

**CHRISTIAN SERVICE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE**

**Department of Theology**



**THE ISSUE OF DIVORCE AMONG CHRISTIANS IN KUMASI AND THE CHURCH'S  
RESPONSE: A STUDY AMONG OF SELECTED CHURCHES IN THE KUMASI  
METROPOLIS**

**DISSERTATION**

**BY**

**AGNES ODOI**

**JULY, 2015**

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RESPONSE: A STUDY OF SOME SELECTED CHURCHES IN THE KUMASI  
METROPOLIS

BY

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A Dissertation submitted to Christian Service University College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Master of Arts in Christian Ministry with Management.

JULY, 2015

## DECLARATION

I, Odoi Agnes do hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own original research, except for sections for which references have been duly made, and to the best of my knowledge, no part of it has been presented to this University College or any other institution for the award of a degree.

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## **DEDICATION**

To my darling husband Rev. Foster Odoi for his love and undaunted support towards my education. God through you has made me who I am. I love you darling Foster.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

|        |   |   |
|--------|---|---|
| KMA    | - | Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly              |
| DOVVSU | - | Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit |
| OT     | - | Old Testament                             |
| NT     | - | New Testament                             |

## **ABSTRACT**

Against the background that the rate of divorce continues to soar high even in our Churches, a qualitative approach was used to examine the issue among Christians in the Kumasi Metropolis and the church's response to it. In all, fourteen people including five divorcees, both male and female, five married men and women, and four counselors, all from the Grace Baptist Church, Amakom were interviewed. Findings revealed that the rate of divorce is on the ascendency and it is prevalent among the young couples. Also, immaturity on the part of partner, infidelity, maltreatment or physical abuse, monetary issues, ex-boy-girl friend reunion, incompatibility, family interference, misunderstanding of marriage, "Borger" marriages, and the issue of sex are the major factors contributing to the alarming rate of divorce. It was also revealed that stigmatization, children dropping out of school, prostitution, armed robbery, madness, premature death, street children and juvenile delinquency, child abuse and financial difficulties are some of the effects of divorce on both partners and children. It was realized that the church allocated three to six month for premarital counseling, there was no availability of post - marital counseling, teachings on marriage are heard from the pulpit only during wedding ceremonies or annual family life week celebration, and there is no programme for divorcees. Meanwhile, deacons or deaconesses who are committed to the vision and goals of the church are accessed and taken through training to become marriage counselors. It was realized that the Church has been hit by the issue of divorce and some marriages have ended up in divorce while others are also facing serious marital challenges. It is being encouraged that marriage counselors should be well equipped to better deal with marriage issues. Also, Churches must devote time to teach on

marriage and educate people on issues related to sex. The church should also institute post-marital counseling to help identify and solve a potential issue that could lead to divorce.

## CHAPTER ONE

### GENERAL INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background to the study

According to John Stott, marriage is in all societies a recognized and regulated human institution but not a human invention. Christian teachings on marriage affirm that marriage is God's idea not human.<sup>1</sup> He further argues that,

The biblical revelation identifies that God purposefully instituted marriage for the mutual society, help and comfort that one ought to have of the other both in prosperity and adversity, the procreation of children and their upbringing in an environment of love and discipline, and for reciprocal commitment of self-giving love which finds its natural expression in sexual union or becoming 'one flesh'.<sup>2</sup>

The purposes for which God instituted marriage were all established at creation and must be seen as God's provision for the institution of marriage. God designed marriage and the family to ensure that the world He created becomes a place of hope, happiness, love, friendship and peace. This makes marriage a vital establishment for a person's happiness and contentment in life. The Christian view of marriage is a lifelong commitment.

The beauty of marriage begins when a man and a woman fall in love and make preparation to live together as a husband and a wife. At this point in their lives, both put in much effort to make their purposes fulfilled. Unfortunately, as the case maybe now, a marriage which began with tender love and rich expectations now lies in ruins. The experience of divorce is very devastating with its challenges. It violates God's will, frustrates His purposes, and brings to a husband and

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<sup>1</sup>John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, (London: Marshall Pickering, 1999), 319

<sup>2</sup>Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, 319.

wife the pains of rejection, disillusion, guilt and the children of the marriage if there are any become vulnerable after divorce.

