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MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE IN AFRICA MILIEU

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Abstract: *This review aims to visualize Marriage and Family Life in Africa. The study further examined the traditional structure of marriage, Marriage and Love in the African Culture, Divorce, Marriage and procreation, and the education of children. It is undeniable that marriage and family institutions are in a serious crisis in most African countries. Significant changes in family structure are material evidence of this affirmation. The lack of interest in marriage and family life on the part of many youths, the high rate of divorce, the usage of contraceptives and sterilization, the increase in cohabitation, the singlehood, the same-sex parents, the management of children of divorced families are challenges arising from the state in which marriage and family life find itself today. As if these were insufficient, the difficult economic climate renders both individual and collective efforts to pull marriage and family life institutions out of their corruption very difficult. This highlights the relevance of this research article to contribute to the challenging project of saving marriage and family life from its severe crisis.*

Keywords: Marriage. Marriage and Family, Africa

1. Introduction

The congress of Verona, this year made us know that the engagement to restore marriage and family institution means engagement in fighting, both individuals and structures, who have vowed not to listen to another message than theirs. Carlo Sabilia, vice secretary to the Italian interior ministry, confirms this challenge when he says at the just ended Verona world congress on the family that: «We cannot go back to conceive the family as in the Middle Ages: we are to hold on to those rights we have won. Each of us loves as he wants and manages family as he believes: What is important is that government gives each of these views its support». Botha, F., Booyens, F., & Wouters, E. (2018). But there is still the assurance that many other people have a more positive attitude towards debating marriage and family life and its related matters in peaceful dialogue. Federico Sboarina,

mayor of Verona, confirms this hope in his comment on Carlo Sabilia's relativist reaction on the same platform as he says: «it remains understandable [...] that at every given opportunity to talk about the family, about children, about the protection of life, these topics become causes for the clash, for verbal aggression, for incapacity to dialogue». Knijn, T., & Patel, L. (2018). It is clear that the marriage and family institution has become a real battlefield for ideologies. What is the church's reaction to these various challenges?

2. Traditional and New Family Structure

In Africa, though modernism gradually influences the culture, traditional family structure is still present in many areas. The traditional family here means father, mother, and children. It can also mean: a widow or widower, their spouse, and their children. Children may be those belonging to both of them as they came together, plus those, one or

both of them brought from their previous relationship. Both cases are known as nuclear families. A family comprised of: a father, mother, children, grandmother and father, uncles, aunts, cousins, etc., is referred to as extended family. These models of family resist social changes because a society itself protects them. Social rules and regulations discourage any attitude or behaviour that tends to harm their peace and harmony. Extended families' periodic meetings (Easter or Christmas periods) are meant for reuniting African families. Children born in the diaspora are introduced to the larger family on those occasions. Cousins know each other, and young members get to know their relatives at home. Like in the Jewish culture, the concept of cousin is not real. Cousins know themselves as brothers and sisters, and so also, they call each other. Selwaness, I., & Krafft, C. (2021).

3. Marriage and Love in the African Culture

In the past, the common practice as far as partner selection is concerned was arranged marriage. This practice though still existing in a few areas, does not enjoy any more good patronage in Africa. Socio-cultural changes in marriage and family life in Africa had generated another practice that, to a large extent, takes care of criticism arising from both arranged and love marriages.

The new trend in many parts of Africa is that parents allow their sons and daughters to choose their "soul mate." But they recommend that the choice is brought to the family for appreciation and approval. So, you may have satisfied your emotional and physical compatibility issues in choosing your partner. By bringing your choice to your family for appreciation and approval, you may have equally allowed parents to do their background checks for security and stability. This model is the most practised today in many parts of

Africa. Potential brides and grooms who adhere to this model usually achieve more stability in their marriages. The patronage of this model and the value African culture placed on marriage and family life make the rate of divorce in many parts of Africa very low. Here, love before and after a marriage has been given ample room, and it is left with the couple to make it grow. From courtship to marriage, marital love is guided by social norms that guarantee its growth and security. These norms carry the concept of emotional, spiritual, and sexual discipline with them. Parents are expected in their role as educators to prepare and introduce their children to this culture. Every good marriage should follow social norms to be recognized. African Culture looks down on creating family without performing traditional marriage rites because it doesn't promote family integration as it does not confer standard-family title recognition. People who go against established social norms are naturally awarded with lower family social status and seen as irresponsible adults. Ahinkorah, B. O. (2021).

