AN ANALYSIS OF MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIPS AMONG TSWANA SPEAKING CATHOLICS IN THE ODI DISTRICT: A THEOLOGICAL ETHICAL STUDY

by

CLEMENT KOKOANA SENEKANE

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of

MASTER OF THEOLOGY

in the subject

THEOLOGICAL ETHICS

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: DR. LOUISE KRETZSCHMAR

NOVEMBER 1995
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people made important contributions to the preparation of this dissertation. Thanks go to Fr. Michael (Superior) and the Stigmatine confreres who gave me the opportunity to take up this study. Thanks to all who helped in one way or another.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Louise Kretzschmar who helped by her direct and thoughtful criticisms. Her comments enabled me to go on in my research. She took exceptional care and patience in guiding the dissertation through the many steps to completion.

A word of recognition also goes to Sr. Kieran McGetrick who went the extra mile. She initially urged me to write this dissertation and particular thanks go to her for her encouragement and advice.
DECLARATION

I declare that: AN ANALYSIS OF MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIPS AMONG TSWANA SPEAKING CATHOLICS IN THE ODI DISTRICT: A THEOLOGICAL ETHICAL STUDY is my own work and that all sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.
SUMMARY

This dissertation deals with an ethical analysis of marriage relationships among Tswana speaking Catholics in the light of the understandings of marriage of both the African and Christian traditions. These traditions have certain practices and perspectives that, if they are put together, can enrich marriage in all its aspects.

The first two chapters analyse the practices and perspectives of marriage within the African and Christian traditions, while the third compares and contrasts them. The aspects dealt with are a) compatible values from African and Christian marriage and b) incompatible values from African and Christian marriages.

In chapter four, the role of the Church in restoring the purpose and the meaning of marriage and what it can do to improve Catholic marriage relationships among Tswana speaking people are discussed and some practical suggestions are proposed.
LIST OF KEY WORDS

Marriage, African values, Christian values, Marriage forms, Indissolubility, Pre-marriage courses, Post-marriage courses, Catholic Marriage, Tswana Marriage, Family, Sexuality, Marital breakdown
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**INTRODUCTION** .......................................................... 1

Chapter 1  
THE CONTEMPORARY EXPERIENCE OF MARRIAGE  
AMONG THE CATHOLIC TSWANA PEOPLE  
IN THE ODI DISTRICT ................................................. 11

1.1 Traditional marriage .............................................. 12
1.1.1 The two systems of marriage in African tradition ........ 13
1.1.1.1 *The matrilinear system* .................................................. 13
1.1.1.2 *The Patrilinear system* ..................................................... 13
1.1.2 Traditional forms of marriage ................................. 14
1.1.2.1 *Polygamy* ................................................................. 14
1.1.2.2 *Monogamy* ................................................................. 16
1.1.2.3 *The levirate system* ..................................................... 16
1.1.2.4 *Informal marriage* ...................................................... 18
1.1.2.5 *The significance of bridewealth (Lobola)* .......... 19
1.1.3 Marriage alliances among the Tswana people ............... 20
1.2 The impact of modern society on traditional African marriages ............................................. 22
1.2.1 The religious impact ............................................... 22
1.2.2 The socio-economic impact .................................... 25
1.2.2.1 *Industrialization* ......................................................... 25
1.2.2.2 *The Cash-economy* ....................................................... 26
1.2.3 The Political impact .............................................. 29
1.2.4 Gender roles ....................................................... 31
1.2.4.1 *The role of men in the family* ............................... 31
1.2.4.2 *The role of women in the family* ......................... 32
1.3 African marriage today ........................................... 34
1.3.1 The present forms of marriage ................................. 37
Chapter 2
WHAT CONSTITUTES MARRIAGE? ........... 43

2.1 Some Christian definitions of marriage .... 44
2.2 A historical outline of Christian (and especially the Catholic) views of marriage .... 47
  2.2.1 The medieval period ............... 49
  2.2.2 The Council of Trent (1545-1563) .... 50
2.3 Contemporary Christian understandings of marriage ...... 50
  2.3.1 Catholic Church's view of marriage .... 51
2.4 The constituent elements of marriage .......... 53
  2.4.1 The act of consent and the sex act .... 53
  2.4.2 Partnership in marriage .......... 56
  2.4.3 Sexuality and fidelity in marriage .... 58
2.5 The indissolubility of marriage .......... 61
2.6 Conclusion .......... 66

Chapter 3
WHICH UNDERSTANDINGS AND PRACTICES FROM BOTH TRADITIONAL AFRICAN AND CATHOLIC THEOLOGICAL VIEWS OF MARRIAGE SHOULD BE STRESSED IN OUR MODERN CONTEXT? .. 68

3.1 Christian (often Western) values and African traditional values of marriage .......... 70
3.2 African values and practices compatible with Catholic theology .......... 72
  3.2.1 The involvement of the African and Church community in marriage .......... 72
3.2.2 The extended family and the Church .................. 75
3.2.3 The act of consent and the sex act ................... 78
3.2.4 The sex act in marriage ........................... 80
3.2.5 Marriage as a community of love and covenant .......... 82
3.2.6 Partnership .................................... 84
3.3 The understandings and practices from both traditional African marriage and Catholic theological views of marriage, which should not be stressed and emphasised in our modern context. .. 85
3.4 Conclusion .................................... 89

Chapter 4

HOW SHOULD THE MODERN CATHOLIC CHURCH
RESPOND TO THE CRISIS IN MARRIAGE? ........... 93

4.1 Why speak of a crisis in marriage? ................... 93
4.2 The Church as part of the problem ................... 96
4.2.1 Its theology and view of African customs ............... 98
4.2.2 The insistence on the indissolubility of marriage ....... 101
4.2.3 Does sexual intercourse belong exclusively to marriage? ... 102
4.2.4 Its failure to support families separated for long periods .... 103
4.3 What the church can do to restore the value of marriage ... 104
4.4 Practical involvement of the Church in restoring the value of marriage ........................................... 105
4.4.1 Pre-marriage courses ................................ 107
4.4.2 Marriage enrichment courses after the marriage ceremony . 110
4.4.3 Crisis counselling ................................... 112
4.5 Conclusion ..................................... 114

CONCLUSION ................................................................ 117

BIBLIOGRAPHY .................................................. 127
INTRODUCTION

In the world of today, the value of marriage appears to have deteriorated. This phenomenon is plainly obvious in the society in which we live. Married life is frequently marred by tensions, misunderstandings, quarrels and confusion. All or some of these problems may lead to separation or divorce. They are the evils that threaten the value, quality and dignity of marriage.

The substance of this dissertation is intended to help married couples. It does not, however, exclude those about to be engaged to marry. I have been strongly moved by the experience acquired from my pastoral work where I have seen people confused and disappointed by their married lives. In other words, I plan to address the issues of the quality of marriage which seems to have been drowned deep under a sea of confusion, difficulties and self-induced problems.

Very briefly, I hold that one of the essential factors in marriage is for there to be an experience of partnership and cooperation between the two people committed to marriage. There must be genuine partnership in marriage. I believe that marriage is an area where people should be able to experience their personal freedom; each in turn leaving room for the freedom of the other partner. One may say that all marriages are different. Yes, they are. But what makes a marriage what it should be? It is its quality, and that is what I wish to discuss in this dissertation and to put across to you as the reader.

It is my earnest desire that this ethical analysis will be of great help to improve the quality of existing marriages. Since I find it difficult, or rather impossible, to separate the quality of marriage from the destructive forces within many marriages, I shall tackle those same destructive forces and expose them so that those who may make use of this research will be
in a position to help those who happen to be caught up in a marriage that has lost its meaning.

Even though I am writing this dissertation influenced by the experience I have had from pastoral work, I want to present it as clearly and as simply as I can, in the hope that it will be helpful, not only to people who are already married, but also to those whose intention it is to get married. However it should, I believe, be of benefit to anyone who is looking for a deeper understanding and appreciation of married life. In particular, I hope it will help couples and pastors engaged in running marriage preparation courses. I trust that it will help husbands and wives relate to each other with greater understanding and love and respond to their sex needs in a more meaningful way than has previously been the case. I hope, too, that it will help those couples who are in the process of preparing themselves for the life-long commitment of marriage.

But is this work really necessary? Many volumes on sexuality, marriage and love exist. I feel embarrassed adding yet another one. Nevertheless, I write this dissertation because I always find a need for a more specific approach that can address the problems I encounter in my pastoral field. Most of the books I have come across present the romantic side of marriage and avoid the difficulties and the problems that very often prevail in marriage. Many of these books deal mainly with the theoretical concept of the indissolubility and value of marriage. They fail to discuss or provide practical suggestions for keeping the marriage intact. Sometimes, even though they discuss these issues, they do not deal with them in depth. They are treated casually and in general terms.

In matters concerning marriage we, in South Africa, are greatly influenced by American and European literature. There is a tremendous neglect and shortage of information on traditional African marriage which is so important to the majority of our people whose marriages are deeply
influenced and built on a long tradition of African customs and beliefs. This lack of information may be one of the causes responsible for the breakdown of so many marriages among the Tswana people in the Odi District, north of Pretoria.

When I spoke, in 1993, to my standard 10 students at Tsogo High School, I found that most of what I say here was new to them. Quite a number of the students did not know what type of married life they would like to have: one could only sense confusion, frustration and fear from what they said. I found that young as they were, both male and female, were still under the pressure and influence of what has been set before them by patriarchal structures and capitalist culture. For example, I found it hard to convince them that partnership and equality are meant to characterise marriage. They failed to grasp this point because of the two accounts of creation given in Gen. 1 & 2. Males felt that they are meant to have power and authority over females simply because the second account presents the man as having been created before the woman. Some women accepted this view claiming that, if they got married, their husbands would be superior to them. This way of thinking was also confirmed by various groups of people, for example, those who were preparing for marriage, the newly married and divorcees.

I found that those preparing for marriage were not clear about their roles in married life. They could not see any problem whatsoever in having a husband who assumes superiority over the family while the wife remains inferior. They said that it is the man who chooses and marries the woman not vice-versa. They made the point that after the marriage ceremony the wife leaves her home to stay with her husband in his home. This is a clear indication that she is now under the care and direction of her husband. I must point out that there was also a part of this group that believed that marriage was natural, and time should not be spent in trying to shape and structure a natural phenomenon.
Many newly married couples support the idea that as the husband is the father of the family, he has to take the full responsibility for it. He has to take care of, support and guide each member of the family. On the other hand, they claim that the role of the wife is to support the husband in the running of the house and listen to and respect his commands. After all, she can do nothing without first consulting her husband. What I found strange was that many believed that a husband could do certain things without the consent of the wife. One good example is that of a husband's right to spend his salary independently of his wife, while the wife has to render an account as to how she spends hers. Another point is that the husband is free to come and go as he wishes while the wife has to receive permission for all her movements outside the home.

It was only those who had experienced marital breakdowns through divorce or separation who gave me a different view. The wives strongly expressed their feeling that their husbands had treated them like children, if not like slaves. One woman told me that she had to ask for permission any time she went out of the house. She could not go shopping or visit friends without her husband's consent. She could not even undertake some extra hours at work without permission from him. Everything she did was timed by the husband. Her husband used to tell her that she could only take so many minutes to travel from home to work and back again. When going shopping she had always to go with their first born son who was eight years old. The son had to look after her and report to the father where the mother was sitting in the taxi and who sat beside her. When it happened to be a man who sat beside her in the taxi or if she arrived five minutes after the given time, she was beaten without mercy. "The most painful and frustrating thing" she said, "was to find him waiting for me at the door, not to welcome me, but to accuse me of unfaithfulness and to examine me to find if I had been sleeping with men during the time I was outside our home. I never enjoyed sexual intercourse for the last six years of my ten
years of marriage. I think that man has hindered my growth and my maturity" (Resident of Odi).

I must say that I was lucky enough to get hold of the man who was the husband of the woman who gave me the above information. He confirmed all that was said by her and insisted that all that he did was out of love for her. He felt that as the head of the family he had to take care of it by supporting and disciplining its members. In the end he realised that there was no happiness in the family and decided that the best thing to do was to send her away.

The above example is surely indicative of the fact that a great many people enter married life without knowing exactly what marriage is or what is required of it. Because of their ignorance of the nature of marriage, people see marriage as something difficult and impossible to live out because it is full of problems and difficulties which may lead to marital breakdown.

Even the married couples with whom I have discussed marital life during a number of weekend seminars told me that they never had the constituent elements and purpose of marriage explained to them. They defined themselves as people who "fell" in love, without understanding what life-long commitment meant in marriage life.

I must admit and accept that there are excellent books available to teach people the facts of life, both biological and psychological. And, every year, fresh manuals of instruction on married sex appear on the book-racks with the regularity of new leaves sprouting on trees. Some are trashy, some are serious, while others are sublime. But many seem to paint a picture of marriage which does not exist in reality. There is a gap to be filled between this make-believe world and the real world. From my pastoral experience I realized that people still have not found what they are looking for in
marriage. I hope my analysis will bring some practical solutions to the problems and the difficulties facing many young married couples today.

This dissertation will be based mainly on information gleaned from the people in the Odi District. My concern lies with Odi District because that is where I have worked as pastor, and where I almost daily encountered marriages breaking down. Some of these broken marriages were solemnized in the Catholic church, where the couples professed their everlasting commitment to the marriage. And yet, a few years later, the same couples replaced love with hatred as they went through the process of separation if not divorce.

The title of this dissertation clearly indicates that I am attempting an ethical analysis of Catholic marriages among the Tswana people in Odi. By ethical I mean pertaining to or dealing with morals or the principles of morality; pertaining to what is right and wrong or good and bad in the conduct of marriage. I agree with Louise Kretzschmar that, generally speaking, ethics is concerned with issues of right and wrong norms as well as good and bad motives and consequences. And that ethics should not be confused with ethos which refers to the way things are, that is, what is customary and generally accepted within a society. Instead, ethics is a critical reflection upon the ethos of our society (Kretzschmar and Botha in Villa-Vicencio 1994: 3 and 36). This ethical research asks whether those ideas, practices and structures which are generally accepted by African and Christian tradition, in relation to marriage, should be accepted as right and good elements. This dissertation asks Christian ethicists if marriage life as well as ecclesiastical contexts conform to the purpose and the will of God.

In this dissertation, ethical analysis involves the identification of what traditional African marriage and Christian tradition consider to be valid norms and why they are considered as being valid. This involves an analysis of both ethical criteria and approaches as well as the contexts
within which ethical or unethical attitudes, behaviour or social structures are experienced by both African and Christian traditions in relation to marriage.

In other words, the ethical analysis of Christian marriages among the Tswana people in the Odi District, will involve two types of ethics, deontological ethics and teleological ethics. This means that I am concerned not only with what is right and wrong (deontological) in marriage, but that I am also concerned with what is good and bad in marriage, in terms of goals, motives and results (teleological).

Having presented the aim and the value of this theological ethical analysis, I now move to an outline of the content. This dissertation is divided into four chapters. The first chapter deals with an analysis of the contemporary experience of marriage among the Catholic Tswana people in the Odi District. The ethical approach towards this analysis is to examine how traditional African marriages functioned under the matrilinear and patrilinear systems. It will be in connection with these systems that the traditional forms of marriage will be explained with their stress on marriage alliance and bridewealth.

Today marriage is no longer structured or understood as it was during the time of our ancestors. This is due to the impact of modern society on traditional African marriage. Here I can mention the socio-economic impact as a result of industrialization and the cash-economy. In addition to this, the political impact and gender roles are examined. In the last part of the chapter I describe African marriage as it is experienced today. Here I want to find out how the Catholic Tswana people understand and live out their marriages. The forms of marriage that they use and the role of the two families and community are discussed. Finally, a word is said in connection with polygamy and bridewealth.
Quite clearly people are confused concerning what marriage is as well as what the constituent elements of marriage are. I therefore set aside chapter two to discuss the constituent elements of marriage and different definitions of marriage as well as the historical development of the various Christian understandings of marriage. The constituent elements discussed are the wedding night, partnership, sexuality in marriage and fidelity. The issue of the indissolubility of marriage is also briefly discussed.

These two chapters serve as a stepping-stone to chapter three which extracts from the African and Christian (particularly Catholic) traditions the elements of marriage that are compatible such as the involvement of the community and the extended family in marriage. The discussion then moves on to the issues of the act of consent and the consummating sex act, the sex act in marriage, marriage as a sacrament, and marriage as a community of love and covenant. Finally, chapter three indicates that not all the elements that are found in the African and Christian traditions can be accepted and stressed today.

The understanding of the essential elements of marriage from both African and Christian traditions needs to be emphasized in order to strengthen marriage. That is, people have to know about them, and to be helped to understand and recognise them. Here the question can arise, how is this going to be possible? Chapter four seeks to answer this question. In it I turn to the Church, so as to show what the Church can do to establish the nature of marriage discussed in chapter two. The Church should be able to provide part of the solution to the problem of the declining quality of marriage and I believe that the church is capable of coming up with constructive ideas provided it studies the tradition of both Christian and African marriages. As many members of the Church are both Christians and Africans, the Church cannot ignore its responsibility for combining both traditions in order to build up an understanding of the essence of marriage among the Christian people of its area.
Furthermore, to enrich marriage, the Church will have to correct its own mistakes with regard to its theology of marriage and sexuality, and the role of women in marriage. Thereafter, the Church can establish pre-marriage courses, marriage enrichment courses that follow the marriage ceremony, and counselling courses to help those who have experienced separation or divorce.

From this discussion another important question arises: how can the aims proposed in this dissertation be achieved? What methodology has been employed? Firstly, I have drawn on my experience as a pastor in the Odi District. In fact, it is this encounter that urged me to direct my studies to the area of marriage and family life.

Secondly, as I am not the only pastor working in the Odi District, I found it necessary to obtain a wider knowledge of the situation, thus, I shared and discussed my ideas with other pastors. Much material was also provided by both married and unmarried people.

A third methodological element was that of research into what has been written by others on this subject as I am quite aware that there have been other people before me who were also disturbed by problems encountered in marriage and family life. I have also called upon my clerical studies within the Catholic theological tradition to aid me. I hope that after reading this dissertation the reader will be in a position to judge what contribution the Catholic approach to marriage can make to the Churches and society at large.

To conclude, on the basis of pastoral experience I have realized that the quality and dignity of marriage has deteriorated among the Tswana people in the Odi District and I believe that certain elements of the African tradition ought to be considered for inclusion in the Church's teaching concerning marriage. I strongly believe that the Church, properly
equipped, can offer much assistance in solving marriage problems in the pastoral area where I work.
Chapter 1

THE CONTEMPORARY EXPERIENCE OF MARRIAGE AMONG THE CATHOLIC TSWANA PEOPLE IN THE ODI DISTRICT

As mentioned in the introduction, this chapter will be mainly divided into three parts. The first part deals with traditional marriage. The second part deals with the impact of modern society on traditional marriage. The third part deals with the contemporary experience of marriage by Catholic Tswana people in the Odi District. This area is found in the old Transvaal, north of Pretoria, a 10 kilometre drive from the industrial area of Rosslyn. This area was part of the well-known "Bophuthatswana" which was proclaimed a homeland under the apartheid system in 1979 and placed under the leadership of former President Lucas Mangope, who was overthrown in March 1994. Today it is known as the North West province.

The Tswana people came to this area because of the forced removals which took place under the Apartheid regime. They were removed from different areas now occupied by Whites. Since then, the Tswana people have been trying to survive even though the apartheid government kept them far from their working places. This same system of Apartheid, with all its implications, contributed greatly to the instability found in married life among the Tswana people of this area. One may ask why I chose these people and what is wrong with their marriages. What are their problems? The answer to these questions is, as I said in the introduction, that their culture of marriage has lost its original structure and moral value. Family life is marked by tensions, misunderstandings, quarrels, confusion and a lack of fulfilment in each of the partners. The two main evils of marriage: divorce and separation, daily threaten the dignity and survival of marriage. The example, noted in the introduction,
of the experience of a woman who divorced her husband after suffering many hardships in her married life is a very common experience in the Odi area.

1.1 Traditional marriage

Marriage in traditional African society was a complex institution because of its many connections with the other social structures and their operation. In African tradition there were different forms of marriage. Here I shall try to present their structures with particular reference to the Tswana people in the Odi District. We have to remember that all forms of marriage are determined by the culture of a given people. Thus, in order to understand non-Western forms of marriage and family life, a person from one cultural background must not presume that the forms of marriage or family life that he or she has known in his or her own culture are the only possible - or even the best - forms of marriage and family life. He or she must seek to understand how and why other forms of marriage arose in other cultures in the past, and why they persist even today. Hence, in analysing the nature of African marriages among the Tswana people in the Odi District, I would like to start off by presenting the traditional forms of marriage of the Tswana people. This emphasis does not exclude other Tswana people living elsewhere.

When talking of traditional African marriage among the Tswana people in the Odi District, one will immediately recall the most usual forms of marriage called monogamy and polygamy. Besides these two, there are other forms such as Levirate and the so called informal marriage. All these forms of traditional African marriage fall under either the patrilineal system or the matrilineal system.
1.1.1 The two systems of marriage in African tradition

1.1.1.1 The matrilinear system

Within this system consanguinity is more important than kinship. The woman is considered the sole, or at least the most important source of the substance of the child. It is made from mother's blood: it is her creation. The role of the male sperm is considered insignificant. People are mutually linked through women. Often, this system incorporates the idea of an all-embracing womb of which all individual wombs are the organs. The womb unites the members of the group: it renders them equal and links all the individuals. The family is considered to be an integral part of the kinship group of the woman and has nothing to do with the kinship group of the man. The matrilinear ideology socializes and integrates the individual, with his or her spiritual needs, into the wider whole of the kinship group.