Divorce is a means whereby a legal marriage is dissolved publicly and the participants are freed from further obligations of the matrimonial relationship.<sup>3</sup> Divorce has become an issue in our society as a result of the many consequences it brings on the parties involved, the children and the society at large. More than just affecting the immediate family, divorce can have a profoundly negative effect on society as a whole. Despite the sufferings accompanying divorce, the rate of divorce continues to be high. The wide range of negative effects is a drain on our society as a whole and the costs attached to them go far beyond just financial expenditure.

Statistics from the Greater Accra Head Office of Legal Aid Ghana indicates that at least, 40% of marriages registered annually in the region break up within a period of fourteen (14) months. Similar figures have also been recorded in other Assemblies nationwide.<sup>4</sup> Cases of divorce have become so rampant and widespread, even in Christian marriages, some Men and Women of God are not spared. Despite the series of counseling sessions that are held for 'would be' couples by their churches, divorce is still on the increase.

Records from the Kumasi metropolis as disclosed by Mr. Samuel OpongMintah, the registrar at the Circuit Court KMA was that between July 2013 and November 2014, as many as 665 cases of dissolution of marriages from the courts were recorded. This is the state in which the institution of marriage has found itself in the Kumasi Metropolis.

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<sup>3</sup>J. D.Douglas, Merrill C. Tenney (eds), *New International Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids:1987), 279

<sup>4</sup>Accra Metropolitan Assembly. (2008). *A.M.A records high divorce cases and low marriage registrations*. Retrieved from <http://allafrica.com/stories/200801150685.html>

## 1.2 Problem statement

In spite of the suffering involved in divorce, the rate of divorce continues to soar high even in our Churches. There is no single and simple answer to the question of why marriages do not survive the ‘better or worse’, and the reasons for divorce vary from one couple to another. In an extensive review of factors that account for divorce around the world, Lowenstein, identified various factors, including women’s independence; marriage too early and arranged marriages; economic factors; poor intellectual, educational, and social skills; liberal divorce laws; sexual factors leading to incompatibility; role conflicts; alcoholism and substance abuse or risk-taking behaviour; differences between the partners leading to acrimony; religious factors; attitudes toward divorce; and many other factors. <sup>5</sup>No marriage is problem-free. Some endure the ups and downs while others unfortunately fall to one of the very many reasons for divorce.

The lawyer in charge of marriage and divorce in the Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly (KMA) asserted that there has been a vast increase in the rate of divorce in Kumasi and the highest percentage is in Christian marriages. <sup>6</sup>

Today, marriages are no longer as stable as they used to be in our churches. There are indications that divorce rates have the potential to become a public health problem in Ghana. <sup>7</sup>There is an assertion that the family is the nucleus of society therefore the society becomes unstable when the family structure is shaken. It is against this backdrop that the researcher seeks to assess the rate of divorce among Christian marriages in the Kumasi Metropolis and to see the response of the church to the issue.

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<sup>5</sup>L. F. Lowenstein, “Causes and associated features of divorce as seen by recent research” *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 42(3/4), 153–171.

<sup>6</sup>An interview with LaywerOseiPoku on the 13<sup>th</sup> of October, 2014, at the Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly.

<sup>7</sup>J. Y. Avotri,&V. Walters, “We women worry a lot about our husbands”: Ghanaian women talking about their health and their relationships with men in *Journal of Gender Studies*, vol.10 2001 197–211.



### **1.3 Research Questions**

- i. What are the biblical views on marriage and divorce?
- ii. What is the divorce rate among Christians in the Kumasi Metropolis and how has the issue of divorce affected Christians in the Kumasi Metropolis?
- iii. What has been the Churches response to the divorce rate among Christians in the Kumasi Metropolis?