In a typical Ethiopian traditional family, education is planned and directed according to gender in preparation for future societal expectations. Girls are meticulously trained to possess all the necessary qualities that project them as girls and women from respectable families in the future. Side by side with their training to become mothers and transmitters of cultural values, they are particularly accompanied to be chaste until they marry. Men, on the other hand are trained to become, even at a very young age, contributors to the productive economic goals of the family and society. In this journey, marriage is not supposed to be their early preoccupation because society wants them first to acquire capacity and capability.

4. Divorce

In Ghana, Togo, Benin, and many other countries in Africa, the rate of divorce is not yet alarming. The interest in marriage and family life is still high among the youths. Youth are embracing marriage and family life as the ordinary thing to do, with special reference to young teachers, nurses and midwives, and security forces. The traditional marriage is a necessary rite one has to perform before being allowed to marry. In other words, African Culture looks down on creating a family without performing traditional marriage rites because it doesn't promote family integration as it does not confer standard-family title recognition. People who go against established social norms are naturally awarded with lower family social status and seen as irresponsible adults, as we have said. Osuji, G. E., & Oluoch-Suleh, E. (2021). As much as they regularize marriage, these social norms also serve as marriage protectors. Traditional marriage process regulations have an in-built mechanism for marital conflicts resolutions. The extended family has within itself many "courts of appeal" which are hardly exhausted without a peaceful solution. But again, the performance of the traditional marriage rite gives the right to access these opportunities. In other words, the family structure or system must recognize the family officially before offering it official services.

Another factor that guarantees family security against divorce is the stigma society attributes to divorced families. And the effect of this stigma does not limit itself only to the couple but also to their respective parents, relatives, and close friends. The shame or its weight makes many avail themselves to the reconciliation process without hesitation. In the absence of figures from the civil offices, we use credible information available at Accra ecclesiastical tribunal. In Ghana (Africa), the

ecclesiastical tribunal of Accra province, comprising: the archdiocese of Accra, four dioceses, and an apostolic vicariate receives only 20 to 25 cases of annulment a year. These figures look relatively insignificant and confirm the fact that the situation is not yet alarming in Africa. But no one can feel secure, knowing the power of globalization. It is important that, while discussing divorce, some of its evident causes be mentioned.

5. Marriage and Procreation

In a report from UNESCO on family, we read: Traditionally, children are loved and highly valued basically for two main reasons. Firstly, they ensure the continuation of the genealogical line common with all the families. They are also a means of security insurance for old age. Couples without children are pitied by their neighbours. Barrenness is a disaster. Infertile women take it as a curse or punishment from God. A childless woman would feel guilty about her inability to give birth to a baby. Her neighbours, especially the relatives of her husband, would frown upon her and even reject her. They will nag the husband to take another woman who could give him a child. He usually complies with the wishes of his relatives and friends. He either divorces the infertile wife or keeps her for labour on a farm.

Secondly, in rural areas, children represent economic assets. Children contribute to the production process in various ways. Older children take care of the younger ones. They serve as sentinels against birds and wild animals which destroy crops. They herd cattle. They go on errands. They assist their mothers in the collection of firewood and fetching water from distant places. Depending upon their sex, they assist either their fathers or their mothers. Traditionally one of the criteria by which the prestige or status of the family in the community is evaluated is by the number of

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children it has. Above all, children are valued because they give a decent burial to their parents. Anakpo, G., & Kollamparambil, U. (2021).