Marriage here involves no bridewealth as in patrilinear communities. Small presents are, however, given to the group that gives the bride. More important is the labour which the bridegroom to be, has to render to his in-laws. Within the matrilineal system the role of the man as husband is very modest. The links with his children are also weak. His own children do not inherit from him whereas the children of his sister do. The existence of the Matrilinear system is affirmed by Remi Clignet in his study which contrasts monogamy and polygamy (Blum 1989: 115). In his comparison he found out that the Matrilinear system was practised in the Ivory Coast by the tribe named Matrilineal Aboure.

1.1.1.2 The patrilinear system

In contrast to the Matrilinear system there is the Patrilinear system. In this system the husband plays the superior role over the wife and family
as a whole. The supremacy of the husband increases to the extent that the reproductive powers of the woman are considered to be at the service of the husband’s kinship group and therefore the children belong to the father’s kinship group. A married woman is not allowed extra-marital relations. A child’s legitimacy is a vital issue. Moreover, the wife’s links with her group of origin are weakened. Her descendants are subordinated to the new contract. In this system the woman, to a large extent, is seen as inferior to the man. The patrilinear system is commonly practised in Southern Africa.

The forms of marriage seen as an acceptable part of the patrilinear system of marriage in African tradition are as follows: Polygamy, Monogamy, the Levirate and informal marriage.

1.1.2 Traditional forms of marriage

1.1.2.1 Polygamy

Traditionally, polygamy had the function of catering for the sexual needs of men and of minimizing the chances of promiscuity and prostitution. I think that more importantly, polygamy helped to satisfy the need and the desire of having a large family, while on the other hand it kept the fertility rate of the women at a low level. Polygamy also strengthened clan and family ties because a single man was able to relate by marriage to more than one family. It also catered for the childless union and offered a kinder solution than that of divorce when a wife was barren.

Polygamy could not be separated from the need for wealth: both for the outlay required by multiple bridewealth payments and for the upkeep of several wives and their children. In a rural situation polygamy increased the labour force and enhanced food production. A larger family community could render all the operations of rural life more efficiently, for example,
clearing land, growing food, building, and guarding the fields against birds and animals. It also made cooperation in communal work less demanding: more family representatives were available to participate. Furthermore, larger herds and flocks were required to meet the bridewealth payments for many wives but, it was a vicious circle in that larger herds and flocks required more wives and children to tend them.

Furthermore, traditional polygamy obviated the need for prostitution. Not only did polygamy solve the problem of the ageing, unattractive or sick wife, (note that being patriarchal, the problem of the ageing, unattractive or sick husband was not regarded as a problem), but it also solved those problems created by traditional taboos surrounding the period of lactation. In most African societies there was a traditional belief that the mother's milk would fail if sexual intercourse took place during lactation. Since baby foods did not then exist, the period of breast-feeding was long and it was usually more than two years before the baby was weaned. Consequently, this custom imposed a very long period of sexual abstinence on the husband. If the husband was not capable of abstaining he could only gratify his sexual needs outside his marriage, if he was monogamous. If, on the other hand, the husband was polygamous, he stood a greater chance of always having a legitimate sex partner at hand.

As I have mentioned earlier, one of the objectives in African marriages was to have a big family. This was based on the belief that children meant wealth, prestige and the blessings of God and the ancestors. The children belonged, not only to the nuclear household but also to the extended family community. As a result, the whole family community and relatives co-operated with one another in educating and bringing up each other's children. It was relatively easy for children to be fostered or loaned to various households within the family community.
African people were usually not satisfied with adopting someone else’s children; it was necessary to transmit life. And this was regarded as an essential aspect of being alive. It was an insurance that one’s memory would be cherished after death. The death of a childless man or woman was final, but the death of a person with numerous progeny was less feared. Children would continue to invoke their ancestors within living memory and make offerings to them. The children were also named after their grand-parents. Within this context, it can readily be understood that childlessness placed a very heavy, if not intolerable, strain upon a marriage. And I am quite sure that without the alternative of polygamy, divorce would have been practically inevitable.

1.1.2.2 Monogamy

Monogamy is the institution of marriage in which a husband and wife may have only one marital partner who is still living.

Apart from the fact that this custom or practice has been, or rather is, accepted and promoted by the Catholic Church through its missionaries and some present day priests, the fact remains that monogamy was already a part of traditional African marriage. It was lived, practised and kept as one of the forms of marriage in African tradition. It was especially practised by the poorer members of society who could not afford to have several wives.

1.1.2.3 The levirate system

The African custom concerning widows was to cater for their domestic, sexual and procreative needs within the family community into which they were married. African marriages had a strong community character. The married woman entered the family community of her husband as a worker and bearer of children for the whole group. She
became the wife of the whole family. She was regarded as "Our wife". This did not mean that any other man, besides her husband, had the right of sexual access to the woman, but it stressed her role in the family. A good number of relatives contributed to the bridewealth, that was why she and her children belonged to the family as a whole.

When the husband died, her marriage in the family was still regarded as being in existence. Usually one of the family men, whether already married or not, would be chosen to take the place of the first husband. Traditionally this was not called a second marriage, but the continuation of the previous marriage. No more bridewealth was paid, and a marriage celebration did not take place. Note also that, if the man who took care of the widow was not yet married, his relationship with the widow did not stand in the way of subsequent marriage, and she was not regarded as his wife, let alone his "first wife".

In Western Christian thinking there is no category in which this relationship can be placed (although it was known in Old Testament times: cf Ruth 4:5). It is an injustice to call it a marriage, just as it is unjust to call it adultery or concubinage. Granted that it raises a complex moral problem for Christians, it is not strictly a polygamous marriage, nor is it a question of sexual relations outside marriage. Kirwen defines it as: "a marital adjustment in a continuing marriage in which a brother-in-law substitutes temporarily for a deceased legal husband" (Kisembo 1977: 79).

Furthermore in traditional society there was a need to house, feed and protect widows, whatever their age or condition. If the widow was still of childbearing age, it was essential that her procreative needs be catered for, and that the children within her be given an opportunity to be born. But even if she was past childbearing, it was still recognized that she had sexual needs, and the care of widows normally included sexual relations. This is still the case in some African ethnic groups, although greater
freedom is now accorded to the widow either within the levirate custom, or in avoiding the custom altogether.

The dignity and the motherhood of the widow was best honoured within the kinship group of their husbands. It is unjust to consider this social provision as reducing the widow to the status of furniture or an inheritance. In conclusion, one should note the fact that although the levirate custom is not to be identified with polygamous marriage, polygamy contributed to the custom by creating a widow problem. The fact was that when a polygamist died, he made a number of women widows at the same time. The levirate tried to solve the problem which polygamy created.

1.1.2.4 Informal marriage

The appearance of informal marriage is a result of the inability, or the unwillingness, of the poorer classes of society to conform to the norms of customary marriage, as well as to the norms of the new forms of statutory marriage and/or Christian marriage. Informal marriage is found in all parts of Africa particularly where modern influences are most widespread. Its lack of rigid cultural, statutory or religious legal forms and attached sanctions makes informal marriage adaptable to many circumstances and environments. The history of its development has also varied from place to place.

Informal marriage was tolerated by traditional African society, but never fully accepted or supported. This form of marriage left the couple free to choose each other without assistance from the relatives simply because the relatives were not involved in preparations for marriage. On the other hand, after marriage, when it was possible, the wife would help the husband to raise payments for bridewealth. This indicates the value of the bridewealth in marriage (discussed below).
Informal marriage not only helped a poor man, the man without adequate cattle or money to pay bridewealth, but it also enabled the man to spend his money on himself or his wife, instead of giving it to her father and certain prescribed kin. On the other hand, it left the wife with great freedom for she could reject the husband anytime she felt like walking out of his life. Alternatively, she was not protected by the usual marital structures, which operated consequent to the paying of bridewealth. What role, then, did bridewealth play in African traditional marriage?

1.1.2.5 The significance of bridewealth (Lobola)

The bride giving group had an interest in maintaining the number of its members. The surrender of a woman left a gap which had to be filled. For this reason, the bride receiving group gave the bride giving group a guarantee, bridewealth, by which the latter, at its own convenience, could indemnify itself for the loss experienced. The function of this lobola payment was to enable the bride-giving group to acquire a wife for itself. The guarantee therefore served the purpose not of material enrichment, but the filling of a gap in the reproductive potential of the kinship group which had surrendered a woman.

Bridewealth conferred status on a woman not because of the material value of prestigious commodities, but this bridewealth made possible a new marriage within her own kinship group. Her brother was now able to marry, and it was her pride and prestige in her native village that she made this marriage possible. From this arose her claims on her brother’s wife (her sister-in-law) who had to render her all kinds of small services. If no bridewealth had been paid, the woman lost her position in the group in which she was born and had nowhere to go should her own marriage end in failure.
Negotiations on bridewealth took time. The basic aim of the bargaining was not, in the first place, to obtain the highest possible price. Even when the price of the bridewealth had already been fixed such bargaining went on in order to show clearly the group's love for the woman, to stimulate the mutual relationships between the two groups and to demonstrate the hierarchy within the group. Moreover, bridewealth often served to stabilize the marriage. By its very nature bridewealth should pass back and forth, creating new alliances as it did so. It was difficult to reclaim bridewealth. Should marital conflicts arise, the wife's kin did their best to bring about a reconciliation.

Marriage served the interest of the group. That is why no young adult male could claim bridewealth for his sister. It was the elders of the kinship group who received and gave the bridewealth, not only for their own sons but also for distant relatives.

1.1.3 Marriage alliances among the Tswana people

From the above discussion of traditional forms of marriage, it is clear that a clan that seeks a spouse for one of its members does not only consider the qualities of the prospective spouse, but also the descent group to which he or she belongs. Marriage establishes a relationship, not only between the spouses and their partner's descent groups, but also between the two lineages or clans. A particular marriage can be the beginning of a new web of relationships between the inter-marrying descent groups. Possibilities, and sometimes even obligations of cooperation, are established in many spheres.

In the past, marriages were frequently the occasions for clans, which previously had been hostile towards each other, to establish a pact of cooperation and friendship and, perhaps, to form an alliance for mutual protection against common enemies. In fact the saying "we marry our
"enemies" was commonly used to describe one of the goals of a marriage alliance. These marriage alliances were formed not only on the occasions of monogamous marriages, or first marriages of potentially polygamous men. They were also made in the case of second and subsequent marriages by polygamous men.

In the light of the above consideration, one can see that traditional marriage in Africa was not something left to chance, nor was it the result of a haphazard choice. Courtship and romantic love were not considered to be of great importance. Marriage was looked upon as a process. The affection of the spouse was expected to develop over the years after the wedding, and was not considered a prerequisite for the making of a marriage agreement.

Both descent groups had an interest in the marriage, and different stages were passed through: these included negotiations, an exchange of gifts, ritual observances, cohabitation, and finally, the birth of the first child, the longed-for new member of the descent group. Marriage for the African involved all these stages. I agree with Radcliffe-Brown when he says: "to understand African Marriage, we must think of it, not as an event or a condition, but as a developing process" (in Blum 1989:46). Both lineages had specific expectations, as the process began and progressed through the various stages.

The marriage relationship and its reality were slowly broadened and deepened. The kinship group was there to support it and affirm its reality. If difficulties arose, the intervention of the lineage and clan was likely and very often swift. In fact one of the functions of the clan elders was to preside in judgement over the marital disputes of its members. We have now seen how the marriage alliance was of great benefit for both the couple and the clan in the sense of building relationship between the couple under the support of the clan. To sum up, I would say that there
were good and right elements in traditional marriage which were lost in the changing of time together with traditional structures of marriage. The good and right norms which were lost included the preparatory meetings of the two families involved and the support of the newly married couple from the extended family and the community at large. Doing away with these good and right practices resulted in the instability of marriage.

It is a fact that in African traditional marriage, rules and norms were clear and were adhered to. However, today the traditional African marriage has been greatly influenced and changed by the impact of modern society.

1.2 The impact of modern society on traditional African marriages

1.2.1 The religious impact

Religion establishes relationships between humankind and God and between a person and other people. When the missionaries arrived in Africa, bringing a religion called Christianity, the African people had their own idea of religion. The first element of African religion was their faith and acceptance of the existence of a higher being. They believed that God existed. God revealed himself to African people through the creation and the gift of life. They accepted God as the one who is above, (Modimo), the source and Giver of life, (Mothodi le mofani wa Botshelo), the Lord God- (Morena Modimo). These and other names for God imply that God has unchallenged power and authority. They claimed he was in command of everything including life. Hence the offspring of marriage would be given names that revealed these different attributes of God. For example: Gofamodimo:- It is God who gives everything - something significant happened when this child is born; Thatayamodimo:- The power of God; Mpho:- Gift from God.
The second element of African religion was the Africans' belief that an intermediary between the person and God was necessary. So they expected their ancestors (Badimo) to form the link between themselves and God. So if a marriage had no children, African people prayed to God through their ancestors. Sometimes their petition would be accompanied by the sacrifice of part of the bridewealth that comes as lobola. This is part of a prayer in which a man and his wife express to their late mother, how they wish she should intercede with God on their behalf. "Hear me, mother! Wherever I wander here on earth, I shall never forget you... The memory of you, and the symbol of your grave, will abide with me, in my heart like a light and guiding me... So hear my plea mother. Ask God, on my behalf, to bless me and my wife, and guide our feet to the unknown land." Likewise his wife expressed her prayer. "Let God bless me through my husband's mother. I never knew you, but my heart is full of respect and love for you...Bless me with children, that your name may live with us forever" (Grace Ogot 1974: 20).

African traditional marriage in all its forms fitted in well with traditional religion. However, problems arose with the arrival of the missionaries. It was clear from the outset that the Catholic missionaries who propagated the Western Christian marriage, as it was described in official Church law, would inevitably create tensions in African traditional marriage. This situation caused tensions among the missionaries themselves and between the missionaries and the faithful, as well as tension among the faithful. These religious leaders had been trained in western theology but in most cases they lacked any understanding of anthropology. In their Christian pastoral work they assumed leadership and control and it was they who guarded the integrity of the gospel message. They failed to involve the faithful in the planning and execution of Christian teaching in relation to marriage. They wished, as far as possible, to guard their understanding of Christian marriage. No attention was paid to the point of view of the faithful. Moreover, Rome served as the norm for everything.
A mono-cultural uniformity was taken for granted and was seen as the highest form of Catholicity.

As far as marriage in Africa was concerned, the attitude was that the faithful had to conform to the model prescribed by canon law which stated that a marriage contract came about through an agreement between two persons. This Western religious definition of marriage created tension because for Africans marriage should, first and foremost, be the concern of two families and in that context it is not exclusively individualistic. The requirements of the Christian religious marriage ceremony consider the marital customs which in Africa lead step by step to a marriage contract as quite irrelevant. In practice, this meant that the existing matrimonial system had to make way for the marriage model developed throughout the centuries by the Western Church within a social and cultural context totally different from that of Africa. There was no compromise.

Further, when the missionaries arrived with the fixed requirements of their religion they took for granted that African practices were wrong. Their religion broke up African families, especially polygamists' families, ignoring the religion that African people practised. Missionaries demanded that a polygamist man had to choose one woman and live with the other women as a brother and sisters. Insistence resulted in many negative consequences for the people involved. It reflected a lack of adequate understanding of the nature and significance of African customary forms of marriage. In other words, Christian religion did not take fully into account the cultural experience of African people. According to Christian religion the only valid form of marriage was monogamy and it had to be celebrated at the Church. As a result, there are couples who denounce customary marriage and yet are not living according to the norms and principles of Christianity.
One can conclude that by ignoring the African traditional religion and by imposing Western Christian religion on the African people the missionaries through their religious practices and requirements as regards marriage, had an adverse impact on African marriage.

1.2.2 The socio-economic impact

Socio-economic changes have altered the status and roles of Africans as individuals and as groups. These same changes have also given rise to some new values and new forms of marriage. But the fact is that almost every element of traditional marriage has been affected to some degree by the new factors and social environment that characterize modern African societies. There is hardly an African marriage that has been able to isolate itself totally from external influences, such as those that stemmed from Western culture and economic practices.

1.2.2.1 Industrialization

The coming of the industrial revolution, in both Europe and Africa, exerted some influence on the stability of marriage. It brought about a major separation between home and work. The family was split up. It is no longer generally the case that husband and wife support each other, as they used to, working hard together on the land. I believe that the industrial revolution is responsible for this shift of work away from home, and, partly, for marital breakdown. The factory or mine became the home for men during the day. Increasingly, this also applied to women. Here one can recall a great number of both men and women in Southern Africa, who lived far away from their homes and near their working places. Those who could return home daily normally left their families very early in the morning for work and came back late at night when everybody was asleep. They had only a few hours with their family members.
Furthermore, the need or desire for money has led many Africans to migrate to urban areas away from their traditional homes either temporarily or permanently. In fact, the possibility or necessity of changing residence can modify many of the forms of the traditional family. Separation from one's descent group can have profound influences upon the traditional roles of spouses: in their relations with one another; in discharging their roles as parents; and in the socialization of the children. The opportunity to gain access to the advantages offered by money often overshadows the traditions of the descent groups, clan or tribe. Migration to an urban centre creates even more problems and greater difficulties for marriages, as well as creating a shortage of housing. If a man were to bring his family, or families for those men who are polygamous, to the urban environment, where they would be distanced from their source of food, then the whole responsibility of supporting the household would fall on him, unless the wife would find income-generating work in the city. Such an arrangement has already necessitated significant modifications to traditional ways of life. It has had repercussions upon a woman's place in the family, and an impact upon the structure of marriage.

1.2.2.2 The Cash-economy

One of the most important and far reaching changes that African societies have undergone in their economic structures is the transition from a subsistence to a cash economy. The pre-cash economic societies were self sufficient in almost all aspects of life. But the development of the cash economy in African societies opened the way for more members of traditional African societies to express and establish their individuality in contrast to the group of which they were members.

The appearance of a cash economy was a natural result of the arrival of non-Africans in South Africa. "The settlers, explorers and colonial rulers exhibited a new way of life, that represented for the African a new
system of values to be sought after. They also created new aspirations and goals among some members of the native populations, and slowly more and more Africans began to desire, or to aspire after things and ways of life, previously unknown to their ancestors" (Blum 1989: 125).

Today few things can be obtained without money. The modern African lives in an environment in which money is an essential factor, and this is clearly indicated in some customs, such as bridewealth (Lobola), which changed from the exchange of cattle to the payment of cash. In other words, almost all forms of social transactions have been influenced by money. In traditional Africa, a wealthy man was one upon whom many other people were dependent. But in modern Africa, wealth can be expressed differently, for instance, by exercising control over money or over the things and services that money can buy.

Some of the reasons which led to the establishment of marriage alliances in the past no longer exist. The need to secure peace between descent groups and clans is no longer a motive for establishing marriage alliances. Moreover, the sense of group solidarity that used to be manifested through marriage alliances is much less evident today. One of the reasons for this change is the substitution of cattle, or other traditional objects that used to be given as bridewealth, by money. Bridewealth is becoming more and more "bride-price", in which attempts are made to acquire the greatest possible amount of money in the exchange. Previously, in the context of marriage, the cattle given to the bride’s people were not considered in terms of their commercial value. But, with a cash economy, a commercial element has begun to pervert the traditional institution of bridewealth.

Today, it is also becoming more common for a young man to raise the bridewealth by himself rather than to have to depend upon his father and other members of his descent group to assist him. For example, when
a young man is school educated, technically or professionally qualified, and is a substantial salary earner, or if he is engaged in profitable trading, he may have access to much more money than the other members of his family and other kin. Even if the community is in a good position to help a young man in raising the bridewealth, the members of the community may be much more hesitant to do so today than they were in the past. Such a change of attitude is partially due to the change in the form of bridewealth, that is from cattle to money.

There is a great fear today that the money may never be returned by the father of the wife if the marriage should break up. Money is easily spent, and disappears much more quickly than would the marriage cattle which used to be easier to keep track of by the local community and by the husband’s group. In other words, even if the divorced woman’s father would want to return the bridewealth money, he may fail to raise the required cash.

It goes without saying that the man who has raised the necessary bridewealth unaided, would be more likely to feel free of obligations to his relatives or his community at large, in choosing a spouse, or in recognizing any debt of gratitude owed to his family for their help. Thus we can see how the change to payment of bridewealth in the form of money can encourage, among the younger generation, the growth of a feeling of individualism and independence from their family members.

This means that the custom of paying bridewealth, the formation of marriage alliances, and the general group orientation of traditional African marriage, have been significantly modified by the advent of a cash economy.

The introduction of the cash economy has also created new aspirations and needs among both African men and women. Women in
African societies have increasingly adopted new values, and the cash economy makes it possible for them to earn their own income which they can freely spend. I strongly agree with Perlman when he says: "Today, African married women are demanding to have a share and control of the income, earned jointly or only by their husbands" (Blum 1989: 32).

The two significant changes that have taken place in African societies with regard to marriage are: the rise of the spirit of individualism which is in contrast to the strong community-mindedness which characterized traditional societies and the gradual substitution of cattle or other goods in the payment of bridewealth by money. Bridewealth payment has started degenerating into commercialization, tending to be more like bride price.

1.2.3 The political impact

Industrialization and the rise of a cash-economy forced everybody to work, women and men alike. But things became worse with Apartheid because it introduced a system of Bantu States that broke the unity of the family bond because people were taken away from their homes. Husbands were more often separated from their wives as hostels became their residential places during the week if not the month. Both the traditional culture and Apartheid assumed that women were regarded as inferior to men. For a long time in the history of South Africa very few women were educated because women's work was taken to be housework and the bearing of children. As a result, women could not occupy high positions in the society.