### **1.4 Aims and objectives of the study**

The study sought to:

- i. discuss the biblical views of marriage and divorce
- ii. assess the rate of divorce among Christian marriages in the Kumasi Metropolis and to also analyze the effects of divorce among Christians in Kumasi.
- iii. examine the church's response to divorce rate in Kumasi

### **1.5 Scope and focus of the study**

Due to constraints of time and resources available for this project, the study was be limited to five divorcees, both male and female, five married men and women, and four counselors drawn from the Grace Baptist Church, located geographically within the Kumasi Metropolis.

## **1.6 Methodology**

### ***1.6.1 Methods of Data Collection***

Looking at the nature of this research work, the researcher employed the relevant tools such as questionnaires and face-to-face interview as that enabled her to collect all the data needed for the work. This included primary and secondary sources.

#### ***1.6.1.1 Primary sources***

The researcher used questionnaires and face-to-face interviews. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with all participants. In some cases, permission was sought from the respondents to record and transcribe some of them for analysis. This was done because it allowed for flexibility in following up on participant's responses, detailed information and the ability to report participant's 'lived experience' from their own perspective. This made it convenient to access relevant information otherwise difficult to obtain, in a much more relaxed manner. In all, the researcher interviewed fourteen people including five divorcees, both male and female, five married men and women, and four counselors. Ethical consent was also obtained from both the Christian Service University College (CSUC) Ethical Board and the KMA prior to data collection.

#### ***1.6.1.2 Secondary sources***

The researcher also collected information from books, theses, reports, journals, newspapers, bulletins and minutes. These works were reviewed and duly cited in footnotes and references.

### ***1.6.2 Samples and Sampling Procedure/Techniques***

Research respondents were selected through a purposive sampling technique using inclusion criteria<sup>8</sup>: married, divorcee, Christian and counselors from within the selected church groups.

Determining an adequate sample size in qualitative research is not as straightforward and prescribed as is the case in quantitative research. This is because unlike quantitative research, qualitative studies do not strive for statistical adequacy, as sample size is not an intrinsic feature of the analysis process.<sup>9</sup> This however does not indicate that numbers are unimportant in qualitative research. Sample size is usually influenced by factors such as the availability of the target population, time and resources.<sup>10</sup> It has been suggested that a sample size of six to ten participants may be adequate for a study using in-depth semi-structured interviews to examine experiences and perceptions within a defined group.<sup>11</sup>

### ***1.6.3 Data Analysis***

In this research, data analyses were done using thematic analysis, which makes use of an already existing interview questions to structure the process of analysis.<sup>12</sup> This process involves sorting or coding the data into themes and categories by identifying and analyzing repeating patterns that exist in the data.<sup>13</sup> Themes are important patterns in the data that are related to the research objectives and help answer appropriate research questions.

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<sup>8</sup>The inclusion criteria is a type of sampling in which participants are selected using predetermined criteria relevant to the aims of the study, and are purposely sought out and recruited.

<sup>9</sup>K. Gerrish, A. Lacey (Eds) *The research process in nursing*, (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010),

<sup>10</sup>I. Bourgeault, R. Dingwall, de R. Vries (Eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Methods in Health Research*. (London: SAGE Publications, 2010)

<sup>11</sup>Bourgeault, *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Methods in Health Research*,

<sup>12</sup>P. R. Ulin, E. T. Robinson, E. E. Tolley, & E. T. McNeill, *Qualitative methods: A field guide for applied research in sexual and reproductive health*, (Durham, NC: Family Health International, 2002),

<sup>13</sup>V. Braun, & V. Clarke, Using thematic analysis in psychology: *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.

## **1.7 Literature Review**

The literature review is an exploration of an area, which at best provides definition and a framework for this research. It is important to notice that a good literature review presents a clear case and context for the research which makes up the rest of the thesis. This was vital to keep the researcher informed about current studies on the topic under study. In view of this the researcher collected additional data through personal interview and questionnaires. This exercise also helped the researcher to analyze and synthesize materials, and it would help the reader to compare and contrast different authors' views on an issue with regards to the subject at stake. In this section, materials on marriage and its purpose, marriage in the view of African scholars and divorce have been reviewed.

