALUATION AND PASTORAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The issue of divorce and remarriage is a complex reality where the unitive and indissoluble dimensions of marriage are concerned. However, Julie Clague says that:

These issues should be discussed soberly in order to remove any ambiguity. Although these ethical challenges threaten marriage and its meaning and nature, the Church and other stakeholders of the human family must be ready to protect God's plan of marriage and family against anything that devalues and dehumanizes in the context of marriage and family.⁵⁶

Evangelizing and educating children, especially teenagers, is necessary. Pope Francis points out that since "adolescents usually have issues with authority and rules, it is best to encourage their own experience of faith and to provide them with attractive testimonies that win them over by their sheer beauty"⁵⁷ The Pope continues to say that "Parents need to consider what they want their children to be exposed to, and this necessarily means being concerned

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Collins, *The Code of Canon Law* (in English translation) (Landon: Collins Liturgical Publications, 1983), Canons, 1141, 1151-1151; cf., *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 2382-2391

⁴⁷ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Second Edition, nos. 1601-1602

⁴⁸ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 39: AAS 83 (1991), 841; cf., no. 212

⁴⁹ *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 20

⁵⁰ Ibid., no. 14

⁵¹ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, Chapter One explains the definition of the family in the light of the Word and Chapter Two discusses the experiences and challenges of families. Other Chapters give us the way forward. See also, Raymond J De Souza, "Reading the fine print in *Amoris Laetitia*". *Catholic Herald* (Catholic Herald Limited, 2016)

⁵² Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 170

⁵³ Ibid, 174

⁵⁴ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1644-1645; see also, in *Amoris laetitia* (The Joy of Love) Pope Francis quotes Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 27, a. 1 "on marriage and love"

⁵⁵ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 232

⁵⁶ Julie Clague, "Catholics, Families and the Synod of Bishops: View from the Pews" *Heythrop Journal* LV (2014), 985-1008

⁵⁷ See Ibid, 288 and 60.

about who is providing their entertainment, who is entering their rooms through television and electronic devices, and with whom they are spending their free time.”⁵⁸ Hence, “It is essential that children actually see that, for their parents, prayer is something truly important. Hence moments of family prayer and acts of devotion can be more powerful for evangelization than any catechism class or sermon.”⁵⁹

In order to understand marriage and family in the Church in the context of the African people, we might borrow from Margaret A. Farley. In her book, *Just Love*, she describes the criteria which make the frame of marriage just. She proposes “free choice, mutuality, equality, commitment, fruitfulness and responsibility for the wider world. She does not favor the “total gift language of the Church documents,⁶⁰ which symbolize a stronger and weaker sex model where gender is concerned.⁶¹ Man and woman should be seen and understood as equal, allowing both to take some of the responsibilities in the Church. The Church is blamed by feminists in Africa for her continuous condemnation of, for example, ‘abortion’, ‘contraception’, and ‘sexual activity outside of marriage’ when many women feel that the Church does not take into account the experience of women. Regardless, bishops in Africa have maintained that the traditional teaching of the Church on marriage and family should not be altered.⁶² However, true dialogue between the institutional Church and its members is required, keeping in mind that marriage is a lay vocation and that the development of theologies of marriage is a special responsibility of married couples. This is a call for the laity that it is rooted in baptism. As the US bishops have noted: “it is characteristic that lay men and women hear the call to holiness in the very web of their existence ... the complex decisions and conflicting values they must struggle with, the richness and dignity of sexual relationships...”⁶³ It is they who are called to be keepers of marriage and family.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This paper has tried to show briefly the *Latin* Catholic Church’s view of marriage and family in relation to African culture. It has evaluated the Christian understanding of marriage and family and discussed several issues on marriage by looking into the meaning and purpose of marriage and family from the point of view of biblical understanding. Then it has discussed the Church’s early teaching with illustrations from some of Church’s noteworthy writers. The paper has also briefly considered current Church doctrine on marriage, including the challenges facing the original plan of the Creator in the order of human marriage and family, from the African

context. The discussion demonstrates the necessity of upholding the Church’s teaching that becomes the beacon/pivot of the research study, but with the ‘Church’s listening ear’ to the laity for the betterment of marriage and family in the society.

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⁵⁸ Ibid, 260

⁵⁹ Ibid, 288

⁶⁰ Farley, 266

⁶¹ Ibid

⁶² Cardinal Peter Turkson, “Catholic interview”, by a U.S. *This article appeared in the August 2010 issue of U.S. Catholic* (Vol. 75, No. 8, pages 34-38).

⁶³ United States Catholic Conference, “Called and Gifted”, Washington, DC, 198, 4, quoted in Paul Lakeland, *The Liberation of the Laity* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 132

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Abbreviations

- [79.] AAS: Acta Apostolicae Sedis (Official Acts of the Holy See)
- [80.] CSEL: "Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum" (Corpus of the Latin Church Fathers)
- [81.] GCS: Ground Communications Segment
- [82.] GS: *Gaudium et Spes* (Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World)
- [83.] LG: *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church)