This accounts for the fact that women have for the most part been kept out of decision making as was reflected for instance in governments of the former homeland states such as Ciskei and Bophuthatswana under the leadership of Mr. Sebe and Mr. Mangope. Even at CODESA, how
many women took part in that meeting? Very few. It is only recently that things have started changing, giving certain women higher status and power in the society at large.

Oppression and alienation may take on various forms that are mainly related to the physical and material conditions of living, but these, in South Africa, have included the intellectual, spiritual and cultural or social conditions of life.

Apartheid exposed black families to oppression and exploitation by white South Africans. This system denied black marriage its independence and dignity. The migrant labour system which has for so long been a feature of South African society reveals the interplay between economic greed, political ideology and sexist discrimination. Even though South Africa was economically healthy, black marriages struggled to survive as married couples were denied the comfort and security necessary for stable marriages. Young couples were denied mobility and housing. Because most of the land was owned by white South Africans, there was very little possibility of acquiring land with the result that men were forced to leave their homes to go to the cities to find jobs. Poverty became a way of life. Back home, women took control of the whole household and ran the affairs of the family. It was only when money ran out altogether or there was sickness in the home that wives travelled to their husbands in the cities for help. Consequently the visit of a wife at the workplace of the husband was seen as a symbol of misfortune. Sometimes such wives received help and found a faithful husband ready to care for them but, more often than not, due to loneliness, separated from his wife and in stark hostel accommodation, husbands were found to be committed to other women and because of that many marriages broke up.
1.2.4 Gender roles

The impact of modern society on traditional African marriage is a clear sign that marriage is a dynamic institution. With the coming of the Europeans to Africa, many changes in the traditional status and roles of women and men have gradually been adopted e.g. men no longer dominate the political and domestic power structures of the society as in the traditional structures. Certain women are less dependent on men than was the case in the past.

Nevertheless, women have experienced and still experience discrimination not only in the family, but also in the workplace and in the Church. For instance, within the teaching profession, male teachers were regularly promoted beyond the level of their competence while women teachers had to struggle for years to achieve parity with regard to salaries, permanent appointments and housing subsidies.

Among unskilled workers, it is known that women, especially black women, were hired for low wages and fired whenever the employer felt like getting rid of them. They had to cook, wash and clean their own homes after a hard day’s work at the "Madam's" house. These women, some of whom are highly intelligent, found themselves limited to those menial jobs because of lack of education due to the apartheid system. This situation led to frustration on the part of the women and so affected their relationships within marriage.

1.2.4.1 The role of men in the family

According to Blum, "Supernatural beliefs functioned as a means of social control and these beliefs provided a strong sanction for a father's authority" in traditional societies (Blum 1989: 135). The authority of the head of a household in traditional societies reflected the values which those
societies attached to male dominance and female inferiority. And because of the support which the supernatural beliefs gave to this authority, most males were able to exercise authority over their household, without too much difficulty or opposition from females.

A father's traditional high status and authority in his family has since been modified. The wife and children demand a greater share in the fruits of the husband's and father's economic activities. A man's status in the eyes of his family and the society is more dependent upon his economic success than used to be the case. Today, if a wife feels her husband is squandering money and neglecting her or their children, she may caution him, or even threaten to leave him.

Every individual, to a greater or lesser extent, has more freedom of movement than people had in the past. This growing freedom has encouraged a greater spirit of individualism, and a lessening of the traditional domestic authority of the men and, similarly, has significantly altered traditional modes of behaviour of both men and women. No one can claim absolute authority over the movements of the other members of the family. Furthermore, many men have also abdicated the responsibility as fathers and husbands. Some are even physically or emotionally absent, if not both.

1.2.4.2 The role of women in the family

Looking at the role of women, one will find that women have been able to achieve much greater economic independence than in the past. In another respect, women have also been able to narrow the wide difference between them and men in the traditional matters of sexual morality. Many of them have achieved a degree of sexual freedom which contrasts sharply with the traditional norms that used to guide the conduct of women. Education plays an important role as it prepares women to attain careers.
and gain skills to participate in the money-oriented economy. In the past a woman had to depend on a man, normally her father or her husband, to provide her with a place to live, clothing, land and assistance for many other needs. Today, it is not necessary for all women to look to men to satisfy their needs as they can earn their own income in one way or another. This also contributes to the breakdown of marriage. This changing role of women in the family has a significant effect on African traditional marriage today as it must be understood and accepted by the male partner.

The introduction of a cash economy, which coincided with the meeting of Western and African cultures, has produced nothing less than a revolution in the traditional African way of life. Almost every structure and value judgement within African society has been affected by the new mores, introduced from outside. The relative peace and order that formerly characterized traditional life are no longer significantly present; they have been weakened or replaced by new forms of behaviour, patterned on those of Western culture, often without a smooth transition or an appropriate adaptation.

Conjugal and family life have not escaped the tension and conflict that have resulted from the meeting of the two vastly different cultures. Not only new economic and social forms have arisen, but also new forms of marriage that conform more closely to the needs and values of the modern African, have emerged. The strongest elements of traditional society that used to render support and strength to the traditional values and structures related to marriage have been challenged and, in many societies, have undergone vast modifications.

The impact of modern society on traditional African marriage has been extensive. We have seen that the cash economy has led to increased individualism which is felt and expressed by some people from all levels and sectors of society. All men and women, both married and unmarried,
as well as children, live under conditions and in cultural contexts in which the traditional forms and expressions of male dominance have changed and are frequently diminished in scope, while the status of women has risen. Changes have taken place and are continuing to do so, with a significant impact upon all concerned. Of course, there are many women who still feel that they are still living in a "man's world."

From the above, one can affirm that marriage is a cultural institution with numerous forms and sub-forms. However, people should not be blinded by destructive forces and think that marriage is absolutely awful and full of difficulties and problems. As long as married couples are aware of the destructive forces and seriously try to develop their relationships constructively, their marriages will foster growth in unity as they open themselves to each other in communication, honesty and commitment.

1.3 African Marriage today

When we talk of marriage we speak of an institution which is dynamic. Marriage is not static. It is a state into which the contracting parties enter with the idea of growing towards a self understanding and an acceptance of each other. However, this hope of growth should not blind the couples to the great difficulties they may encounter in marriage. Looking around and meeting young couples, one finds that many, in the euphoria of honeymoon and marriage, forget the challenging aspect of the bond of marriage. In attaching oneself to one man or one woman, one renounces thousands of others. This grief, this loss of liberty, is necessary in order to welcome a new liberty which we discover in a marriage fully lived; the liberty of paternity and maternity, the liberty of knowing oneself to be loved and being capable of loving.
It is a fact that couples start married life full of joy; everything being euphoric. They are liberated from their fears and their anguish, from all that kept them from expressing themselves. However, after a certain period of time, clouds begin to appear in the relationship. They get on each others' nerves and experience communication problems. This can lead to anxiety, especially if they are unprepared for such episodes. Love risks being transformed into hate.

With the passage of time, a move from the euphoria of encounter to blockages and the inability to communicate with each other manifests itself. In the early days of marriage, the man leaves his work quickly in order to be with his wife and children. He speaks freely; he is enthusiastic, attentive and sensitive. Then, gradually, he begins to be more taken up by his work, or some social, political or religious activity. He comes home late. He is tired and less enthusiastic. He loses himself in television. Perhaps he begins to drink. The wife gives herself more and more to the children, she also works, and gradually a wall grows up between them. As a result there is a loss of common interests and activities.

This deterioration in the relationship between husband and wife is an observable phenomenon in our societies, and also among the Tswana people in the Odi district in the North West Province. Many couples separate or seek a divorce. The man and the woman find themselves apart, frustrated, angry, depressed, and unable to continue to live in an atmosphere of conflict and aggression. Finally they part. Their hearts are vulnerable. New relationships are regarded with suspicion and distrust. The wound festers and gives rise to fears and doubts. Will I be able to remain faithful? Will my partner remain faithful? Was it my fault or theirs? Where did I go wrong?

I believe that separation and divorce come as the result of the failure of the man and woman to realize that the point of the blockage
could instead have been the point of growth. The union of the man and the
woman, and the life with their children, are there for the growth and
healing of each other. They are there to grow together in love and service,
towards a true maturity, to be better able to open themselves to others, to
the world and to God. This demands that certain barriers and egotistical
and egocentric tendencies, built up in childhood, must be broken down.
This hurts. That is why there is confusion and suffering when one or the
other or both at the same time begin to touch the anguish and limits of
each other. But one should not flee from these moments; one must not run
away from the difficulties and the anguish because, not only growth and
deepening of marriage relationships, but also healing, would be impeded.

Badia summarized this point of marriage rather well by quoting
from the old marriage ritual: "This union then is most serious, because it
will bind you together for life in a relationship so close and so intimate that
it will profoundly influence your whole future. That future with its hopes
and disappointments, its pleasures and its pains, its joys and its sorrows, is
hidden from your eyes. You know that these elements are mingled in every
life and are to be expected in your own. And so, now knowing what is
before you, you take each other for better or for worse, richer or poorer,
in sickness and in health, until death" (Badia 1979:151).

What remains a fact with the Catholic Tswana marriages in Odi
today is that couples renounce, reject and criticise African traditional
practices of marriage claiming to keep Christian forms of marriage which,
in fact, they neither understand nor practise. But, if the couples reject
African traditional forms of marriage and do not live according to Christian
principles, it presupposes that they must live according to some other form
of marriage. However, my observation is that they select aspects from both
the traditional and modern forms of marriage.
1.3.1 The present forms of marriage

Before dealing with the question of what constitutes marriage, let me point out that there are basically three ways in which Africans living in Odi today may marry. Firstly, they can use a traditional form of marriage. We saw that there a son, a daughter or family could choose a future spouse. Bridewealth is paid. But when one tries to define the status of this form of marriage within the wider legal framework of South Africa, one meets numerous difficulties. The major difficulty is that tribal marriages are valid only within the framework of tribal law and in proceedings between Africans. This form of marriage is taken as an inferior kind of marriage, and must give way when it comes into conflict with a civil marriage. There is no doubt that this form of marriage meets problems because the official marriage certificate has become an essential requirement for married couples living in Odi. And, generally speaking, traditional marriage is perceived by the people as being legally inadequate and, therefore, insecure.

Secondly, they can enter into a civil marriage. In this form of marriage, the man and woman, given the necessary permission, are married by the commissioner or by one of his agents (including those ministers of religion who are authorized marriage officers). The couple go to the commissioner's office, pay a specified fee and are married in the presence of two witnesses. The purpose of queuing at the office of the commissioner is simply to acquire the certificate that constitutes legal and incontrovertible evidence of their married state.

Thirdly, there is Church marriage. This form of marriage, if it is not carried out by a legal marriage officer according to the state, is not legally recognized by the authorities of the state. As a result, a couple may experience a severe problem because according to the law of the land they are not married.
1.3.2 The problems that Catholic marriages experience in the Odi District today.

Apart from the problem of which form of marriage to follow, many Catholic married couples experience divorce or separation. Such marriages have lost the values of permanence and fidelity.

The experience of marriage in Odi is that it often conforms to norms, derived not from a single homogenous system, but from different systems. For example, the traditional ceremony meets one set of requirements, but it does not satisfy demands made in terms of the Christian and Western systems, such as the matrimonial certificate.

The three existing forms of marriage throw light on why marriages in Odi have lost their direction. Confusion in relation to the various forms has brought frustration and uncertainty to married couples and those who are about to marry. These couples find it difficult to decide between Christian and traditional forms of marriage.

It is a fact that people don’t know what form of marriage to practise. Conflict in most cases comes as a result of ignorance, for example, where the husband expects his wife to act in accordance with tradition, even though in other situations both may be well integrated into the Western and/or Christian way of life. Friction among the married people of Odi frequently arises out of the husband’s tenacious recourse to tradition in his relationship with his family. I also realized that men, including even educated men, seem to resist the emancipation of women which modern conditions promote.

African marriages should include the two groups that enter into a contract in order to ensure the survival of the group. The two groups are the bride-giving and the bride-receiving families. In the Odi District these
groups no longer sit down as a unified body to help in solving the problems and difficulties of the newly married couples. This lack of family support contributes to marital breakdown. For example, when a problem or misunderstanding arises in the marriage, and both families are called in, instead of trying to solve the problem objectively in order to keep the marriage intact, each group supports and stands with its own son or daughter and puts the blame on the other group.

Nowadays, the parents or extended family often have no say in the choice of the future spouse for the son or daughter. What happens is that the partners choose each other and, if they so wish, inform the two families about the arrangement of the marital celebration. In other words, marriage becomes a private business between the two partners.

By failing to involve the extended community of relatives, marriage today has lost its greatest asset. The community is neither involved in suggesting the future spouse nor in the arrangement and preparation of the marriage ceremony. As a result, one finds that those members of the community who might like to be there and come uninvited to the celebration will remain passive and play the role of spectator.

The other problem regarding modern marriages of the Catholic Tswana people in the Odi district is that after marriage they have no-one to turn to for assistance. After the marriage celebration the young couple face life by themselves. The village or urban community is there with its elders, but does not take part in admonishing and instructing the newly weds. Older members of the community do not visit nor give them advice. The community remains passive towards the couple in the sense that although they know that the couple got married on a particular day, they do not give them moral support.
The other problem that the Catholic marriages face in the Odi district is that of polygamy. Today the education and emancipation of women as well as their desire for a deeper companionship in marriage, makes them hostile to polygamy. Most African women declare that "a boy with two wives is a big liar. Today he sleeps with one woman and tells her that she is the one he loves. Tomorrow, he sleeps with the other and tells her the same things" (Aylward Shorter 1977: 26). This shows the extent to which a man can deceive a woman. The woman becomes the victim of love. Polygamy is still in existence but it is often practised secretly. It is fairly frequent to find young men courting two girls at the same time, in the hope that if one refuses, the other will accept. And occasionally, it happens that the young man marries both girls, one after the other within a short time. A more frequent occurrence is that a young man is driven to form a polygamous marriage as a result of labour migration.

Another common problem is characterised by the man deserting his wife so as to take a second wife. In such cases, the husband blackmails his wife into accepting his liaison with another woman. He keeps the other woman as a concubine and maintains this second household, threatening to dismiss or desert his legally married wife if she objects to the arrangement. This is what many families in Odi are experiencing. This impacts negatively on the legal wife and builds in the children a bitterness that no one can heal except through the reunion of the father and mother. Counselling can help, but only to a limited extent.

Another threat to Catholic marriages in Odi is that of a married man getting a second home where he marries another wife and settles with her without telling her about the first wife. This keeps the first wife in suspense as to whether she is loved or not. She wonders whether she should ask for a separation or whether to continue with the marriage. The children and relatives suffer immensely because the second marriage is not
secret. As a result of the above problems, Catholic marriages in Odi often end in divorce or separation.

1.4 Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion one can conclude that marriage has gone through some changes in its history, especially African marriages. The way marriage was organized, arranged, celebrated and supported traditionally is completely different from the way it now functions. The main features and value of the African traditional system of marriage were that the parents were involved in the choosing of the future spouse for their son or daughter. The two families had to hold meetings. They had to reach an agreement. Once they had reached some agreement, the bridewealth would be paid out to confirm that the marriage had taken place.

Secondly, marriage was open, not only to the extended family, but also to the whole community. The extended family was involved in the arrangements of marriage. As regards the wedding feast, the community was present, dancing, singing, rejoicing and advising the new couple. After the celebration, the whole community, especially the elderly people of the community, kept giving advice and support to the newly married couple especially when they were experiencing problems and difficulties.

Furthermore, the rate of the practice of polygamy was high because it was believed to be a safe way of catering for the sexual needs of the man and that it minimized the chances of promiscuity and prostitution. It was also seen as fulfilling the desire of having larger families and, at the same time, making room for the childless union.

In the traditional African system, death was not the end of marriage. The widows could not re-marry, but they remained under the care of the
brothers-in-law of the deceased. These brothers had to cater for them, their domestic, sexual and procreative needs within the family community into which they were married. In other words the wife was married not only to her husband but to the whole clan of her husband.

This is not the case today with the Catholic Tswana people living in Odi today. Their traditional values of stability, permanence and mutual support in relation to marriage have changed if not been completely lost. Marriage has changed as a result of the impact of the new societal structures. From these new societal structures came the problems and difficulties that these Catholic couples have to overcome to survive. I believe that Catholic marriages in Odi can manage to overcome these problems and difficulties only when the couples know and understand what traditional African marriage actually involved and what the constituent elements of marriage entail.
Chapter 2

WHAT CONSTITUTES MARRIAGE

In chapter one I discussed some aspects of traditional African marriage, namely how it has changed and the present experience of Catholic marriages in Odi.

In this chapter, I discuss what marriage ought to be if it is to fulfil its goal of being a central core of the community and expressing love so that couples can grow towards maturity. I must mention now that to give a precise definition of the word marriage is not an easy task. This difficulty is due to the diversity of definitions of this word, some of which are governed by cultural, historical and social factors. However, I found that many of these definitions are complementary. For the purpose of this dissertation, a few definitions of marriage in general will be given before proceeding to a Christian definition of marriage. Looking at our society today, it would appear that the question of marriage raises many serious questions for humankind. For instance, what are the aims and expectations of marriage? Why do people get married?

We have seen in the previous chapter that marriage and family life have been challenged by factors such as urbanisation and industrialisation, migratory labour, the cash-economy, new understandings of sex roles, and improvements in education. Above all there is a tremendous increase in the divorce rate in our society. This was confirmed by The Pretoria News of 10th December 1981 in reporting the divorce rate in the city and the country as a whole. It was reported that for the country as a whole, the figure increased from 11456 in 1978, to 13816 in 1979 and 16543 in 1980; an increase of 44% by 1982 (Hulley 1989: 81). What is interesting is that in spite of the confusion about marriage, and poor relationships between
spouses, which is linked to the changing functions and understanding of the family in society, people still continue to get married.

Nevertheless, many people of different ranks are today questioning the institution of marriage. Marriage is no longer considered to be an imperative, but is rather a matter of choice. This is affirmed by many women who choose a career rather than marriage, or when married couples postpone the starting of a family, or even choose to remain childless. In fact, many educated black women choose not to marry because marriage brings only obligations with nothing in return. As the minister of the Catholic Church in Odi District, I saw that people were reluctant to get married formally in church, the reasons being the fear of indissoluble monogamous marriage, social and marital instability, and impoverished views of Christian marriage. In spite of marriage being seen as relevant to human nature, some people continue to ask their priest or pastors: What is marriage? What are the constituent elements of marriage?

2.1 Some Christian definitions of marriage

The most obvious feature of contemporary marriage is that it is a living together, the sharing of life-supporting tasks between a woman and a man who are married to each other in the eyes of the Church and community. (The possibility of homosexual marriage is not discussed in this dissertation.) Marriage is the result of a decision, freely made by both parties to honour, respect and love each other until death. One definition of marriage is that it is a covenant between partners who, among other things, pledge themselves exclusively to one another. The idea of exclusivity is conveyed in every wedding service, in some form or other (Hulley 1989: 83). Patrick Whooley, in defining marriage, says that marriage is not a thing that can be grasped and defined for all time. It is a highly relative and fluid institution. He finds that anthropologists recognize that marriage is an institution within all cultures; certainly in all African cultures.
According to him it is sufficient to define marriage as the union of a man and a woman recognized by the community and from which legitimate offspring are born. He says that marriage is never just a sexual relationship, it always means more. Around that union he sees a set of relationships, rights, obligations and patterns of behaviour, incorporating the union into the family and clan system, regulating interactions and defining roles. He makes the point that the institution of marriage and the manner in which it is contracted varies greatly from one culture to another.

The bible defines marriage as a covenant of companionship and partnership. It describes marriage in terms of companionship. The concept of marriage as companionship appears in Malachi 2:14 where it is stated that "The Lord has been witness between you and the wife of your youth to whom you have been faithless, although she is your companion and your wife by covenant." This scriptural passage indicates clearly that for both the husband and for the wife, companionship is the ideal. The issue of marriage as partnership is also found in Genesis 2:18 and Proverbs 31:10-11. The latter states that "A wife of noble character is worth far more than rubies and her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value".

Jay E. Adams defines marriage by saying what marriage is not. He believes that "contrary to much contemporary thought and teaching, marriage is not created by human beings. It was not devised by humankind, somewhere along the way in the course of human history, as a convenient way of sorting out responsibilities for children" (Adams 1980: 3). Adams argues that God established, instituted and ordained marriage at the beginning of human history (Gen. 2:3). It is a fact that God designed marriage as the foundational element of all human society. It is said in scripture that "a man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" (Gen. 2:2).
Marriage is the union of a man and a woman which legally and morally should bind the two together for life and it excludes intimate relationships with all others. In this way a home can be established and a family maintained. The husband and wife united in marriage are declared to be one flesh. (This definition of marriage as the union of a man and a woman does not ignore the many Biblical passages that present polygamy as another form of marriage in the scripture, though it would be difficult to reconcile the two understandings.)

The happiness of the marriage depends on the love and companionship between husband and wife. Husband and wife should become part of each other. Their lives are joined into one life and neither is complete alone. As Ephesians 5:28 says "men ought to love their wives as they love their own bodies." And in loving each other as one loves one's own body, marriage usually brings home the relationship and responsibilities of parenthood to a husband and wife. Their marriage forms a home and family where children can be born and have the love and care of a father and a mother.