This Ethiopian concept reflects the entire African perspective on the importance of childbearing to a large extent. Children are assets for the family and for society. Both family and society glorify families with children and discriminate against those who do not have. Families without children suffer humiliation and rejection. To a large extent, African culture does not receive the event of childlessness with joy and, for that reason, does not react to it kindly. Women suffer more because society attributes the blame to them. The cause of childlessness is almost never suspected from the side of the man. The man can never be sterile unless he is declared impotent. Many a time, women rejected and divorced on the ground of infertility give birth when they remarry. Marriage without children in many African cultures is not a successful one. It gives room, often, for many superstitious interpretations. Sujee, Z. (2021).

Children in Africa are a working force as they participate in almost every productive activity in the family. Alone or together with their parents, they go to a farm, to the river or on the sea to fish, to the market for trading, to their parents' workshops to help. In partaking in the activities their parents do for a living, they learn those activities for their livelihood in the future. They could securely take care of themselves and their old parents when they become adults. Through these activities, children contribute to growing the economic capacity of the family. Most of them help their parents pay their school fees, their agreement fees to learn a trade, etc. In cases where parents are working in big cities, one or two children are sent to school in the village to take care of their grandparents while schooling. They fetch water for

them, cook for them, etc. They accompany them to the hospital for regular check-ups when the need arises.

6. Education of Children

Culture values the education of children as much as feeding them. A child in an African context is the property of the society, the clan, the extended family, as well as the nuclear family. In typical traditional areas, the family structure gives more power to the extended family over the child than his parents. Uncles and aunts have a stronger voice in the child's life than parents. Though this reality is gradually fading away in urban areas, it is felt strongly in some important moments or stages of the child's life. Uncles and aunts play a "first bench role" in outdooing and naming ceremonies, traditional marriages, settling marital disputes, etc. These important ceremonies make them very present in the child's education process. The education of the African child is, according to culture, a societal affair. Anybody can correct the African child outside his nuclear family. Though changes in culture are making this traditional education model a bit difficult in some areas, the concept still remains a cultural reality in many places. But that is not to say that culture here is not confronted with challenges.

Social media are the first challenges seriously militating against the education of children. Globalization has reduced the world to a small village. Through social media, African children can watch children from any other parts of the world. A tendency of conformism generated by images and ideologies communicated on social media makes the education of children very challenging in many parts of Africa today. The concept of human rights, not been well understood, puts parents before an attitude of the rebellion of some children towards them. Sociologists suggest a new

pedagogy for the education of the new generation of children. McEwen, H. (2021).

One of the elements of the new pedagogy sociologists mention is the availability of parents at home to accompany their children. In Ghana and most of the African countries, weekends are not free for family social business. Three weekends out of four are constantly spent either on funerals or weeding. Despite their goodwill, many parents find themselves in a difficult situation they cannot do anything about. This drastically reduces family members' availability to family interactions and dialogue. Though it is true that each family member, in one way or the other, suffers the consequences of this communication gap, children are the greatest losers. They have less access to their parents and, for that matter, less formation opportunity. Allan, M. M., Bridget, M. N., Khathutshelo, M., Graduate, M., & Zwivhuya, M. (2021). This obstacle is aggravated with work and related issues; namely, work instability and inadequate salaries. Where one or both of these elements are militating against the welfare of the family, parents go in for some extra job outside their normal working hours or during weekends. And the non-availability of formators will definitely produce fewer results. In other words, the absence of parents makes children's education ineffective.

7. Conclusion

It is undeniable now that marriage and family institutions are in a serious crisis. Significant changes in family structure are material evidence of this affirmation. The lack of interest in marriage and family life on the part of many youths, the high rate of divorce, the usage of contraceptives and sterilization, the increase in cohabitation, singlehood, same-sex parents, and the management of children of divorced families are challenges arising from the state in which marriage

and family life find themselves today. As if these were not sufficient, the difficult economic climate renders both individual and collective efforts to pull marriage and family life institutions out of their corruption very difficult. All this highlights the relevance of this work as a contribution to the challenging project of saving marriage and family life from its serious crisis.

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