### ***1.7.1 Marriage and its purpose***

B. Ward Powers expresses that, in all biblical teaching, marriage is seen as being a relationship between a man and a woman. Anything else which may be true of the nature of marriage flows out of what it is first of all as a relationship. The writer continues to express that marriage has three purposes or, more accurately, a single purpose with three aspects: companionship, mutual help, and the fulfillment of the sexual natures of man and woman. It is based upon mutual commitment, and rests upon the consent of the man and woman to its continuance. It is further revealed that “marriage is an ordinance of creation, and is God’s gift to all mankind: he made marriage for men and women, and he made men and women for marriage.”<sup>14</sup>

In our contemporary secular world, the marriage relationship is being progressively viewed in three basic concepts. Firstly, it is viewed merely as a legalized domestic union. To McLuhan, in

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<sup>14</sup>B. Ward Powers, *Marriage and Divorce; The New Testament Teaching* (Petersham: Jordan Books Ltd, 1987), 7-11.

this respect, the legal dissolution of the relationship will not be viewed as a problem.<sup>15</sup> Secondly, it is primarily viewed as a sexual arrangement between a man and a woman. The mutual agreement of those same two people to discontinue that relationship will be a matter of their own business and of little consequence to society. Thirdly, marriage is degraded to the level of a merely commercially advantageous arrangement. In this respect, its dissolution will mean no more than the termination of any secular business partnership. From McLuhan's own perspective, "the biblical picture of God-ordained marriage – The dignity and sacredness of the marital union in the sight of God is directly related to the creation and procreation of other complete human beings in their triune entity of spirit, soul, and body. "Only the full joining of two persons in the totally unified being of marital oneness constitutes scriptural marriage. This implies spirit-to-spirit unity, soul-to-soul inner disclosure and openness, mutually shared God-consciousness and devotion and love-inspired physical caress and sexual experience. He uses Genesis 2:14 to verify the above concept.<sup>16</sup>

In the words of John Stott, "Marriage is in all societies a recognized and regulated human institution. But it is not a human invention. Christian teaching on this topic begins with the joyful affirmation that marriage is God's idea, not ours".<sup>17</sup>

Francis Benyah contributes to existing knowledge by stating that "Marriage is an enduring institution which human beings have handled in many different ways since biblical times." On the biblical view of marriage, he asserts that "many Bible scholars believe that Bible teaching on biblical marriage is epitomized in the statement "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh"" (Genesis 2:24). From this text he

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<sup>15</sup> M. G. McLuhan, *Marriage and Divorce: God's Call, God's Compassion*, (Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1991), xix-xxii.

<sup>16</sup> M. G. McLuhan, *Marriage and Divorce: God's Call, God's Compassion*, xix-xxii.

<sup>17</sup> John Stott, *New Issues facing Christians Today*, 319.

infers that the very first description of the nature of marriage in the Bible, as consisting of leaving, cleaving and becoming one flesh, reveals the biblical understanding of marriage as a covenant relationship. Again, Benyah infers that God intended marriage to be a permanent union. The man was to depart from his parents' home in order to "be united to his wife and ...become one flesh" with her. Both Jesus (Matthew 19:5) and Paul (Ephesians 5:31) quoted this passage from Genesis as the foundational premise of marriage.<sup>18</sup>

### ***1.7.2 African concept of marriage***

In Kwame Gyekye's own view, marriage is a basic institution in African society and is the recognized social institution, not only for the establishment and maintaining of the family, but also for creating and sustaining the ties of kinship. He also asserts that, "Traditionally in many African societies, a young man who has gainful employment of any kind and earns some income is expected, in fact, urged to marry. Any undue delay on the part of the young man to marry will cause his parents or the elders in the lineage to worry and even to interfere in his private life in order to advise and encourage him to marry". Gyekye again comments that "an unmarried is almost an anomaly" implying that everyone is expected to marry.<sup>19</sup>

According to Rebecca Ganusah, Mbiti sides with Gyekye's view of marriage by stating that, "marriage is a duty, a requirement from the corporate society, and a rhythm of life in which everyone must participate. Otherwise, he who does not participate in it is a curse to the community, he is a rebel and a law-breaker, he is not only abnormal but "under-human". Failure

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<sup>18</sup>Francis Benyah, "Because Your Hearts Were Hard: An Examination of Jesus' discourse on divorce in Mark 10:2-12", in *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology*, vol 18 No 1, March 2014.