They have to work together as companions and partners united by marriage. God provided the commandments in order to protect this sacred union of marriage from destructive forces. He said that "Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not covet... thy neighbour's wife" (Ex. 20:14,17). Hebrews 13:4 strengthens this when it says marriage should be honoured by all, and husbands and wives must be faithful to each other. God will judge those who are immoral and those who commit adultery. God's purpose is that husband and wife, parents and children, find in the family the love, companionship, and care that each one needs (Jackson 1969: 11).

The teaching of Saint Paul on marriage contains moral values and principles which are important and relevant to the marital practices of
African Christians. Replying to some Church members in Corinth who, from personal experience, thought of sex as impure and considered the celibate life better than marriage, he agreed that celibacy was good, but quickly proceeded to say that marriage was generally to be desired. Since sex is always a temptation to people, he encouraged each man to have his own wife and each woman her own husband. Paul was a realist. He dealt with the issue of marriage in the light of a historical situation. He believed that where marriage was entered into, it had to be full marriage, physically consummated (2 Cor. 7:4-5). Marriage was to be real marriage where each individual should be free to make a decision in the light of particular circumstances on whether to marry or not.

Furthermore, marriage is a foundational institution. Society itself in all its ramifications depends on marriage. The attack on marriage, experienced today, is actually an attack on society itself and on God who built society on marriage. Marriage is an important element of the foundation upon which the Church, as God's special society, rests. This covenantal community is weakened as the family is weakened. With these preliminary comments in mind, attention can now be turned to various historical conceptions of Christian marriage.

2.2 A historical outline of Christian (and especially the Catholic) views of marriage

Early in its history the Catholic Church had to fight Gnosticism. Gnosticism regarded the body as inherently evil. It rejected the body because it was material and not spiritual. Gnosticism forbade people to marry. The Church needed to respond to both extremes of ignoring the body or over emphasising the body. In response to this Gnostic heresy, the early Church theologians, following Paul, emphasized the created goodness of the body. This theology was based on the Incarnation.
In the post apostolic era, virginity was elevated and celibacy was a preferred lifestyle for the truly spiritual in the Church. And because of asceticism and many other influences, the focus of attention shifted away from an emphasis on marriage and personal sexual morality within marriage, to the single, celibate life. During this period, Church theologians de-emphasized sexual activity. Let me take Clement of Alexandria as an example, "although affirming that marriage was instituted by God, he maintained that sexual intercourse ought to be practised only with a view toward procreation" (Grenz 1950: xiv). The fall was over-emphasised. In this way the church fathers came to associate human sexuality with the realm of sin. As a result the sex act was thought to be always tainted by lust and, thereby, by sin even when practised within the marriage bond. The emphasis on the sinfulfulness of human sexuality meant a growing emphasis on celibacy as the way to avoid the danger of sin bound up with the sex drive and even marriage itself.

It was because of this emphasis that in the West, climaxing with the First Lateran Council in 1123 A.D., celibacy was imposed on the clergy. Augustine is one of the most prominent theologians who touched on the theme of human sexuality. His theology was affected by his personal turbulent history as well as by the turbulence of his time. Prior to his conversion, Augustine was well acquainted with "the temptations of the flesh." He was also influenced by Manicheism, a dualistic philosophy which, like Gnosticism before it, held that the flesh was evil.

Although as a Christian he fought against the Manicheans by affirming the goodness of every aspect of God's creation including the body, the emphasis on the fall and original sin spilled over into Augustine's understanding of human sexuality. He saw the effects of the fall as being present in sexual activity in two ways. He maintained that sexual intercourse was the transmission of both life and original sin. And that because of its unavoidable link to passion and thus to compulsiveness,
every act of coitus was tainted by evil. At best, marriage was useful as a way of channelling passion toward a useful end, namely, procreation.

Despite this pessimistic attitude toward sexuality, Augustine did develop a positive understanding of marriage. The union of husband and wife could carry the blessing of God. The goodness of marriage came about in three ways; through the faithfulness of the spouses to each other (Fides), through procreation and the education of children (proles), and through the sacramental importance of marriage as a sign of the grace of God (Sacramentum) (Grenz 1950: xvi).

2.2.1 The medieval period

In this period sexuality in marriage was considered good but procreation dominated. The man was considered active while the woman remained passive. I think the reason was simply that men were playing the leadership role, and as a result they allotted to themselves the active part. Even though a number of regulations in connection with sexuality in marriage were instituted, it was at this time that marriage came to be regarded as one of the seven sacraments. Matrimony was taken as the remedy for human concupiscence.

Aquinas maintained that marriage was a sacrament. The sign was the mutual consent of the couple. The marital act was good in itself and meritorious as long as it was rational and was directed towards procreation. For Aquinas the primary end of marriage was procreation and the education of children, the secondary aim was the mutual help and support of the couple. Thus marriage was both a procreative institution and a spiritual communion.
2.2.2 The Council of Trent (1545-1563)

The Council of Trent proclaimed that Christian marriage is a sacrament by divine institution. It is a grace-filled experience. It declared Christian marriage monogamous and indissoluble. This was the reply to Martin Luther and other Protestants who denied that marriage was a sacrament. Furthermore, to defend the Church's view of marriage, the fathers of the Church formulated the canonical saying, "If anyone says that matrimony is not truly and properly one of the seven sacraments of the Law of the Gospel, instituted by Christ the Lord, but that it was devised in the Church by men and does not confer grace, let him be anathema" (Elliott 1990: 103). According to the fathers, the grace of the sacrament derives from the passion of Christ. This grace perfects the natural love of marriage and strengthens the indissoluble unity of the couple. Thus Christ himself sanctifies the spouses. These notions of marriage as the union of husband and wife and marriage as sacrament have influenced the contemporary Christian understanding of marriage.

2.3 Contemporary Christian understandings of marriage

Most Christians today assert that, according to the design of the Creator, marriage consists of the monogamous union of a male and a female in a lifelong commitment to one another which is to be characterized by fidelity. Christians hold that this view of the marital union, based on what Jesus said in Matthew 19, summarizes the essence of the divine intent from the beginning, God being the source of the marital bond: "so, they are no longer two, but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Mt.19:6). The Christian sees the husband-wife relationship as the primary expression of the God-given human drive to bonding and thus to community. Marriage is a step in the direction of the establishment of community.
Above all, the Christian speaks of marriage as a vehicle for the outreach mission of the Church. This occurs through the influence of godly families in the wider society. Repeatedly, in the New Testament era, the homes of Christians became bases for the launching of the Church in specific locations. The Philippian congregation, for example, began with the baptism of the households of Lydia and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:11-15). Furthermore, families offered their homes to provide facilities for house churches, for example Philemon 2. Priscilla and Aquila comprise the most vivid example of the influence of a married couple for the growth of the Church (Acts 18:2-3,26; Rom. 16:3; 1 Cor. 16:19).

An additional view of Christians is that marriage means companionship. The ideal marriage is now pictured as that in which the husband and the wife become for each other closest friends. The current thinking argues that the truly happy marriage partners are those who experience intimacy, who enjoy being together, and who share in the interests, goals, and dreams of their spouses. Christians believe that the marital bond can be a fruitful relationship as husband and wife are freed from the need to compete with others and to prove themselves to each other. By living in an atmosphere of complete acceptance and mutual companionship, they are able to express themselves freely, leading to a wholeness of existence and the companionship of marriage which provides a source of identity and intimacy in an otherwise impersonal society. This viewpoint can appeal to the biblical materials for support as well. The creation of the woman was precipitated by God's desire to provide a suitable companion for the man (Gen. 2:18-22).

2.3.1 Catholic Church’s view of marriage

Post Vatican II perceptions of marriage with the Catholic Church see marriage as an institution confirmed by the divine law and receiving its stability, even in the eyes of society, from the human act by which the
partners mutually surrender themselves to each other. For the good of the partners, the children, and society this sacred bond no longer depends on human decision alone.

The Catholic Church takes God as the author of marriage and the only one who has endowed it with various benefits: the continuation of the human race, the personal development, and the eternal destiny of every member of the family. The Catholic Church is convinced that by its very nature the institution of marriage and married love is ordered for the procreation and education of the offspring and it is in them that it finds its glory. (It should be noted that there is a debate within Catholicism itself as to whether marriage is ordered primarily for the procreation and education of the offspring or for the union of the couple.)

Above all the Catholic Church sees marriage as a sacrament, the sacrament of matrimony, which was established by Christ as a symbol of his own union with the Church, to give full scope to its sacred power and to enable it truly to become for husband and wife, a great mystery (Eph. 5:32), whereby they might express in their own lives the love by which Christ gave himself for the Church (Vatican II 1975: 474). Talking to a Catholic priest working with me in Odi, Rev. Charles Mittempergher, about the contemporary Christian understanding of the view of marriage, he started with what he called the "Basic factor", that is, Christianity reveals that God has given human beings stewardship over all creation. He went on to say that people are servants of God in managing creation and are charged with the responsibility of using it with freedom. In procreation they enjoy decision-making over life. This is done with co-responsibility and equality in the co-operation between man and woman. According to him, Christianity does not see marriage as an inevitable event of human life for the purpose of procreation and conservation of the human species. Marriage is a vocation in which the responsibility of generating is a response to God’s plan revealed fully in Jesus Christ. Offspring are not
simply a way of preserving and developing humankind, but assume the
eternal dimension of the plan of God; husband and wife feel called to give
God children, who will share in the nature of God and membership of the
Kingdom which Jesus has initiated by his salvationist action. Thus, marriage
should be indissoluble because of the unique plan or vocation for this
individual man and this individual woman. Marriage is a reflection of the
community which is in the Trinity and which is communicated through
marital love and education. Marriage is a sacrament in which the salvific
action of Christ allows the power of the Holy Spirit to give life to the
adopted children of God and makes them fulfil God's plan. He concluded
by saying that marriage is the cell of the Church and of society and its
authority surpasses any other authority (including that of the state, tribe
and club).

Having outlined some of the main Christian views of marriage,
attention can now be given to a discussion of the constituent elements of
marriage.

2.4 The constituent elements of marriage

I have no doubt that marriage was instituted by the Creator with a
purpose in the context of the divine intention for humankind. But, until
now, discussion has focused on marriage in general. Less thought has been
given to these practical issues: When are a man and a woman married?
What is required for a bona fide marriage? And what actually constitutes
the marital bond?

2.4.1 The act of consent and the sex act

The wedding night had two socio-legal functions, not only in Old
Testament period (Deut. 22:13-21) but also in traditional African marriage.
The consummation of the marriage through intercourse sealed the marital
contract between the couple and the two families. But then a problem arose as a result of changing cultural values on matters such as virginity prior to marriage. Consequently, an important question has been left unclarified: at what point are a man and a woman married?

In contemporary society, the constitutive elements in a bona fide marriage are the inward commitment of the two consenting parties. This idea reflects the modern understanding which views marriage as the bond entered into by the free and personal choice of two people. Unfortunately, this understanding becomes the foundational principle to which appeal is made in the face of various related ethical questions, such as premarital sex, adultery and divorce.

The essence of marriage can be described as the inward commitment expressed through an outward act. The two people must be committed. The emphasis on inward commitment actually comprises a movement back to the understanding of marriage presented in the stories of creation in Gen. 2 and of the marriages of the patriarchs. These stories give the impression that these early marriages, although generally arranged by the respective families, were also constituted by the love and devotion of the spouses for each other.

Of course, it would be correct to argue that romantic love, as we view it today, is not an essential element of marriage unless it forms a dimension of the inward commitment that constitutes marriage. I must say that many Christians look to agape, (defined as the unconditional giving of oneself to the other and unconditional acceptance of the other), as one of the essential elements to constitute marriage. I believe that agape is necessary for marriage. That is why I think that, ultimately, marriage requires this type of basic commitment on the part of each spouse to the other person and to the marriage itself. This commitment must include the determination of the husband and wife to persevere in the marriage.
There is no doubt that inward commitment forms the basis of marriage. But by its own nature, this commitment calls forth outward acts. In fact, the same principle that James applied to faith fits here too; "In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead…….show me your faith without deeds and I will show you my faith by what I do" (James 2:17-18). The most obvious outward expressions of the inward commitment in marriage are, firstly, the declaration of a covenant in the presence of witnesses and, secondly the physical expression of personal commitment in the sex act. Put differently, this commitment is expressed in the wedding vow and sexual intercourse.

Furthermore, the definitions of Christian marriage provided above show that since Christian marriage involves an attitude towards life and society, it cannot be understood in isolation from other dimensions of life such as politics or economics. (This was made clear in chapter one). Therefore, this dissertation seeks to show that even those issues which are regarded as political or economic issues are also matrimonial issues. In other words, the primary element that constitutes marriage is the commitment of the couple to each other and to the marriage. Above all, Christians take the act of consent and sexual intercourse as the most essential elements to show and confirm that the people concerned are married.

In other words, some of the essential elements that constitute marriage are the exchange of the act of consent and the act of sexual intercourse. There is no doubt that it is the people entering married life who constitute the marriage when they freely choose each other unconditionally and together become companions and supporters of each other. But their choice becomes real with the act of consent, a public commitment and the act of sexual intercourse. It is believed that after these acts, a man and a woman necessarily become husband and wife as they are now married. Their union is meant to be a permanent union.
In my discussion of what constitutes marriage I have, up to this point, focused on the following: Firstly, the need for couples to commit themselves to marriage; secondly, the importance of the act of consent and the sex act; and thirdly, the importance of the inward commitment expressed as an outward act. I do not, however, think that by themselves these elements constitute a successful marriage. They need to be followed up by further constituent elements, namely, partnership, sexuality in marriage, and fidelity.

2.4.2 Partnership in marriage

I must start by pointing out at this point that Africa is in a regrettable state of confusion regarding marriage as we have seen in chapter one. This confusion was mainly brought about by the uneasy coexistence of Western and African cultures. Many of the Catholic Tswana people in Odi believe that in order to prove their worth they should imitate Western culture. Because of that, it is difficult to give a precise description of what partnership in African marriage involves. Let it be said that equality (meaning equal partnership in marriage) is stressed very much today in marriage, especially in Christian marriage. But, in traditional African marriage it was never the point to be discussed. It was taken for granted that each of the partners had to contribute towards the well being of the marriage and family life. These functions were taught to young men and women as part of their traditional education by the elderly people of the society.

Today, there are those who think that there was no equality in African traditional marriage. According to them, the man was always the oppressor, the privileged half of the marital union, the one who dictated to the woman. This is their perception of traditional African marriage. Unfortunately, even today some women are complaisant towards such an attitude. Take for instance the case where the husband finds himself in the
awkward position of being in some way inferior to the wife. If the wife is too clever for him, he often resorts to physical strength to bring her into subjection. He is proud and will seldom admit defeat. In other words equality gets replaced by competition or by domination. On the other hand, there are those who think that there is, and has always been, equality in African marriages. They argue that in public the man seemed to be in control, but in private it was the woman who was really in control. In public the woman was traditionally subject to her husband, while in private she could be the one running the show, with the man being the humble and obedient subject all the time. There are examples of both approaches in the Odi district at the present.

I therefore see that the African woman can be regarded from two points of view: the indoor view and the outdoor view. Put under public scrutiny she looks like an adult child. Even her husband, speaking about her, refers to her as one of his children. But indoors, she is mistress of her household. She has to be consulted on every important issue that affects the family, such as the marriage of the children.

I personally think that there was a measure of equality even when the man seemed to be the head of the household. In fact, the woman was an indispensable partner and supporter, as mentioned earlier. The most obvious feature of contemporary marriage is that it is a living together, the sharing of life-supporting tasks between a woman and a man. This can be seen when important matters arise, such as arranging the marriage of their daughter or son. A genuine marriage cannot exist and last without partnership. In the Odi district we experience marital breakdown because there is much confusion as regards partnership in marriage.

I must admit that it is difficult to deal with partnership isolated from culture as it is understood and practised differently by African and European cultures. In African culture, partnership was not a point of
discussion. Each partner knew his/her family role because their duties were divided according to sex, age and ability. Complementary roles (with female submission) were assumed. The husband, for example, could make decisions and commitments on behalf of his family and the wife would conform. This was the case also in, for example, medieval Europe. On the other hand, modern Western culture stresses the ideal of equal partnership in marriage even if this is not always experienced in reality. I believe that the type of marriage that should be stressed today is that of marriage as complementary and as a partnership. This becomes a difficult task because of the variety of cultural experiences and customs in contemporary South Africa.

2.4.3 Sexuality and fidelity in marriage

"The reality of marriage consists in the personalizing of sexuality through a permanent commitment which is open and creative, and therefore opposed to transient and undisciplined lust" (Verryn 1975: 130). What this statement indicates is that genital sexual activity deeply involves all the potentials of the human person and it is best expressed and protected in a stable and enduring union between a man and a woman. In other words genital sexual activity calls for a personal union. Above all, human sexuality must be seen as holistic, as touching us on all levels. Sexual intercourse in marriage ought to be seen as sacramental and perhaps even as liturgical. I find it very important for married couples to see their explicit sexual activity as integrally related to the whole fabric of their married life. They cannot expect intercourse or other sexual actions to achieve their full potential if they do not make efforts to relate honestly, openly and compassionately to each other in all areas of their lives. Sexual intercourse heals tensions that exist in a marriage relationship, but it does not work if a couple assumes that they can automatically turn to sexual expression at the deepest level when they are being inconsiderate towards each other and failing to make an effort to love each other. Let it be clear
that sexual intercourse is not a substitute to sort out interpersonal problems between spouses. It should rather be seen as the culmination of successfully working through the causes of any tensions. It is the expression of the unity that exists between the couple, it does not create interpersonal unity in and of itself.

In marriage, sexuality serves a creative and procreative purpose, and thereby it enables the partners to grow in unity - to be one flesh. The failure to understand that sexuality calls people to creativity, and productive living in which each helps the other to realise his or her inherent potential in self-discovery and outward expression, results in marital discord and breakdown. We cannot express our sexuality without being involved in a deep, true and loving relationship with another person. Sexuality is a relational mode of being. To achieve personal growth and fulfilment we must reach out to embrace another person.

At this point, I feel obliged to say something concerning the significance of sex within marriage because this is one of the determining factors in this institution. I agree with Professor Hulley when he says that the nature of the sexual act should be acknowledged as part of sexuality, an important part, yet still only a part (Hulley 1989: 89). Our society has created a kind of mystique about the sexual act. Consequently, it has lost its real meaning. It has become an end in itself: something to be achieved by force if not by deception. But it is only when the sexual act is experienced as part of a total sexual and personal relationship that it is endowed with its full meaning. Then it becomes a unitive and creative activity within that relationship. As an end in itself, it is not a part of a permanent relationship enhanced by growing unity. Instead, the sexual act becomes a mere liaison which is not intended to be permanent. Such an act is transitory by nature, once its objective is achieved, there is no further need to maintain the relationship. The sexual partner becomes merely a means to an end. What results is only frustration and interpersonal
alienation. In such sexual behaviour the whole person is not involved and the act is reduced to a mere physical activity. Misconceptions about the sexual act must be corrected. Persons can understand the importance attached to sexual intercourse by the attitudes and actions of relevant partners. Just look at what happens when one partner is found having an affair outside the marriage. The discovery that one’s partner has had sex with someone else is often the determining factor in the breakdown of a marriage: it is seen as a betrayal of the trust which should protect the dignity and quality of marriage.

Sexual encounters between spouses should make them more open to each other emotionally and physically. The sexual act is a symbol of trust and openness. And as a symbol points beyond itself, so the sexual act points not at itself only but also to the relationship between husband and wife which it symbolises. It is a vital expression of that relationship. Sexual infidelity is not simply a matter of sexual intercourse, it is a betrayal of the act which symbolises the relationship. The betrayal of fidelity and trust brings about the destruction of the union and the bond of marriage.

I mention above how important fidelity is in marriage. The relationship in marriage should involve fidelity and trustworthiness. This means that the couple must avoid infidelity since the extra-marital sexual activities of married partners violate the marriage covenant. Such infidelity nullifies the point that marriage is a covenant between partners who pledge themselves exclusively to one another. Having married each other, the partners have to remain faithful as they freely chose to engage themselves in the covenant of marriage and to live in a certain way. This covenant is one in which fidelity, trust and trustworthiness should reign.

But how sure are the partners that they will remain faithful to and loving towards each other? We cannot ignore the fact that divorce and
remarriage exist in our society. Both divorce and remarriage have strongly challenged the idea that a marriage union should be indissoluble.

I agree and accept that real marriage should be marked by fidelity and permanency. And it remains quite clear to me that marital indissolubility should be the goal or norm under which our approach to marriage must operate. But, unfortunately, from our experience in society it can be seen that a great many marriages break up. In some places there seem to be nearly as many divorces as there are marriages. For example, in my village, almost all the young couples of my age are divorced, some of them have even remarried several times. Let me make it clear that both Catholics and other Christians are involved in divorce. So where does the notion of the indissolubility of marriage fit into this picture?

2.5 The indissolubility of marriage

As this dissertation has sought to work its way through some of the agonizing sexual ethical dilemmas faced by married couples, the controlling perspective has been the belief that marriage has about it a goodness that calls for both fidelity and permanency. It must be clear that marital indissolubility should be the goal or norm under which the approach to marriage must operate. But it is unfortunately also clear that in our society a great many marriages do break up.

In chapter four, the response of the Church to the divorce crisis is discussed. Its greatest priority should be the improved preparation of people for marriage, doing this through a deepened theology of marriage and through more thorough instruction about marriage for all people, beginning with the youth. But the fact remains that even with our best efforts at marriage preparation, such cases will occur in our finite and sinful world.
With reference to marital crises it has been increasingly recognised by the Catholic Church that many persons, through lack of maturity, do not give a true or proper consent to their first marriage. If such a lack of consent can be proved, the first marriage can be declared null and void with the result that, in the Church's eyes, the partners are free to enter a second marriage. (This is called annulment and it is more easily obtained now than it was in former times). If a person wishing to enter into a second marriage can obtain a tribunal annulment of his or her first marriage, this is surely the most desirable course to be followed at this time.

The question might still be asked whether the marital annulment process with its attempt to safeguard marital indissolubility by establishing that some marriages never existed, is necessarily the best process for the Church to follow in dealing with the dilemma of divorce and remarriage. Additionally and perhaps more seriously, there are a lot of very happy and healthy marriages which could be considered as nullifiable if the criteria for true marital consent were applied to the beginnings of these now successful marriages. From this one can conclude that the distinction between annulments (which the Catholic Church accepts) and divorces including remarriages (which she does not accept) is a distinction that may not be very helpful when it is applied in a wholesale fashion.

In the light of the annulment approach to broken marriages, some biblical scholars, historians and moral theologians hold that the words of Jesus, "what God has joined together let no man put asunder" (Matt. 19:6; Mk. 10:9), should not be taken as a strict legal formula for every particular case in which a marriage breaks down. Still other scholars stress the porneia clause of Matt. 19:9 as meaning that unchastity is a biblical ground for divorce. What makes things more complicated is that the group that stresses Matt. 19:6 and the group that stresses Matt. 19:9 agree that marriage should be for life.
Obviously, the tribunal approach to marriage does not fully reflect the Church’s ideal norm which is marital indissolubility. But the fact is that we all live in a very finite and imperfect world where complete fulfilment of our ideals is not always possible. It does not seem impossible that the Church could both proclaim her ideals on marriage (that marriage should be indissoluble) and at the same time be merciful in particularly difficult cases such as where one partner makes the marriage union cruel and impossible for the other partner. For an example, in a case where the husband physically abuses the wife.

Today, with our changing culture, it can be said that the ideal of the Church concerning the indissolubility of marriage is not practical, because people get married when they are young and a few years later they get divorced. And today’s divorced persons, as a whole, face many more years of life than in previous centuries. This makes divorce without remarriage much more burdensome.

As a result of the changing culture people no longer live in large extended families as was so often the case in the past when families typically included grandparents, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, cousins, nieces, and nephews. Today the typical family is husband, wife and children. And these frequently live hundreds of miles from any of the other relatives just mentioned. Formerly, when people lived in extended families, a person who was divorced tended to have a variety of close relatives at hand who could offer love, support, and understanding after the divorce. In our era, the divorced person may well be completely devoid of family support after their divorce. This obviously increases the pain of divorce without remarriage. Considering these changed conditions of our society, it can be said that, provided that the Church finds other ways to give clear witness to marital indissolubility (for example, a deeper theology of and preparation for marriage), the good to be done by permitting second
marriages under certain conditions outweighs the harm such marriages might do (Keane 1980: 143).

I mentioned earlier in this dissertation that it is not easy to define the term "marriage". And in one way or another I have discussed the necessity of marriage for the existence of both the Church and society at large. But its necessity does not rule out the great controversial question as to whether marriage is indissoluble or not. This question has caused divisions in understanding the nature of marriage. This can be attributed to the complexity surrounding it and also to the new realities and situations that arise in modern society (which were outlined in chapter one), thus requiring a fresh examination of the issue.

The question of indissolubility is a burning issue. Some people argue that this is the ideal of marriage while others, even some Catholics, think that indissolubility is an absolute. In other words there are different views as regards the indissolubility of marriage. The Catholic Church officially teaches the indissolubility of marriage. From my pastoral experience I think what it means is that the absolute indissolubility of marriage only applies to sacramentally concluded marriages and even in such marriages only to those that have been validly solemnized and physically consummated. Some have criticised this view. For example, Martin Luther criticised the teaching and practice of the Catholic Church. He held that the Church has no power either to permit or to prohibit divorce. Questioning the indissolubility of marriage Luther said that, in the case of adultery where one partner behaves immorally, the innocent party should have freedom to remarry (Kasper 1980: 59).

I must say that even some Catholics in the early days of the Church were aware of the difficulty that the question of indissolubility was imposing on the people. On this issue Origen reported that certain leaders of the Christian community had permitted certain women whose husbands
had committed adultery and who were therefore divorced from them to remarry during the lifetime of their first husbands. Origen was aware that this practice was contrary to the teaching of scripture, but regarded it as quite reasonable, because it helped to prevent a worse situation from arising (Kasper 1980: 54). Later on, Basil appealed to the Church to accept a man who was divorced because of his wife's adultery, to participate in the Eucharist.

What I find strange is that the Catholic Church accepts the point of indissolubility as absolute in marriage, and yet on the other hand grants marital annulments on the understanding that there has never been any previous marriage, even if the two acts, act of consent and act of sexual intercourse, have been fulfilled.

As a result I fail to understand how the Catholic Church can reconcile the issue of indissolubility with the granting of annulments. I find marital annulment as one of the factors that might lead to marital breakdown. Simply because, I repeat, couples may enter married life with the notion that there is the possibility of getting an annulment. And this notion may cripple the effort of both parties to continually build their marriage in the face of all difficulties. The possibility of annulment becomes a danger to the well-being of the family. It makes it hard for couples to forgive each other and to forget each other's faults. I personally think that the Catholic Church should re-examine its granting of annulments as it contradicts the substance of marriage which is fidelity and permanency. Another point I want to raise is that the couples, when meeting the difficulties which are part and parcel of married life may not work hard to cope with the present situation because they might entertain the hope that if she or he leaves the present marriage situation, she or he can remarry and start afresh with a new partner. But it is probable that the same problems will be encountered in the second marriage. Be this as it may, the thorny issues of
indissolubility, divorce and separation need, in my view, to be revisited by the Catholic Church.

2.6 Conclusion

An area which has been given inadequate emphasis in the changing systems of marriage is that dealing with the constituent elements of marriage. Some people young and old go in and out of marriage. Today the couple proclaim love and commitment to each other, and tomorrow hatred and separation, if not divorce. This practice raises the question: What is marriage? What are the constituent elements of marriage?

As regards the question of what marriage is, many definitions have been provided from different cultural contexts. For example, marriage is defined as a highly relative and fluid institution, a union of a man and a woman recognized by the community. Marriage is also seen to be more than a sexual relationship. It is considered to be a foundational institution for both the society and the Church.

There has been a debate going on throughout history in Christian circles, and especially Catholic ones, as to whether marriage was primarily directed towards procreation or towards the union of the couple. The contemporary Christian understanding of marriage is that it is a monogamous union of male and female in a life-long commitment to one another. In addition, the Catholic Church takes God as the author of marriage and the only one who has endowed it with various benefits.

Concerning the constituent elements of marriage, a number of them were discussed in this chapter. These include inward commitment, public consent, the wedding night, partnership, sexual activity in marriage, and fidelity.
This discussion raised the issue as to whether marriage should be permanent and indissoluble. The indissolubility of marriage raises a very controversial point of discussion. The point is that marriages break down with increasing regularity in our society. Thus, the question is, "how can the Church claim that marriage is permanent and indissoluble?" In response to this, the Catholic Church has maintained that the marriage is still indissoluble even when it administers annulment, which means that there had actually been no marriage. Still, the problem is how possible it is that people can spend more than ten years in marriage, recognised both by the society and the Church, and thereafter say that there was no marriage at all? It is for reasons such as these that the matter of indissolubility needs to be re-examined.

In a nutshell, from this chapter one can conclude that the definitions, the constituent elements of marriage as well as the issues of permanence and indissolubility are right and good but the problem comes when we make them absolute. For example, in reality, when we see a marriage breaking down, I find it immoral to expect a partner to bear the burdens of marriage caused by the other partner. The unbearable cases should not be tolerated for the sake of making marriage permanent and indissoluble. I believe that a human being is not made for marriage but marriage for the human being.
Chapter 3

WHICH UNDERSTANDINGS AND PRACTICES FROM BOTH TRADITIONAL AFRICAN AND CATHOLIC THEOLOGICAL VIEWS OF MARRIAGE SHOULD BE STRESSED IN OUR MODERN CONTEXT?

In chapter two attention was focused on the constituent elements of Christian marriage. This chapter aims at relating these to some traditional African elements of marriage. These should be accepted and emphasized together with the Christian teaching on marriage. I feel there is a need to examine them so as to find out which aspects of this traditional teaching as well as the Christian (and particularly Catholic) constituent elements of marriage should be stressed today in order for marriages to be strengthened.

When one compares African traditional marriage with Christian views on marriage, one discovers that both traditions are concerned not only with what is right and wrong (deontological) in relation to marriage but they are also concerned with what is good and bad (teleological) in terms of goals, consequences and motives. However, many of the right and good elements of African marriage got lost and were forgotten with the coming of Christianity to Africa. For instance, traditional marriages' preparatory periods as well as family and community involvement in marriage were often forgotten. There is sufficient evidence that the missionaries condemned some of the practices that were good and right within the context of African tradition and culture. They did this through lack of information concerning, for example, the active role of the parents and community in the newly established marriage.
Even though there are still people who think that whatever belongs to African tradition is pagan and, therefore, evil there are many things of great value that could be introduced or adapted to Christian marriage without conflicting with the Gospel. For example: customary marriage is not an arrangement between individuals, but an arrangement between two families. This helps towards the stability of the new household. The Church should aim at building upon this foundation if it wants to have marriage as a permanent institute. This, of course, depends on the proper preparation of the couple through the community and the Church working together.

In customary marriage each family tries to find out as much as possible not only about the person who is going to be married to their son or daughter, but also about the general background of the other family. The basic knowledge thus gathered helps towards the stability and happiness of the marriage. The Church should aim at preserving this insistence on mutual knowledge and understanding, and to this end it should discourage hasty marriages.

African marriages are valid human institutions, and the Church has no right to undermine them without genuine moral cause. The aim of the Church should be to strengthen them and build them up. The Church, therefore, must work together with the community, not in opposition to it. I think that everything must be done to minimize the distinction between the customary celebration of marriage and its Christian celebration. Roman Catholic canon law (canon 1098) admits the validity of a marriage between two Church members even when there is no priest present provided there are two witnesses. It might be that, under the provisions of this canon, a great many customary marriages between Roman Catholics in Africa are valid in the eyes of canon law.

I believe that both the (largely Western) Christian and African tradition contain elements which are right and good for the well being of
marriage. I have no doubt that these traditions can complement each other to make marriage a community of love and growth for the couple and any children who may be born.

This chapter will be divided into three areas. The first area will present the values of the Western Christian marriage and African traditional marriage. The second area will deal with compatible values, that is, the common elements which I think are right and good and which ought to be stressed. Since not all elements can be compatible, the third area, therefore, will briefly consider some elements which do encourage this restructuring of marriage which aims at trying to reduce the high rate of divorce.

3.1 Catholic (often Western) values and African traditional values of marriage

It is accepted that marriage, in the pre-Christian era, was a secular affair regulated by the State according to traditional practices and social customs. However, as Christianity spread throughout the world, the Church drew up its own regulations with regard to marriage in accordance with its interpretation of Scriptural teaching on marriage. As it spread into different areas, it accommodated the practices and customs of other traditions, except when they obviously conflicted with the Christian theology of marriage. Thus, a Christian marriage was explicitly and truly a religious act.

In the course of the Church’s history, traditional pagan customs were accepted as part of the marriage ritual and christianised. Thus, the Church provided not only a liturgical blessing for marriage, but also retained many of the pagan customs and laws, once they had been brought into line with official Church teaching - a curious mixture of survival of secular customs with religious accretions.
When the Catholic faith began to be accepted in the African context, however, Western Catholic formulations regarding marriage did not take African traditional practices regarding marriage into account. A distinction was not made between what was essentially Christian and what was merely Western. As is shown in this chapter, this led to many difficulties in the area of marriage, particularly in relation to polygamy.

Thus, in this chapter, an attempt is made to evaluate which African conceptions and practices with regard to marriage are compatible with Christian (and Catholic) theology - even though they may differ from Western conceptions and practices with regard to marriage.

Free consent of the partners and stability are essential elements of a Christian marriage. Children are not seen as essential to the union, and there is a certain degree of equality between the partners. Thus the values of monogamy and the indissolubility of marriage are of prime importance, the latter especially in a Catholic Christian marriage. Moreover, Catholic theology recognises the importance of marriage as a community of love and covenant, and it is in marriage that the sexual act properly belongs. Fidelity, contract and freedom of consent are clearly regarded as important for the permanence of marriage in Christian theology. This includes the issue of the sacramentality of marriage.

On the other hand, African marriage emphasises the consent of partners as members of a group, with a view to greater stability. It further stresses the value of the presence of children to the union. The alternative would be dissolution or polygamy. In an African marriage, the important role played by the wider community, extended family and lobola will not be easily forgotten. It is my intention to discuss the African values and practices which are compatible with Christian theology and to show how these two traditions can, in fact, enrich the marriage.
3.2 African values and practices compatible with Catholic theology

3.2.1 The involvement of the African
and Church community in marriage

This dissertation has shown that marriage was never completely private in the African tradition. It was exposed to the community at large right from the start. Thus, the chief of the community (village) would be informed together with his council about the procedures of marriage in the community. From there the message would be spread around that, for example, Lesego is getting married to Tshepo. The message would go out to the neighbouring communities. The bringing forth of lobola would further legalize the marriage and later would give legitimacy to the children coming out of this union. The payment of bridewealth is one of the major marriage rites because it involves the exchange of gifts from the two families. It confirms the message that these persons are getting married.

When the community had received the message, it had to be alerted to help both materially and morally, even before the completion of the wedding arrangements. Materially, people would start thinking of what to bring for the feast, for example, maize, sorghum and goats or sheep. The men of the community, together with their chief and the council, would see to it that wood was provided for the feast. The women would offer to provide water, to cook and to do some decorations where necessary. The children and the young adults of the community would begin to practice the singing and dances for the feast. Thus, a marriage involved a feast for the whole community, young and old alike.

Morally, the elderly men of the community would start talking to the young man, making him aware of the commitment he was about to take. They would tell him that he must be a mature man, taking on the responsibility of his family and the whole community. On the other hand,
elderly women would be talking to the young woman, teaching her how to love and take care of her family. Both the young man and the young woman were helped in controlling their emotions and feelings for the good of their marriage. When the day of the feast came, the community was there to help and celebrate together with parents and relatives of the new couple. The community was dedicated and determined to continue to help and support the young couple after the marriage ceremony.

Today the couple-to-be, often prepare for their marriage on their own. In other words they make a feast for themselves instead of having the community making a feast for them. The Church should help to bring back the role of the community in relation to marriage. During the preparation and the actual wedding celebration, the community should take part in dancing, singing and giving advice to the couple entering marriage. All those practices of traditional African marriage whereby the community gave moral support, especially through some elderly people in the village, should be incorporated into Christian and Church marriages. Thus, when marital problems arise, elderly people are there to help the young couple to solve them. Elderly people were the source of wisdom not only for their families but for the whole community. These practices raise a question, "to what extent can the involvement of the community be considered a Christian value?"

There is no doubt that the Church refers to itself as a community. It is a community of Christians who are there to take part in the mission of Christ, that is, the mission of serving and saving the world. This mission of serving and saving the world compels the Church to take part actively in the marriages of its members. It should enlighten the young members about marriage and it should encourage and support those who are experiencing problems and difficulties in marriage. As a community it should feel free to be involved in the life of its members either materially or morally. The Church has a ministry of charity; let it begin at home.
The Church must be there to give moral teaching to the young adults, especially those who have made up their minds to enter married life. The couple must be taught how to be mature and take the responsibility for the family. Just as in the traditional community, the Church must introduce its young members to marriage. It must teach them discipline, prepare them, marry them and continue to support them after the marriage ceremony. It must, as the community, feel free to be actively involved in the life of its members.

I am aware that the Church community cannot fulfil the function of a community in the traditional sense, but it can still help in encouraging cooperation between young adults and parents especially in relation to the issue of marriage. It can even encourage and support couples to attend courses such as the marriage courses discussed more fully in chapter four. The Church should help couples to spend more time getting to know each other as well as the background of their prospective spouses before they can commit themselves to marriage. We have mature people in the Church, people who have experienced the ups and downs of marriage. We also have the couples who specialize in various areas of life, such as psychology, marriage counselling and social work. These, I believe, are the people on which the Church can draw to support and encourage the newly established marriages in our society.

Further, the Church as a community can also help in arranging marriages together with the two families involved. Material support and the carrying out of different duties can make a great contribution towards the success of marriage. And, finally, the wedding feast could become a community celebration. For this reason I see the idea of community fitting very well in both the African and Christian traditions.

How does the involvement of African community fit with the involvement of the Church community? The majority of Africans, in South
Africa, belong to Christian churches which are influenced by Western culture. At the same time they are part of the wider local community. To us, as Africans, the local community is part of the extended family. The Church, too, is a family which comprises members of the local community. The fact that the Church is situated in the local community makes it an integral part of that community. This would imply that the Church is also part of the extended family.

3.2.2 The extended family and the Church

In addition to the involvement of the wider community, the involvement of the extended family in the traditional marriage is another aspect that should be stressed by the Church within our society. In some places it has often been the tradition for the parents or the extended family to choose the future spouse for their children. The choice could be made at different stages. What is most important is that, nearly always when such a choice has been made, the first part of the bride-wealth is handed over from the family of the son to the family of the daughter. The other possibility of choosing the future spouse was that the parent would wait till their son or daughter chooses the one whom he/she wished to marry. Thereafter, the arrangements were left to parents or the extended family. Thus, whether the future spouse was chosen by the parents, or whether the boy told them about the girl he wished to marry, marriage was an arrangement between families and not only between the two relevant people.

Criteria in choosing a future spouse were of great importance for the permanency of marriage. One had to know what kind of person he or she was marrying and, also, one had to know more about his or her background. It was for this reason that the two future families tried to acquire more intimate knowledge of each other. And when a partner-to-be was seen against the background of politeness, greetings, services rendered,
in patience and the capacity to work, then, the two families sealed the covenant by exchanging gifts. All of this is a clear indication that in traditional African marriage, marriage was never regarded as a private or an individualistic matter.

When the missionaries arrived in Africa, they perceived traditional African marriage and Christian marriage as being incompatible. They found it difficult to separate what was essentially Christian from what was merely Western in relation to marriage. However, I do not see them as completely incompatible. I feel that if the Church is to help make marriage an area where love and growth are fostered, then it must be prepared to accept this as a process which goes through important stages. I do not see why the Church cannot accept the African stress on the importance of the involvement of the family at large in choosing the future spouse of the member of the household. By choosing, I mean discussing and giving advice to the member who wishes to marry as to what type of spouse they think is fit for him or her. In addition to that, I would like to see a well established link between the three groups, those of the two families of the lovers and the Church.

The role of the extended family in traditional African marriage was regarded as very important from the beginning of the arrangement of marital preparations. Its support extended even after the marital ceremony. I think that the role of support, encouragement and the giving of advice to the new couple is compatible with a Christian approach to marriage. The Christian ceremony requires that there must be two witnesses, one from the bride's side while the other stands for the bridegroom. And the role of the witnesses is to support, encourage and advise the new couple. As you can see, both the extended family in African traditional marriage and the witnesses in the Christian rite fulfil the same function in respect of the newly married couple. They are not in opposition to each other, the only difference is, I think, that the extended family can render a better service
to the couple than the two witnesses can. Africans it is said, live as relatives while European Christians live as citizens. Marriage in Europe is of the conjugal type while in Africa marriage is of the family type. In African society, the relatives also helped the wife and husband with the care and education of the children.

The Christian tradition must, "judge everything, but hold on to that which is good. If it is true that the reaction of the official Church in Africa to the matrimonial concepts and customs until now has been determined to a large degree by the mono-cultural point of view taken by the central authorities in Rome, it is right that present-day pastoral work in Africa should be extremely cautious with regard to autochthonous cultural institutions which are themselves changing" (Heijke 1986: 29).

I say this with a clear conscience because the extended family is part of the African family tradition. Like so many other African customs and traditions the Church must help the people of Odi, if not all Africans, to integrate these customs and traditions into the Christian Faith. This does not mean that African culture is static, but it does mean that those elements of traditional culture that remain intact must be drawn upon to combat the high rate of marital breakdown.

Furthermore, the involvement of the extended family in the newly established marriage is meant to give moral support to the young couple so that they may successfully manage those marital problems which often arise. I must also mention that the involvement of both the community at large and the extended family in the new marriage is not always good or helpful. They can become a stumbling block for the growth of the young couple. The extended family or the community at large can prohibit the development of an intimate relationship between the couple, rendering them incapable of solving their problems without turning to the extended
family for help. This would be neither right nor helpful. Instead of being an obstacle to growth, the community and the extended family ought to promote marital understanding and growth. Here I expect the Church to facilitate and promote a healthy relationship between the husband and wife as well as between the couple and the extended family.

3.2.3 The act of consent and the sex act

Furthermore, both traditions, African and Christian, regard the act of consent and the sex act as important in marriage. Marriage is a human reality. It is the union of one man and one or more women (in the case of polygamy), in which they commit themselves to each other in an intimate sharing of their lives until death. This union is of its own nature ordered to promote the fostering of a special kind of love, rightly termed marital or conjugal love, between the spouses and to the generation and education of children. I have no doubt that both traditions accept this, and work towards the promotion of this union. The only difference is that African traditional marriage accepts both polygamy and monogamy while the Christian tradition (especially in its traditional Western form) proclaims only monogamy.

There are two types of the act of consent. There is the act of consent performed during the ceremony. This is known as the public commitment of the couple to each other. This public commitment comes as the result of another type of consent known as private consent which concerns the inward commitment of the couple to each other. The act of consent during the ceremony is the act whereby a man and a woman publicly surrender themselves to one another. The only difference I can notice now is that the two traditions used different methods to carry out this act. In the Christian tradition, this act of consent is made during the matrimonial ceremony when the couple say clearly that they take each other for life. In the African tradition the act takes place between the
representatives of the two families. There the girl would be asked if she
knows the boy. And if she said she did, that was taken as committing
herself to him for life. Thereafter the marital arrangements would start
between the two families. In other words, in the African tradition the act
of consent was a process which started before the ceremony of marriage.
In both cases, the couple never become husband and wife before ceremony
but only after it.

I must also mention that there were some cases where force or
pressure had to be applied to get the reluctant young person to marry the
partner chosen by the parents or relatives. But the normal practice was for
the parents to make the choice with the full consent of their son or
daughter.

I don’t think that there is anything that can take the place of this act
in marriage. It is this act that brings marriage into being and transforms the
man and the woman into spouses, husband and wife. This act is unique
because in and through it, a man and a woman give themselves to and are
received by each other. Both the Christian and African traditions believe
that in and through this chosen act the spouses give to themselves a new
identity. The man becomes the woman’s husband, and she becomes his
wife, and together they become spouses.

Surely, these traditions are compatible with what William E. May
says in his book "Sex, Marriage and Chastity". He says that the importance
of the act of marital consent is beautifully expressed in the second account
of creation which is the story of the creation not only of humanity but of
marriage. There we read that when the male-man saw female-woman,
equal to him, he exclaimed: " Here at last is bone of my bone and flesh of
my flesh... for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and
cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" Gn. 2:23-24
(William E. May 1981: 36).
Above all, both traditions expect marriage to be permanent and a context within which the offspring are to be begotten and lovingly nurtured in steadfast fidelity between husband and wife.

3.2.4 The sex act in marriage

Related to the act of consent is a second outward act, the physical expression of personal commitment in sexual intercourse. This act forms the repeated reenactment of the covenant between the two partners as formalized in the wedding ceremony. The Christian and African traditions both accept that the sex act serves as a primary means of expressing not only our fundamental sexuality but also the mutual commitment of the marriage partners. The sex act is meaningful and cannot be dismissed as a mere bodily function devoid of meaning. I therefore strongly believe that the sex act must be understood in the context of both the Christian and African traditions.

There is no doubt that both traditions have preached that the proper place for the sex act is in marriage. In African tradition the idea was so strong that if a girl fell pregnant before marriage, she could not be married by a young adult man. She could only be married by a widower. That is why it was rare to have girls falling pregnant before marriage. Similar to the Christian tradition, the African tradition in its own way preached "no sex before marriage". To show the importance of the sex act, both traditions strongly feel that the young adults or young couples should be prepared and helped to understand the role of the sex act in marriage.

In both Christian and African societies, sex is not used for biological purposes alone. It also has religious and social uses. For procreation and pleasure, sex plays an important and obvious role in any normal marriage in any society of the world. Furthermore, the sex act is a sacred action signifying inward spiritual values. The sexual organs are, in a sense, the
gates of life and are to be respected. That is why for so long in the history of these traditions, people could not talk and discuss sexual matters freely. That explains why sexual knowledge has often been difficult to impart from parent to child. But girls are probably better off in this respect than boys since they spend more time with their mothers and older women relatives than the boys may spend with their fathers. In the modern context our young people usually gather sex information from fellow young people and it is often a mixture of truth, myth, ignorance, guesswork and jokes. Formal schools and universities in modern Africa are often the centres of even greater ignorance in relation to these matters so that young people go through them knowing, perhaps, how to dissect a frog but nothing about either their own procreation capacities or how to establish family life. In contrast to this ignorance, both traditions saw the necessity of preparing young people entering marriage to understand the role of the sex act.

From both traditions, I find that there are religious and social reasons why sexual unions are held to be sacred and inviolable. And if there is a breach of this use, it is taken very seriously. Sexual taboos of one kind or another are numerous, and show clearly that Africans, like Christians, consider the proper use of sex to be sacred, therefore, its practice must be safeguarded. For example, both traditions condemn adultery, fornication, incest and rape.

As regards the relationship between sexual and social life, the two traditions regard the husband and wife, with their children, as forming the family unit which in turn participates in the increasingly wider social orders of the parish, town, city and nation. They agree that the sexual life of the husband and wife has a social impact at all these levels. Of course, it is in the home that most immediate and important social consequences will be seen.
3.2.5 Marriage as a community of love and covenant

I realise that when we talk of marital life the issue of love appears throughout the discussion. We have seen love mentioned again and again under the discussion of the act of marital consent and the sex act. I take these two points as basic to what marriage should be as was discussed in chapter two. The significance of these two acts has been understood by both the Christian and African traditions as they pronounce marriage to be a community of love and covenant.

Both traditions support the idea that marriage is the place where people should grow in love for themselves and for other members of the family so as to form a living and active community. It is as a consequence of their love that the partners profess publicly their everlasting commitment to each other, until death, during the act of consent. And we see the same love being promoted in the sex act when partners give and receive each other.

In order to build this community of love, these traditions, in their various ways of conducting and preaching marriage, felt that there must be a covenant or agreement between the partners to start and continue building a community. We have seen under the discussion of the act of consent that the people entering marriage proclaim their love and commit themselves to each other. This is the covenant. It is for this reason that the Christian tradition and African tradition call marriage a covenant. A covenant between partners, who are marrying each other, witnessed by the extended family, the Church as the community of believers, and the community at large. This is why, from the moment of the wedding feast, the couple will be addressed as husband and wife.

Furthermore, the two traditions agree that the marital act inwardly participates in the marital good of fides (faithfulness). When non-married
persons unite in coition, their act in no way participates in this beautiful good. It does not and cannot do so because there is no fides, no covenant of complete and total fidelity between them. But when husband and wife choose to give themselves to and receive one another in the act of marital coition, they do so as irreplaceable persons who have willed to unite their lives and their persons; as beings who are summoned to be utterly faithful to each other.

In the community of love and covenant, the individuals united in the marital act become spouses who have pledged themselves to each other and who, in uniting sexually, are true to this pledge or to the act of consent. From this community of love and covenant we can see that the marital or conjugal act is not simply an act of sexual coition, but an act that is both unitive and procreative in so far as it is an act participating in and realizing the goodness and rightness of fides (the faithfulness of the spouses to each other) and proles (the procreation and the education of children).

In traditional Africa, sexual activity was in the service of life and the transmission of life. People who indulged in sex for selfish reasons were strongly condemned. Sexual power was regarded mysterious and sacred. And this is exactly what the Church preaches regarding the issue of sex. Yes it is sacred, it has to be used with care. Sex must be engaged in within a God-given moral framework. The pleasure of sex in both traditions is of course, legitimate, but its outcome, whenever possible, is to be children (Benezeri in Kisembo 1977: 81).

As far as I can see the unity and permanency of marriage were observed in African traditional marriage as were sexual union and faithfulness. The high rate of divorce that we experience today was unknown. The Christian churches should use the values of African tradition in order to strengthen their proclamation of the unity and permanence of marriage in a relationship of love and faithful covenant.
3.2.6 Partnership

The issue of partnership cannot be left out of a discussion of marriage even though it is understood differently by Africans and Westerners. It is one of the essential elements in marriage. African tradition understood and practised partnership under the idea of complementarity and submission. The African husband was called the head of the family, the superior, while the wife was inferior to him and was expected to conform to his will.

On the other hand there is the more recent understanding of partnership on the part of Westerners. They understand partnership in terms of equality. What Africans and Westerners have in common is that they both use scripture to support their position, though they interpret scripture in various ways. Thus, they agree that partnership is one of the essential elements in marriage, but the actual nature of this partnership would require further discussion between the parties involved.

It would seem that if African values and practices which are compatible with Catholic theology are encouraged and supported by the Church, the rate of separation and divorce would be reduced. It can also be stressed that marriage is not private. It is open to the community at large, the extended family and the Church as a community of believers. Marriage is a union that includes important issues such as the act of consent and the sex act. The rejection of pre-marital sexual intercourse is common to both Africans and Catholic theology.

The other conclusion that can be drawn from this section is that both traditional African and Catholic theological views of marriage understand marriage as a community of love, covenant and partnership. Of course it cannot be ignored that there are, from both traditional African marriage and Catholic theological views of marriage, certain understandings
and practices that should, or should not, be stressed and emphasised in our modern context. Below I briefly discuss those that I think should not be stressed and emphasised as they are no longer valid or helpful in promoting positive or creative models of marriage in the contemporary South African context.

3.3 The understandings and practices from both traditional African marriage and Catholic theological views of marriage, which should not be stressed and emphasised in our modern context.

In the above section I discussed the elements that I think can be emphasised and practised in our modern society. But the fact remains that not every element of traditional African marriage is compatible with a Catholic understanding of marriage.

There is no doubt that polygamy had some value in African traditional marriage. The Church’s stance right from the onset has been rejection, the non-acceptance of polygamy. It saw no chance whatsoever of polygamy being incorporated in one form or another. It signalled this rejection through the missionaries. Polygamous families were excluded from the community of Christian believers. If these people seriously wanted to join the Church, they had to first break up their polygamous marriage. Those who refused to abide by the regulations were denied the sacrament of baptism as a punishment. Further, the missionaries told them that if they died unbaptized they would die as pagans and they would not see God.

Even today the Church still hasn’t changed its attitude towards polygamy. When the Church looks back at its past reaction against polygamy, it does not feel that it made a mistake to fight polygamy. The only regret, however, might be on the means it used to destroy it. (The Church is critical of polygamy because it accepts only the monogamous
union of marriage.) One can therefore expect that as regards to polygamy today, the Church should use a different strategy which will not destroy people. It should use a means which will teach and help people understand that fidelity and partnership cannot be as fully lived in polygamous marriages as in a monogamous marriages.

Within modern society, the attitudes of some African men and many African women have changed with regard to polygamy. Relations between the various wives in polygamous households were previously judged in a favourable light, at least by some. On the other hand, polygamous unions were (and are) also full of tensions, jealousy and misbehaviour. Understandably, educated African women who have had close contacts with European culture object to polygamy. In part, they object to the idea that a woman is valuable only as a mother and not as a person. (Such objections, however, are naturally not only directed to polygamy but indeed to the African marriage system as a whole.)

Thus, apart from the fact that the Church regards only monogamy as a fully acceptable form of marriage, the pressure of modern socio-economic forces on marriage makes it difficult, especially on the part of women, to regard polygamy positively. Today, women want to own property, to have responsibility and to be less dependent on men. Furthermore, with the demands of the modern socio-economic structure I do not think that there are many men who can manage adequately with several wives and numerous children, especially in the urban areas. The cows and fields are no longer there as a source of income, instead office work, factories and mines are the places of production. The income I am talking about is money. It has to be used for the maintenance of the family and the education of the children. From modern societal experience, families struggle and as a result both women and men have to go to work. The circumstances today are different to those of yesterday when our ancestors regarded a big family as a sign of wealth. The role of men and
women in the family have changed, as have the means of economic production.

No matter how polygamy was perceived in the olden days, today, women claim that they are not willing to share their partners with anybody else. They are right to say that because if it is acceptable for a man to have more than one wife, the same should be expected of women.

Polygamy has lost the value it had in the African traditional marriage. It no longer stabilizes the institution of marriage and the family. It does not help to tighten the bonds of society and broaden the circle of relatives and associates. The family and community control and safeguards no longer exist in quite the same way. That is why some African traditions have to be changed or adapted to the modern context. For example, the role of the husband in the home today differs immensely. We now believe in the sharing of roles and responsibilities. Housework and care of the children has to be shared. Let me end with a remark that while African men must learn to change, women need to be patient with them because it is going to take time and courage to make the changes. Otherwise there will be much needless conflict.

Another area of incompatibility is that of levirate. The Christian tradition accepts that care should be provided for widows. But, it does not accept that the widow should be taken into the household of a brother of the deceased. It rejects the view that the brother of the deceased should honour the potential fertility of the widow and make her the mother of new children.

The issue of the levirate raises another question: why has the Christian tradition (mainly Western) rejected Israelite and Old Testament levirate marriages? The answer to this question depends on the issue of biblical interpretation. Westerners consider the New Testament as having
received priority over the Old Testament. To them what appears in the Old Testament should not be regarded as normative for the Church. As a result, they take the line that when a married man dies, the marriage of the woman who remains has, by the very fact of his death, come to an end. "Till death do us part" seems to be a clause taken for granted in a Western marriage ceremony. Whilst there are some African Christians who reach the same conclusion as Western Christians, other African Christians use some Old Testament references to support both polygamy and the levirate. Furthermore, this second group believes that marriage is in fact a contract between two families. Based on the idea that the wife is married to a man and to his lineage, and also on the conviction that the procreative power of the woman has been put at the service of the lineage of her husband for all time, the patrilinear community concludes that the death of the husband does not cancel the basis of the contract. Divorce alone, with the return of the bridewealth, can dissolve a marriage, not death as Christian tradition teaches.

Connected to this issue of levirate is that of remarriage. Christian tradition accepts that when one partner dies, the remaining one is free to get married. But the African tradition says no, a widow cannot remarry because she is still married. To remarry with someone belonging to another kinship group meant the return of the bridewealth as a sign of divorce and she would have to part with her children. And on the other hand, the Western tradition thinks that it is unjust to accept this traditional social practice because the custom of the levirate deprives a woman of her freedom while it leaves a man free to marry if the wife dies.

Does Catholic theology agree with the West or Africa on this issue of remarriage? There is no doubt that from its theology of marriage, the Catholic Church agrees with West as regards the issue of remarriage. The Catholic Church agrees that death ends marriage and leaves the living partner free to marry if she/he wants to.
3.4 Conclusion

In the introduction to chapter three the point was made that African customary marriage is not simply an arrangement between the newly married persons, instead, it is an arrangement between two families concerned positively with the married couple throughout their lives. The Church should support this practice and look at it as an important custom to be encouraged.

Sub-section 3.2 suggests that adequate preparation by the family and the community, and the provision of the necessities for a successful marriage ceremony can engender a feeling of obligation for the couple to remain permanently in marriage. Today couples-to-be prefer independence from their families and their communities not only in the preparation of their marriage but also in the way they lead their lives after marriage. It is here that I feel the Church ought to re-introduce the role of the community. The Church should encourage the community to help with the preparation and to take part in the dancing and singing. It should remain vigilant after the marriage celebration by offering moral support. The Church should emphasize the importance of the couple getting to know each other well before marriage as this would reduce later conflicts. The families of the boy and the girl should be encouraged to scrutinize each other thoroughly before any final decision regarding marriage is made.

The choice of a spouse through the help of the family lays the foundation for permanence. To me it is like double checking to make sure the individual has picked the right person. This does not necessarily exclude the love that the couple would have for each other, but would be a means of ensuring that each partner has made the correct choice. Such family involvement in the choice of a partner assures the couple that moral support and help would be provided should conflicts arise in the future.
Another important element is the involvement of the extended family. For example, the uncles could decide and act on behalf of a deceased father or a cousin can assume the duties of the bride's brother. In short, the extended family offers support and security. The whole family gets involved from the beginning and remains involved. While Christian tradition claims that a couple can get married in the presence of three people only, the priest blessing the marriage and the witnesses of both the man and the woman, the Church in Africa has no choice but to accept the fact that, according to African tradition, the idea of the marriage of the two families is central. This implies that marriage is not a private affair. It is an alliance bringing two family communities together in a permanent relationship. The Church should encourage this practice but, at the same time, be vigilant. It is a fact that the extended family or community at large can be a stumbling block and could ruin a marriage relationship by curtailing the privacy the couple might need. The growth of the new marriage could be stifled by the desire of the family and the community to know how the couple relate to each other after the marriage ceremony. The Church must guard against unwanted or harmful interference.

The next significant issues raised in this chapter constitute the act of consent and the sex act. The act of consent requires that the couple publicly declare their commitment to each other during the marriage ceremony, each accepting the other for life. In the African tradition the act of consent takes place between the representatives of the two families after the girl has confirmed that she knows the boy, and that she is willing to be married to him. This act of consent becomes fully real through the sex act in marriage which means the physical expression of personal commitment in sexual intercourse. The sex act symbolises a meaningful commitment to marriage. It obligates both parties to give themselves fully to each other and they may not deny each other this unique expression of love. The sex act has these purposes - unification, procreation and pleasure. Sexual
intimacy and faithfulness strengthen the two persons physically, spiritually and psychologically. Therefore it is a sacred action.

Both Christian and African traditions see marriage as a community of love and covenant. The act of marital consent and the sex act form the basic elements of what marriage should be; love that is characterised by a deep intimacy. It is a life-long contract and demands fidelity and loyalty. The persons concerned must commit themselves to each other. Also the two traditions agree that the marital act of necessity compels faithfulness. This act should make a husband and a wife a united couple. This is what makes the sex act outside marriage meaningless: it lacks the faithfulness of the spouses to each other. How can procreation and the education of children be achieved in and outside marriage where there is no commitment to each other or to any resulting offspring? In African tradition, husband and wife were seldom divorced. That is why I encourage the Church to resort to the values that kept marriages permanent in the African tradition.

Despite these compatible values, there are some African practices that, I believe, are incompatible with Christian (and particularly Catholic) theology. Whilst I criticise the exclusion of people from God’s kingdom on the basis of conclusions drawn by missionaries who had no adequate knowledge about African structures and customs, I nevertheless regard polygamy as less than Christian. I hope that today different approaches will be used by the Church to prove to people that monogamy is a better marital relationship. To a certain extent, I do support a move towards establishing monogamous families. Today, socio-economic forces favour monogamy rather than polygamy. The socio-economic factors that supported polygamy have disappeared. Women claim their rights and liberation by wanting to own property, and also by wanting to become part of the decision making process, especially in matters pertaining to their welfare and growth. In short, women’s liberation brings a big change to the
outdated African mentality on marriage, and particularly on polygamy. The other point of difference is that of the levirate which Christianity has completely ruled out of its practices even though it was practised by some Israelites in Old Testament.

Finally, one can conclude that both African and Christian traditions have religious and cultural features which can be modified and applied to bring about stable marriages. These elements can be adapted and integrated through dialogue, understanding, mutual respect and an acceptance of one another. The Church should encourage that such features be carefully analysed and made part of its doctrines. I am convinced that such a move would open the doors towards solving today's problems which threaten the purpose and stability of marriage.
Chapter 4

HOW SHOULD THE MODERN CATHOLIC CHURCH RESPOND TO THE CRISIS IN MARRIAGE?

In Chapter one, attention was focused on the analysis of contemporary Catholic marriages among the Tswana people in the Odi District. This was done so as to find out why marriage has lost its proper meaning and purpose. Chapter two dealt specifically with marriage, that is, what marriage should be in spite of the negative effects of change exposed in chapter one. In that chapter the constituent elements in marriage, such as companionship, partnership and sexuality in marriage were dealt with. In chapter three I presented the compatible perceptions and structures of traditional African marriage and Christian marriage so as to show how a combination of these understandings and practices can enrich and safeguard marriage against separation and divorce. In this chapter I expose the causes of the decline of personal and social morality. This is followed by a discussion of the extent to which the Church is part of the problem. Thereafter I indicate what the Church can do to restore the essential qualities of marriage discussed in chapter two and how it can use traditional African marriage beliefs and customs to strengthen existing and future marriages.

4.1 Why speak of a crisis in marriage?

Marriage is in crisis. More often than not marriages are threatened by separation and divorce. This is due to the fact that many people enter marriage without a proper understanding of what marriage is all about. When the couple experience difficulties and problems in their union, they may turn to either separation or divorce, instead of facing the challenge.
Above all, I believe, the impact of modern society on traditional African marriage has played a role in precipitating a marriage crisis. This is demonstrated by the religious, the socio-economic, and political impact of modern society and changing gender roles, which are discussed in chapter one. Furthermore, the couples of today live in confusion as regards to what ethical norms to follow. This is because they reject traditional practices of marriage and yet fail to keep up to the demands of Christianity. In other words there is a crisis in marriage because of ignorance of what marriage is all about and confusion of what ethical principles to adhere to in marriage. All this comes as a result of a lack of marriage preparation by the couple themselves, the Church and the wider community. It is because of this that the society is experiencing a decline in personal and sexual morality.

It is a reality that individuals must live up to the expected moral standards of their own community. If morality deals with what is right and wrong according to given norms, then those norms must be clearly stated. For example, an excessive love of money is wrong. There is an uncontrollable desire for money because people no longer depend on subsistence agriculture but on money. Young and old members alike concentrate on how to acquire money as fast as possible. Practically speaking, money controls people's social life. I have no doubt that this has negatively impacted upon marriage. Because of the cost of arranging, celebrating and living out their marriages, people tend to choose economically rich partners. Today, instead of being concerned with the union itself and the growth of the marriage partners, the couples are concerned about having a lot of money, driving big cars and living in mansions. The sad part of this attitude is that should all these fail or should the expectations of the partners fail to be fulfilled, marriages break down as each partner goes his or her way to find money and to enjoy himself or herself. In most cases, where marriage has been blessed with the children, the latter either remain with the grandparents or join the street
kids. In such circumstances, the state is expected to carry out the burden of caring for these children. This task has become too difficult for the state to carry out since the number of street children is growing at an alarming rate. There are too many children who, because of separation or divorce or the death of their parents, lack parental love and material support. This creates one of the key causes of the lack of moral values among young people. Their feeling is "nobody cares; why should I"; hence the escalating crime rate.

The love of money has driven people into the world of insecurity and selfishness. Our society is selfish and materialistic: people do not take care of anybody except themselves. There is a lot of drunkenness and quarrels. Today people do not simply fight but kill each other when quarrels and disputes break out. Every day the mass media reports a number of crimes and this is a proof that there is a lack of concern for other people. On top of all these problems, there is much poverty and a severe shortage of jobs. These, in one way or another, have encouraged marital breakdown, immorality and a high rate of prostitution.

Another possible cause of moral decline is pornography which encourages indecent dressing and an insatiable desire for sex. It encourages people to have uncontrolled sex. What it presents to people is not always possible in reality. And if one partner expects and pushes the other partner to do and to experience what "the blue movies" suggest, he or she may strain the marriage if the other partner does not share the same feelings.

To these personal moral factors one can add the way the society behaves. In some parts of Southern Africa, single parenthood is encouraged and has become a well accepted practice. Within a home, sons and daughters are given accommodation where their parents never interfere with their privacy especially as regards sexual matters. Their fiancé may visit them at their own homes and nobody is allowed to interfere. The
result is naturally children outside wedlock. When eventually a woman gets married after having children, the arrangement is that the father or fathers of her children are officially allowed to visit their own children at the place of their mother who is married to a completely different man. In this way, a woman then has access to three or more men who have all been sexually intimate with her. When they come to visit their children at her marriage home, the current husband may suspect that his wife continues to be intimate with her former lovers. But society sees nothing wrong with this since it claims that the fathers have a right and a duty to see and support their own children. The marriage may break as a result of this practice because the person who has married the woman expects exclusive love which should under no circumstances accommodate any other intimate relationship.

I consider marital breakdown - both separation and divorce to be the most important social issues of our day. The consequences are massive: the doctor sees the stress symptoms associated with marital conflict. The hospital sees the consequences in alcohol consumption, affective disorders, suicidal attempts, suicides and general disease. The behaviour of children at school shocks and surprises the teacher. I, as a clergyman, face moral dilemmas posed by divorce. The solicitor encounters the unhappiness and anger of frustrated spouses. Society picks up the bill of millions of rand as a cost of marital breakdowns. Divorce is also damaging for children. Should they get married, their marriages might also end in divorce. Second marriages are riskier entities than first marriages even though they may be happy for the adults, the cost to the children is very great. Divorce has to be prevented or at least its incidence greatly reduced.

4.2 The Church as part of the problem

It is a fact that today marriage has lost much of its status and dignity. One of my parishioners expressed her feelings saying she perceived
marriage as an institution under threat. When I asked her why, she said that there were two types of evidence to support her view. These were, firstly, that marriage is becoming less popular. Fewer people are getting married while others develop some alternatives to marriage such as cohabitation. The second type of evidence, she pointed out, is that divorce cases are increasing at an alarming rate and that this puts the institution of marriage under threat. She was correct. Marital breakdowns have greatly increased. We can divide marital breakdown into three types: a) Divorce which involves terminating the marriage legally; b) Separation which involves the physical separation of spouses, although they are still legally married; and c) Empty-shell marriages which implies that the spouses live together married in name only, with little in common. The high divorce rate has led people to ask if the Church has failed to strengthen and support the values of the institution of marriage.

I personally think that the church has some share in the loss of the status previously accorded to marriage in Odi if not all over Africa. I want to provide a few examples to show why I consider the Church, in this case the Catholic Church, as part of the problem. First of all, I believe that the Church has failed both in its theology and in effectively communicating its theology of marriage. From my pastoral experience, I realize that most of the couples do not know the teaching of the church as regards marriage. I think that the church has lived too much in the field of theory. It has failed to be practical in dealing with marriage matters. For example, priests sometimes preached about marriage in an obscure way and did little to provide practical guidance.

Furthermore, the Church confused people so much that they found it difficult to relate the teaching of the Church with what is said about marriage in the scripture. In the scripture, for instance, there are cases of polygamy as well as those of monogamy. And all that is said about the covenant and marriage in the Old Testament is said in a context which is
known to have been polygamous. I therefore interpret the New Testament's relative silence about polygamy as evidence that it did not pose a pastoral problem to the early Church. By then, monogamy was the general practice. But has the Church effectively communicated this interpretation to its people? I believe it has not.

4.2.1 Its theology and view of African customs

It remains a fact that the Church has failed to understand traditional African marriage. Instead of working with traditional African structures, the Church rejected and undermined them. And in this way the Church, for example, removed the traditional ways in which virginity was prized and good marriages were promoted. If, for instance, a man was not happy about the condition of his newly married wife on the wedding night, he was supported by his society to put a full stop to that marriage as the young woman had deceived him pretending to be a virgin, when she was not. The Church could have supported or even improved this traditional African moral practice. But it lacked information. Lack of information cannot be an excuse. Therefore I believe that the Church is not completely blameless. When it labelled what was traditional and cultural as sinful, unbecoming and unacceptable to the Christian Western ethos it was influenced by a lack of understanding of the values involved in an African set up. This was a cause for divided loyalty; on the one hand loyalty to one's culture which was truly meaningful and on the other hand, the shaky loyalty to their new faith. Experience shows that people remained caught up in two worlds. While accepting and showing their Christian faith and commitment to it, the traditional and cultural aspects of marriage were deeply rooted in them. It was quite clear to an African man, for instance, that the relationship between his family and his wife's family was more important than the relationship that was to exist between himself and his wife. This was their society's stance. They had to act and behave accordingly.
A second area of weakness was in the Church's response to marriage in terms of preparing young people for marriage. For a long time in the history of the church in Africa, the church did not take part fully in preparing those who sought to commit themselves to marriage. What happened was that a young man simply chose a partner, sometimes with the help of the parents or relatives. And the two families of the couple held meetings to exchange ideas. We know that in traditional African marriage there were stages of preparation. For example, the meeting of the families and the imparting and the receiving of bridewealth. The Church, not being involved in the preparation, did not incorporate this period of preparation into its own practices with regard to marriage.

The Church remained ignorant of what was happening in the traditional arrangement of marriage. As a result, it became impossible for it to know what was happening until the time when the parents came to report that so and so wanted to get married in church. And the couple would be called to the Church, maybe for half a day to be helped to know how the celebration is going to be organised and what to say or to do during the ceremony. But the fact is that the church did not practically prepare them for married life. It did not help them to know how to grow together, handle their emotions, or to behave in marriage. The Church took most of these things for granted.

Thirdly, it was well known in Africa that a young couple needed the support and advice of the elders. This was due to the fact that the young couple would experience new things in their marriage. For example, they would experience the use of sex and the practical means of addressing each other in conversation or communication. This is a time when they would learn something about themselves and each other. Misunderstandings, quarrels, emotional upsets and uncertainty caused by different factors arise in marriage. All these need somebody who is mature and experienced enough to explain to the new couple how to overcome such difficulties.
Where is the Church after the wedding? It is nowhere to be found. It does not even concern itself to find out how the newly married couple cope with their situation. It does not reach out to the couple so as to support or advise them in practical areas such as misunderstandings and difficulties in accepting each other. Practically speaking, I think that the Church expected people to go to it instead of the Church following up its couples and supporting them whenever they needed help. (Here the word Church refers to the leaders of the community of believers, who are supposed to be guiding at least the people placed under their care).

I am convinced that the couple needs the Church especially when they face the issue of unfaithfulness. Unfaithfulness in marriage means that one or both partners have had sexual unions with other persons. This can arise from various causes and situations. Lengthy separations create sexual desires that may lead to unfaithfulness. Pregnancy involves a period when sexual intercourse is not advisable except, of course, where a man has more than one wife. Lack of sexual satisfaction may lead one partner to seek it from another person. Quarrels and other marital disturbances may make a partner have sexual unions with someone else, partly as an outlet or compensation and partly as a way of punishing the other partner. Lust, selfishness or lack of self control are other factors involved in unfaithfulness. Obviously, some of the situations leading to unfaithfulness are hard to bear, and I think that is where the Church is needed and where it has failed to give support and advice to the couple concerned. The Church has been holding back its knowledge and skills which she should be using to help the couple to cope with their marital problems.

Furthermore, the Church has been avoiding the issue of financial problems. It does not tell the couple about the impact of money in the marriage. It does not teach people how they need to plan carefully and how to spend the money that they have. Some couples enter married life without knowing that they have to tell the other partner exactly what their
income is. I cannot ignore the fact that money very often is the one item that causes tensions and quarrels in marriage. The Church should inform the couple that no marriage sails on smooth waters the whole time. Waves and storms are bound to come. The Church has failed to tell the couples or to prepare them for these quarrels that may arise in their marriage. Most of the couples enter marriage without being aware of differences, disagreements, disputes, disappointments and tensions that they may encounter in marriage. Hence, quarrels and grudges last for a long time and are unresolved.

It is the duty of the Church, and it should not try to avoid it, to prepare and help the couples to do away with grudges as these poison their souls and their love for each other. The Church should know that the couple need to be prepared for marriage and to be supported after the wedding ceremony.

Further area of weakness is that the Church has failed in its theology of marriage especially in explaining the relationship between Church marriage and customary forms of marriage. And it also over stressed the issues of indissolubility and the exclusiveness of sexuality in marriage without providing a convincing explanation.

4.2.2 The insistence on the indissolubility of marriage

Another cause of marital problems is the Church's insistence on indissolubility. In reality, this demand of the Church has made the lives of some a misery. It is a fact that marriage is not always smooth and easy. Unfortunately, sometimes things might be so bad that it becomes impossible for partners to continue living together. Let me take a case whereby a couple got married, having met all the requirements of the Church to get married and live together as husband and wife. A few years later, this couple encounter the problems of marital relationship and
communication. This can come as a result of a husband who is influenced by his friends, who now and then tell him how bad his wife is and how often she is involved in extramarital affairs. Hearing this, the attitude of the husband changes towards the family, especially towards his wife. This goes so far that the husband hits and insults the wife daily. Now, the couple who pronounced love to each other at the wedding feast, practice hatred and separation.

Can the church say that because marriage is meant to be permanent and everlasting that the couple, especially the suffering partner, should remain in that bond because it is meant to be permanent? I know of a touching case. A woman left her husband in search for work in a distant city. Eventually, she neither returned to her husband nor corresponded with him for more than fifteen years. Ultimately, no one knew whether this woman was still alive or not. For how long would the Church expect this man not to get married to another woman because of its insistence on the indissolubility of marriage? The Church has failed in its theology of marriage to recognize the rights of an individual who can suffer unjustly just because there is a religious insistence on the permanence of marriage. The Church should accept that divorce, separation and remarriage exist. The Church must realize that it deals with people who sometimes enter marriage out of ignorance and lack of maturity. And when they experience difficulties and sufferings, some find no solution except to abandon the marriage. They may prefer to remain single while others want to try another partner.

4.2.3 Does sexual intercourse belong exclusively to marriage?

Unfortunately, the Church failed to prove and convince people that sexual intercourse should be regarded as belonging exclusively to marriage. Some people reject the view that sexual intercourse should be restricted to marriage. As a result, there are both married and unmarried people...
practising sexual intercourse outside marriage. The clergy, the highly
intellectual body of people who go through a long period of training, have
not discovered and exhausted all the possible methods of convincing people
of the importance of sexual fidelity within marriage. The most endangered
and disadvantaged group is that of young people. Pre-marital sex has led to
damage in terms of the emotional growth of young people, the spread of
sexually transmitted diseases, forced marriages and family conflicts.

4.2.4 Its failure to support families separated for long periods

This situation, very often, also encourages sexual intercourse outside
marriage. This practice does not only end up with childlessness (especially
when contraceptives are used) for young people at a later stage when they
get married but it also brings forth unwanted children. The children are
unwanted by their mothers because they may be too young to look after
them or because the child is born in the absence of the father who happens to
work far away from home and the child becomes the cause of disharmony
between the husband and the wife. These indeed are the results of the
Apartheid system which pushed people away from their homes in order to
find work. The same system did not make any effort to provide family
homes at these places of work. This implies that men could spend two to
three years without seeing their wives. What did the Church do, practically,
to face this important aspect of social injustice? What did it do to change the
situation? Sometimes it condoned it through silence. These destructive forces
were discussed in chapter one and they have contributed towards the
break-up of the family and with it, the support of the extended family. Thus
the Church has, through its silence or ineffectiveness, failed to support
families. In all these ways the Church has been part of the problem.
4.3 What the church can do to restore the value of marriage

Given the fact that the Church has, in some instances, been part of the problem, what can it do to alleviate the problem of marital breakdown? It is noticeable that once again the Church finds itself in a similar transitional situation. Marriage has, in fact, lost almost all its social supports. Civil law recognizes a relatively wide spectrum of reasons for divorce and the attitude in society as a whole towards the phenomenon of divorce and consequent civil remarriage is characterized not simply by tolerance, but rather by indifference and even approval. It is easy to understand that divorced persons who have contracted a new civil marriages have come to regard it as more or less acceptable behaviour and to believe that they have a right to marry again. Some of those who have been divorced and re-married have experienced human suffering in their first marriage and happiness in the second. On the other hand, others found that divorce and remarriage have led to suffering because they are living contrary to the teaching of the Church, especially where children are involved or because they have not resolved the problems of the first marriage. What, then, ought the Church to do?

The Church must revise and clarify its theology of marriage. The reality is that the Church has been confusing people in its theology of marriage. For example, in its history there was a time when the Church regarded procreation as more important than spousal union in marriage. And now it regards spousal union as more important than procreation. Furthermore, the Church condemned the African forms of marriage even before it could try to understand them. The relevant example would be that of polygamy. People living in polygamy were said to be living in sin. The Church should rethink its theology, especially in dealing with themes such as the permanency or indissolubility of marriage. In its teaching, emphasis must be put on marital fidelity and partnership.
This can take place only if the church can admit its failures of the past with regard to marriage. It has to accept that women are not inferior to men. They are equal as creatures of God but differ in the tasks assigned to them to perform. For example, we cannot expect women to be physically strong like men, or expect men to give birth. Their physical structures are different. But some of the tasks such as house work and earning a wage can be performed by both partners. The Church has previously failed to convince the society that women are not slaves of men. This must be corrected.

The Church must really revise its views regarding women, sexuality and marriage. This is one of the areas where the church has really encountered some failures. Women are not the source of evil and sexuality is not as bad as it is sometimes thought to be. The fact is, women and sexuality are created by God and he pronounced them good. In regulating marriage, the church made too many rules to follow in marriage. Some of these rules I find humiliating and not helpful to the couple. For example, to tell a couple that they should have sexual intercourse only in order to have offspring is humiliating because sexual contact can and does help to strengthen the bond of marriage between husband and wife. Lastly, it must correct the mistake of rating celibate life higher than married life.

4.4 Practical involvement of the Church in restoring the value of marriage

To deal fairly with the issues of marital breakdown, separation and divorce, the Church should first look into a revision of its theology and teaching regarding sexuality in general and marriage in particular. The question one can ask is how can the Church prevent or limit the divorce rate? What method can it use? At present, I think the most effective and appropriate method is to establish pre-marriage courses and marriage enrichment courses after a marriage ceremony and counselling courses for
those who are or have been affected by marital breakdowns. This implies practical involvement on the part of the Church.

The first thing the Church can do, even before one can talk about the pre- and post-marital courses, is to have a general teaching in sermons, Sunday schools and catechism to educate the congregation in matters of marriage. It must counteract the negative aspects of both Western and African cultures. And, hand-in-hand with that, it must promote the positive aspects of both cultures. My analysis of the current position is that its leaders spend too little time with their people. They have only a few hours a week to address their congregation. That is why I stress that, in addition to the giving of homilies, it should establish very strong and influential Sunday schools and catechetical classes as well as bible studies and discipleship classes. In all these areas, the Church should frequently address the issue of marriage.

Furthermore, I cannot deny that most of the marriages we have are neither simply African nor Western because our marriages today are a mixture of Christian, Western and African forms. For this reason, I find it fitting that the Church should analyse marriage. It ought to identify and analyse the positive and negative issues from each culture, so as to help people realise what they can keep or borrow to strengthen and improve their marriages.

As far as I can see, Sunday schools and catechetical classes, bible studies and discipleship classes are the best places in which to prepare our young men and women for marriage. These are areas where the Church can form and inform their consciences. The Church should use the Sunday services and catechetical periods effectively because it is the only time it can have with the great majority of the congregation. People spend most of the time influenced by TV, Radio, Newspapers and the media in general. Friends too, have some influence on each other. Generally
speaking, people spend seven days of the week under the influence of the mass media and friends while only a few hours on a Sunday are left for the Church. Just looking at this set up, one can see how much the Church has to struggle to maintain its influence in the lives of Christians and the society at large.

4.4.1 Pre-marriage courses

I am fully convinced that the young people of today are greatly in need of marriage-preparation guidance courses. One of the reasons for divorce is that women have greater expectations of internal levels of emotional sustenance within the marriage and are not prepared to put up with instances of great insensitivity. We all suffer from feelings of anxiety, depression, mistrust, lack of confidence, fears of being abandoned, pessimism and a lack of initiative. Coming to marriage, we long for an understanding of our wounds and an opportunity to repair the damage. We want our spouse to heal us by giving us encouragement, reassurance, security, confidence and appreciation. Sex is not the only thing in marriage. When couples are so wounded that their mutual needs exceed their emotional resources, the marriage cannot survive. In the majority of marriages, there are complementary resources, and couples provide each other with the confidence, trust and security which is needed and, in some instances, help their partner to overcome problems such as alcoholism, drug abuse and gambling. Marriage is probably the most important source of healing in society. The inability to respond to an individual partner's need is a temptation for one to look elsewhere for a more accommodating partner.

As people grow older and change in their appearance, sexual attraction may be at risk. Our needs change, making the partner we chose at twenty irrelevant at forty. To prevent this one has to be familiar with these patterns of change. This information can be transmitted once again.
by the Church through marriage sermons and also via other teaching opportunities. It is good and advantageous to have a partner who appreciates and facilitates your changes, assisting you to realize your potential to become creative, one who supports you when you fall, helps you when you become sick, all the time understanding and appreciating each successive layer of your being. Someone who is exposed to the majesty and poverty of your personality. Some people say it is boring to be accompanied by the same person for a long period. I think it is more difficult to start from the scratch with a new person. Reliable continuity rather than a restless change is the key to personal and marital growth.

I am convinced that if time and again the Church were to treat marital issues in its sermons, Sunday schools and in catechetical classes, it would be laying a good foundation for pre-marital courses. But specific pre-marital courses are also necessary. This is where the specific areas of marriage can be discussed and understood. For instance, here the participants can speak of the problems that they see and hear married people talk about. Questions such as, why does the Catholic Church preach that there is no divorce, and yet we know people whose marriages ended in divorce and separation? Why is pre-marital sex wrong? How should the couple relate to their friends, the extended family and the wider community? What is it that the couple can do to make their marriage a happy one? Furthermore, the participants can be helped to understand that marriage involves union, fidelity and mutual support. All of these and many other questions can be treated in pre-marital courses. Even trial marriages, childlessness, barrenness and sterility, as well as unfaithfulness, can be topics for discussion. These pre-marital courses should provide people with information and guidance on both the positive and negative aspects of marriage.

From my pastoral experience, I realise that young couples usually enter the married state without being introduced to the issues of finance
and family planning or the role of parents and parents-in-law in their marriage. I find it difficult to understand how marriage can become what it should be if there are no pre-marital courses given under good leadership. In this instance, the Church must train priests and married couples to run these courses. The importance and necessity of the marriage ceremony can be discussed during such courses. The matter and form of the ceremony, and the role of the witnesses, congregation and Church, can be mentioned also. Today, people want to know the reasons for doing or accepting anything. It is unfortunate that because of the lack of pre-marital courses, we have people who enter marital life without knowing the importance of the act of consent and the sex act in marriage. It is time for the Church to stand up and establish as many centres of pre-marital courses as there are parishes. And this can materialise only if the trained faithful take part in them.

I want to emphasise that lay people should be involved in these courses to work with priests or operate on their own where there are not enough priests to serve all the parishes. It is good and helpful for those entering marriage to hear about the experiences of other people. Secondly, I would like them to be involved so that these courses may become the basis of ongoing marital courses. Usually, the congregation faces the problem of starting anew, whenever the priest is transferred or changed. I find this unnecessary because if the lay people have been included in the running of the courses, they can carry on by themselves. They could ask a priest, now and then, from another parish for theological or other explanations that they find too complicated or too difficult to deal with in their courses.

Any course is of no use if it does not have a continuous aspect in it. The Church must start pre-marital courses and make sure that they are permanent. Getting married couples involved in the courses would surely make the courses interesting and enriching. The Church must make use of
the congregation. Every congregation of believers is made up of specialists and educated people who can be of great help in the pre-marital courses.

In order for lay people to be involved in the leadership of pre-marital courses, the Church must provide training courses for the community of believers. People should know that God called us to life and service. We need to work and serve him in our lives and the lives of other people. In this way the faithful will understand why they have to give of their time to help others in the pre-marital courses. The church should, through such courses, help people know that there is growth in life, just as there is growth in the person which will enable growth in their marriages. Furthermore, the Church should establish post-marriage courses to help the newly married couples as discussed below.

4.4.2 Marriage enrichment courses after the marriage ceremony

For the Church to prepare young couples for marriage is not enough. Many problems in marriage begin later when the couple start learning to know each other more deeply. Older couples need to be helped to meet on a regular basis to discuss, debate and learn from one another. With all the social and personal problems faced by families in South Africa today, a very strong support system is needed.

When society is affected by something unpleasant, everybody looks to the government either to blame it or to ask for help. But I agree with the view that "While we feel that the government will have to do something about migrant labour and violence and drugs that have invaded the family life, the Church can make a very important contribution by simply enabling married couples to come together to support one another" (Challenge Magazine No 20 Feb. 1994: 7).
The best known Church organisation in which married couples help and support one another is the "Marriage Encounter organization". The Marriage Encounter weekends give married couples the opportunity to examine their lives together: a time to share their feelings, their hopes, disappointments, joys and frustrations. They can do so openly and honestly in a face to face, heart to heart, encounter with the person they have chosen to live with for the rest of their lives. The emphasis of these Marriage Encounters is on communication between the husband and the wife, who spend a weekend together away from the distractions and the tensions of everyday life, to concentrate on each other. It is not a retreat, nor a marriage clinic, nor group sensitivity course. It is a unique approach aimed at revitalising marriages. This is a time for the couple to be alone together. To rediscover each other and together focus on their relationship for an entire weekend. Every marriage deserves that kind of attention. In fact, whatever organization it might be, what is important is to give people a chance to reflect on the reconstruction of family life. The Church should support and encourage such opportunities for married couples.

This discussion reminds me of the question somebody once asked me: "Does the Church, truly speaking, have a role in marriage?" Let me bring to your notice that marriage is not only the business of the extended families or the wider society. The Church as the community of believers must feel invited into the married life of its members. Marriage affects the life of the Church because many people belong to the Church. That is why I believe so strongly that after the matrimonial celebration, the Church must make every effort to stabilize the marital relationship and to help the married people absorb the shocks that come out of living together. The Church can facilitate the constructive forces such as communication, honesty and commitment by establishing ongoing marriage courses and marriage encounter weekends to give the married couples the opportunity to examine their lives together. The idea is to make the family a viable unit. A Christian reconciliation group could be set up in every Church and
outstation. I talk from experience as this group exists in the Odi District area where I worked as a priest. Many marital problems have been solved there. This group is a helpful source of information and support for anyone dealing with marital difficulties and problems. Another way to support young married couples could be the counselling methods based on "Transactional Analysis." This has been proved to be extremely successful by parish councils in the three Catholic Churches in the Odi District.

Thus, I believe that as many institutions as possible should be involved in trying to restore the dignity of marriage and offer a support base for couples encountering problems. Furthermore, provision should be made to strengthen those marriages that are sound which can provide a support base for those who are experiencing problems. Providing teaching on the positive aspects of marriage can contribute towards restoring the dignity of marriage for all categories - pre-marriage, post-ceremony and marriages in crisis. Institutes of counselling can be of great help to the couples who cannot cope with marital problems or those whose marriages have already broken down.

4.4.3 Crisis counselling

In spite of all the courses that the Church can establish to prepare and help people in marriage, there will still be marriages which experience separation and divorce. I think it would be wise for the church to establish marital crisis courses whereby people can be helped to cope with their situation. In fact, this reminds me of one widow in one of my parishes who made a passing remark that they are never given any chance in the parish to show that they exist and can do something as divorcees and widows. She felt that they are neglected.

My reply to her was that the church does not want to expose them to the whole congregation and to the whole of society. She rejected that
completely. Reflecting on that quick discussion, I felt very strongly that it was true; very often we talk about the married couples and do not mention single parents, or divorcees and widows. From that discussion I learnt something. She taught me that the Church should establish marital crisis courses for those who are going through a divorce and also take care of those who may or may not remarry. It can also draw on the experience of its single parents, divorcees and widows.

I must admit that I now come to the most painful of all marriage problems. Divorce is the final culmination of other marriage problems. It is the final stage brought about by a number of factors. The couple deciding on divorce think that they are solving their problem but, in so doing, they precipitate many others. For example, divorce causes problems for the children who have already been disturbed by the parents' unhappiness. This can cause youths to become delinquents and may also lead to teenage pregnancies.

Besides these problems there is also the possibility of financial insecurity. It might be very difficult for one or both of the partners to make ends meet financially. There might have been total financial dependence on the salary of one partner by the other. Life can become miserable. There might be a temptation for self reproach. A course of self rehabilitation, that is self acceptance, can be healing. The chance to begin anew exists. After all, all the factors preceding divorce are human factors, created by one or both of the marriage partners or their relatives and associates. As human factors, they can be resolved, by means of the marital courses mentioned above.

There is no doubt that people who have gone through marital breakdown are affected in one way or another, and they need the presence and help of the Church. I think the church can help them by establishing marital-crisis courses where education, counselling and support could be
given. The couple can be helped to realise what led to their divorce. In so doing, the Church may be able to establish a strong foundation of forgiveness and reconciliation in marriage. The partners may remarry their former partners after understanding the cause of the divorce and experiencing the support of the Church. I believe that in marital-crisis courses, the Church can in some instances make the dead marriage regain its life. The relationship which has become a stinking grave, a hell of fire where nothing good can exist, the marriage relationship which has become a heap of misery and sorrow, can be changed into a happy marriage and family life: one where the members grow and are fulfilled.

To sum up, I agree that the Church must ensure that it spends more time with its people, and gets involved in the lives of its people. It should also make its theology of marriage clear and effective in establishing the above mentioned courses. But, prior to that, in order to have constructive and meaningful courses, the Church should analyse itself. In other words, it must put its own house in order before it tries to help those who are in need of the above mentioned marriage courses.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the involvement of the individual persons, the society and the Church in marital breakdowns.

I have elaborated on the contribution of a personal decline in morality to marital breakdown. Persons in marriage must accept that indulgence in what is morally wrong harms the marital relationship. Materialism, pornography and incompatibility of individual weaknesses have hazardous consequences. They must be fought at all costs. An excessive desire for money, for example, can be a cause of marital collapse.
Coupled with these are the areas of which the Church has been part of the problem. The Church refused to encourage the positive elements of traditional African approaches to marriage which could have formed the basis for a Christian marriage. It has also not clarified its theology in marriage. It has failed to give authentic teaching and has not made its presence felt throughout the various stages of married life. It's role has been to bless the marriage and then to disappear. Therefore couples have been left unsupported by the Church.

Further, the structures in society encourage permissiveness. Sex outside marriage gets support from the parents by encouraging procreation outside marriage. Instead of teaching children to abstain from sex, their children enjoy sex in their own homes where their own parents seldom disturbing or interfere with their children’s sexual activities.

Suggestions have been offered to how the Church can respond to these problems. It has to re-shape its theological structures in relation to marriage. Once it has done that, it must make itself available for the practical prevention of aspects that could harm the marriage relationship. With vigilance the Church has to come up with solutions to redeem broken marriages. It must offer courses that cover the whole institution of marriage. Here I am talking about pre-marriage courses, marriage enrichment courses after the marriage ceremony and marriage counselling as the way the Church can be practically involved in restoring and promoting marriage life. Above all the Church has to accept that marital breakdown exists and it must address the issue of divorce in a more acceptable way rather than simply insisting on marriage indissolubility and permanence. In all of these the Church should make an effort to understand the causes of marital breakdowns in the African context. The introduction and establishment of a variety of courses including marriage encounter sessions over weekends constitute a stepping stone in the right direction.
In conclusion, I suggest that the Church must reflect on the nature and purpose of marriage, especially because it is still in a good position to promote and restore the dignity of marriage. I believe that it is the duty of the Church to strive towards a clearer and deeper awareness of itself and its mission in the world, and of the treasury of truth of which it is heir and custodian. By doing this it will find a more revealing light, new energy and increased joy in the fulfilment of its own mission, and discover better ways of augmenting the effectiveness and fruitfulness of its contacts with the world. For the Church does indeed belong to the world, even though distinguished from it by its own unique characteristics (see Ecclesiam Suam 1979: 11). This act of self-examination on the part of the Church will help it realize its mistakes and come up with constructive solutions to the marriage problems we encounter not only in Odi but throughout the country, indeed, throughout Africa.
CONCLUSION

Marriage in the Odi district today is a fascinating but bewildering subject. This is partly because so much of a marriage relationship takes place in private. Its character varies from couple to couple. It is extremely complex, and it has been subjected to a great deal of change in recent years.

It is a fact that whether or not the marriage is a legally constituted one, there is usually public recognition of its existence; the couple’s relatives, friends and acquaintances know that they are married or living together. But beyond this fact, it is probable that most people will know only a little about the relationship between the two people involved: for example, what they talk about when they are together, even whether they talk at all or what they say about their sexual relationship. Marital problems will usually only explode into public view when something abnormal occurs and outsiders gain information through the couple’s need to talk or seek help. Of course, some marriages are less private than others, but it is generally true in our society that most of the interaction between a wife and a husband is carried on in their own home and away from the public gaze. They will not usually discuss with other people the intimate details of their lives together.

If one wants to understand other people’s marriages, one usually has to go through a vast array of tiny clues, with most of the major pieces missing. It may therefore be hard to reach an answer to the question of what a particular marriage is like, for one will know little about any marriage except that of which one is either a close observer or a participant.

Marriage is also a complex phenomena because there are different married life styles. We have all heard of marriages in which the husband
dominates, or of marriages dominated by the wife, or of the couple who are always arguing but appear to be quite happy with their married life, or even of those who seem to lead quite separate lives. Explanations of why marriages have the character they do have, are complex and varied. There are a variety of cultural, structural, psychological, and religious explanations.

Finally, of course, marriage behaviour is changing. What makes this bewildering is the difficulty of predicting what will happen in the future. The three main directions of marital change which are observable in Odi are: more cohabitation; more symmetry between the roles of husband and wife; and a greater incidence of divorce. It is upon this context that this study was based.

The aim of the study was to present an ethical analysis of marriage relationships among Tswana speaking Catholics in the Odi District. What urged and motivated me to do this study was the increased marital breakdown in African societies, especially in the Odi District. Some of these problems result from the confusion of living according to African and Western cultures simultaneously. This has been confirmed by a succession of couples who visited me and told me how difficult or impossible their married lives were. Most of them had the feeling that nothing could be done to make the situation better except separating or divorcing. Christians are also affected by these causes of marital breakdown because of their existential context. The Catholic Church does not allow divorce. Therefore, I was forced by this situation of the high incidence of divorce and separation to examine traditional African forms of marriage in relation to Christian theologies of marriage. This is due to the fact that in traditional African marriage the rate of divorce was very low while modern society experiences a high rate of separation and divorce. It is disappointing because one expects the Christian tradition to have a low rate of divorce and separation. In this investigation, emphasis has been placed largely upon
the changing values in relation to marriage from African traditional marriage to modern systems of marriage. This dissertation has been able to show that today marital needs are conflicting with other societal or group expectations, such as, personality traits, changes in social structural factors, or in social values, making it more difficult for people to achieve the goals and values expected of a married couple. No one can deny that the rate of divorce and separation is increasing daily, so much so that most of the young adults prefer not to commit themselves to marriage. It would appear that there are many misconceptions, misunderstandings and confusions as to what marriage is all about.

Chapter one outlines the African traditional forms of marriage that helped to make marriage permanent. First of all, the organization, preparation and celebration of a marriage involved the two families and the community at large. This was because the two families and community felt obliged to support the newly married couple. The involvement of the extended relatives of the two families became relevant especially when things went wrong. They had an important role to play so as to prevent the marriage from breaking down. This stress on the extended family and the community explains why the practice of polygamy was found to be good and acceptable in African society. Polygamy served to ensure the prosperity of the extended family and it also rescued a childless union. The sexual needs of the man during lactation were satisfied through the polygamous structures. This prevented promiscuous relationships and prostitution.

It is difficult to talk of traditional African marriage today. The reason for this is the impact of modern society on traditional African marriage. Today's structures are highly influenced by socio-economic factors. This is manifested through industrialization and the advent of a cash economy. Moreover, religion and politics made their presence felt in African societies. As a result, gender roles have also changed. Consequently, there are African people who reject traditional forms of
marriage. They claim to be practising Christians, yet they do not get married in the Church because they are afraid of the Christian regulations governing marriage. By avoiding both traditional and Christian forms of marriage, they opt for a civil marriage that opens the possibility of a relatively easy divorce. In all these ways, the stability of traditional African marriages has been undermined.

Chapter two starts off by defining marriage. It outlines different definitions, especially Christian definitions of marriage. It states that marriage is a union which legally and morally should bind the two people together for life, and exclude intimate relationships with other people. This chapter goes on to discuss the historical development of the Christian concept of marriage. Christians have wondered whether marriage should be primarily defined in terms of either procreation or the intimacy and union of the couple.

The constituent elements of marriage were found to include: an inward commitment, public consent, the wedding night, partnership and fidelity. Inward commitment implies a total giving of oneself to the other person unconditionally. The couple must include and express their determination to live as husband and wife till death separates them. This inward commitment is expressed in the form of a public act which involves the articulation of the marriage vows in the presence of witnesses. This public consent is consummated by the sex act itself. Partnership implies that marriage is a contract between two people, man and a woman who have freely pronounced their vows. Promises made by both sides are expected to be carried out. Fidelity is necessitated by the fact that marriage must both encourage growth and be permanent. It is an exclusive relationship between two people, a man and a woman. Under the above circumstances, marital indissolubility should be the goal or norm under which marriage should operate.
I came to the conclusion that considering the African traditional view of marriage and Christian understandings of marriage, marriage should be a permanent relationship. Permanence and indissolubility are right and good but the problem arises when they are made into absolutes. The Church should adopt the attitude of Jesus as regards observance of the Sabbath law. In all fairness a human being was not made for marriage but marriage for human beings. Where persons have made a genuine efforts, circumstances beyond human control should not be tolerated in the interest of maintaining the permanence and indissolubility of marriage. The difficulty our modern society faces is that divorce and remarriage exist. Only when couples understand and practise what marriage is really meant to involve will the number of divorces be scaled down. Marriage is a very complex and complicated issue, and both society and the Church need to influence marriage in a positive way instead of influencing it in a negative way.

In chapter three I discuss understandings and practices from both the African tradition and Christian theologies of marriage which should be stressed in our modern context. An attempt is made to extract from both African and Christian theology (particularly Catholic theology) those elements of marriage that are compatible, such as the involvement of the community and the extended family in marriage. This means that the parents, relatives and the community ought to work towards supporting the couple to keep their marriage going. Traditionally, a marriage was regarded a contract between two families rather than between two individuals. This stabilized the new household. This approach should be supported by the Church, which should work with the community and not oppose it. Further, the Church should understand the importance of lobola. This is symbolic and seals the contract. It empowers the community to continue to help the young couple even after the marriage ceremony.
The couple-to-be must be enlightened about the danger of disregarding their parents and the community or else there will be no one to turn to in times of trouble. I believe that, concerning today’s marital problem, the Church stands a better chance to advise than the community because it has anthropologists, social scientists and marriage counsellors with the required expertise within its ranks. It must teach young people discipline and it should prepare them for marriage. It should continue to support them after the marriage ceremony. In its teaching, the Church must emphasize the role it plays as well as the significance of accepting the role of the community. These two communities, the Church and society, should work together from the beginning. In particular, their guidance in helping young people make the correct choice is of vital importance. The unfortunate thing about the involvement of the extended family is that the missionaries worked hard to destroy traditional arrangements. They did not want to recognize the values involved. As a result, modern couples ignore their parents, their extended family and the society at large and often end up in severe marital difficulties.

As far as the act of consent is concerned, I have stated that the matter of public consent is treated differently by the African community. The Church makes room for it during the marriage ceremony after scrutinizing both the man and the woman privately. In the African tradition the act of consent took place between the representatives of the two families, after each family had satisfied itself that their son or daughter was in agreement with their choice. The African approach whereby the choice of spouse is made through the help of the family lays the foundation for permanence. It makes sure the person has chosen the right partner. Therefore the Church should support this wider understanding of the act of consent.

The act of consent is related to the sex act. I have shown that after people have committed themselves to a marital contract they have to be
sexually open to each other. No one can say, "no", to the sex act without a good reason as this act seals their union as husband and wife. The stance of both the Church and the African traditions is that sex should be restricted to marriage. Both treat it seriously. It is a holy, sacred and intimate act. Historically, people have not felt free to discuss it, especially where children were involved. Unfortunately, in today's world this taboo about sex misinforms the youth. They do not maintain that sex should be practised in marriage only and, because adults avoid discussing it, young people become victims of ignorance. Even teachers have been avoiding discussions on this matter. Therefore, I think the Church should encourage parents, institutions of learning and its teachers to discuss this aspect thoroughly to safeguard the youth.

What does marriage as a community of love and covenant offer? It offers love at a deep level. This love is exclusive, it is only found in marriage. Giving oneself fully to the other person implies a lot of self denial. One has to devote one's life to one's partner. One has to become highly sensitive to the needs of the other. It is the fulfilment of love (agape). This sex act singles husband and wife out as a couple, a unit, never to be separated. From this outline one can see that sex outside marriage becomes meaningless, indeed, destructive. Not only to the couple, but to the whole family. The reason is that where one parent is missing love cannot be fulfilled. Children need both their parents. This is one issue in relation to which the people of Odi experience a severe crisis. Many children are born outside wedlock and are not properly parented. As I explained earlier, in a compound, parents do not disturb but would rather encourage the sexual relationship of their children. This state of affairs is directly contrary to both African tradition and Christian theology which both encourage sexual intercourse in marriage only.

There are also some elements of African tradition that are incompatible with the teaching of the Church. These include polygamy and
the levirate. Urbanization has meant that it is difficult, indeed, inadvisable, for people to have large families. The jealousy that co-wives may encounter, as well as the higher expectations of marital unity may exclude the possibility of polygamy. Today women cannot be owned by men as was the case in the past because women work and earn salaries like men. This enables them to own land and property. The status of women has changed. Another area of incompatibility relates to the levirate. While the Christian tradition accepts that widows should be taken care of, it definitely does not condone the idea of the husband’s brother taking over all the marital rights including the sex act and the resulting offspring. The Church in this regard considers the partner, either the man or the woman, as being free to choose to remain unmarried or to remarry whomsoever is found to be appropriate. I would say that in today’s world, the levirate is an outdated practice.

From the elements discussed above, I can now conclude that there are elements which can be considered good and bad and those that are right and wrong as regards marriage. These elements are found in both African and Christian traditions. The Church should reconsider some practical elements of African tradition which have upheld marriage and should try to re-employ them. The African tradition should also try to see elements that need to be improved in order to continue to strengthen marriage. Outdated ideas such as polygamy and levirate must be discarded where possible. The response of some to the preaching of the Church has been one of dismay and incomprehension. Their incomprehension resulted from the fact that some missionaries' presentation of Christianity was strictly culture-bound and has therefore failed to meet the needs of the African people. A solution will have to be found by African Christians themselves who will have to re-interpret the Biblical teaching on marriage. They should interpret it in such a way that it will reflect more closely both the Biblical message and their own cultural reality.
In chapter four I have elaborated on the contribution of the personal and social decline in morality to marital breakdown. Materialism, pornography and individual weakness harm the marital relationship. The Church has also contributed to the problem by refusing to accommodate those traditional elements which have proved positive in sustaining marriages. Further, I indicated that society shares part of the blame because it encourages permissiveness. Sex outside marriage in today's world seems to be supported by some parents, thereby allowing procreation outside marriage. The Church's teaching concerning marriage has been pretty vague and it does not help the couple after the wedding. The Church's rigidity that people hold to marriage for the sake of permanence and indissolubility does not share Christ's noble understanding that the human person must be above legalistic prescriptions. The Church's teaching regarding marriage cannot ignore human sin and weaknesses.

What can be done? The Church has to accept that marital breakdown is a reality and it must be addressed by a new theology of marriage, especially on issues such as the indissolubility of marriage. It also has to correct its traditional practice of regarding women as inferior to men. The Church should also do something to curb the massive escalation of marital breakdown and divorce. The consequences of marital breakdown are alarming. These include lunacy, drug addiction, suicide attempts, sexually transmitted diseases, teenage delinquency and pregnancy. These problem spill into the educational institutions where it can be seen that most children have come from broken families.

Based on this study of marriage in the Odi district it can be concluded that there is an increasing call for the development of an African Christian understanding of the theology of marriage. The Church has got to define its theology of marriage more clearly. It must offer sound teaching that can be imparted at different levels to its people.
Another area which calls for attention is that of marriage courses. Marriage courses are important because they provide a place in which the couple can be formed and informed about marriage. In pre-marriage courses the couple is made aware of the demands of marriage. They are also helped to develop means of counteracting possible problems and difficulties that might arise in their marriage. It is here, too, where their expectations are purified and made realistic so as to avoid disappointments and frustration.

Moreover, still after the marriage ceremony the couple need courses where they find help in time of difficulties or where they can be together with other couples to share about their marriage experiences. That is why there is a need for marriage enrichment courses after the marriage ceremony. It should be possible for couples to meet at places other than home, definitely away from everything including the children whenever possible. It is also necessary to establish institutes of counselling for those couples who have undergone the pains and sufferings of separation and divorce. The people who are divorced or widowed need special attention because they have been deeply wounded.

All these analyses and suggestions are put forward in the hope that they will be taken up and developed by others for the enrichment of African Christian marriage. In this way we can enable the Christian faith to take root in the African continent as whole and, particularly, in the Odi district. May God enable the Tswana Catholic couples who have formed the basis of this study to experience healing and growth in their marriages and family life.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. BOOKS


B. PAPERS, REPORTS, DOCUMENTS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND BIBLE STUDIES


The Umtata Women's Theology Group's booklet on *Towards a theology of sexuality* (first three booklets).