<sup>19</sup> Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction* (Pheladelphia, Ps/Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company, 1996), 76, 78.

to get married under normal circumstances means that the person concerned has rejected society and society rejects him or her in return.<sup>20</sup>

G. K. Nunkunya holds a similar view and adds a working definition that marriage is ‘a union between a man and a woman who have gone through all the laid down procedures in the society and are therefore legally, religiously and customarily recognized as husband and wife’.<sup>21</sup>

Rebecca Ganusah expresses that,

“To say that marriage in Africa is one of the greatest values of the people is not an overstatement. To grow up to a certain age, of say thirty years and above, without getting married, is to draw attention to oneself. Many interpretations would be put on that state. To put it bluntly, the society would think there must be something wrong with the person. In the case of a man, he may be regarded as someone who is antisocial - someone not wanting to share his life with others - or he may be suffering from a physical problem; (or, “one who is considered to be irresponsible, worthless, good-for-nothing, contemptible”).”

Ganusah states that “marriage in Africa is also not an institution between two persons only; it is a marriage of four families, of the families of the mother and father of the woman and those of the father and mother of the man.” It could be deduced that an African family is not made up of husband, wife and children only. Rather, it is a make-up of all those who are related by blood to a person. It includes father, mother, aunties, uncles, grandparents, nephews, nieces, cousins, and so on. In this communal life, what affects a couple affects all members of the families.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Rebecca Y. Ganusah, “Informed Choices on Marriage, Childlessness and Reproductive Technologies: An African Christian Theological and Ethical Reflection” in *Ghana Bulletin of Theology News Series*, Vol.3 Dec. 2008, 13.

<sup>21</sup>G. K. Nunkunya, *Tradition and Change in Ghana: An Introduction to Sociology*, (Accra: Ghana University Press, 1992), 42.

<sup>22</sup>Rebecca Y. Ganusah, “Community Verses Individual Rights in Africa: A viewpoint” in *Legon Journal of the Humanities*, vol.15 2004, 3.

Commenting on the issue of childbirth in African marriage, Ganusah states that, “To be married in African is one thing, and having or not having children is another thing. Marriage is seen as incomplete unless there are children in the marriage.”<sup>23</sup>

According to Mbiti, “without procreation marriage is incomplete. He further states that “marriage and procreation are ‘a unity’.”<sup>24</sup> It is a great joy, therefore to hear news about the birth of a child to a couple. In Africa, if one is married and for about three to four years there are no signs of childbearing, such a couple would face moments of anxiety as they see themselves as not living up to societal expectation or making the marriage “complete”. Childlessness in early years of marriage could be as a result of the couple’s deciding to stay for some time before starting to make babies. In other cases, the couple may be going through moments of adjustment to each other. But to the African community, however, there must be something going wrong with them and the earlier something is done about it, the better.<sup>25</sup>

From the above views it could be deduced that the African society places higher premium on the institution of marriage. From the African’s perspective a man is said to live a fulfilled life if one gets married and is responsible in taking care of his wife and children. Again, marriage in African society is a union not only between the man and woman but among all facets who share blood ties with them. It could be also deduced from the above that childbearing in marriage is of much importance to the society. These African views of marriage are of vital relevance to the research since it is done within the African context, in Ghana, specifically in the Kumasi Metropolis among the Ashanti Region in Ghana.

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<sup>23</sup>Ganusah, *Informed Choices on Marriage, Childlessness and Reproductive Technologies*, 13.

<sup>24</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London; Heinemaa, 1980), 133.

<sup>25</sup>Ganusah, *Informed Choices on Marriage, Childlessness and Reproductive Technologies*, 13.



## **1.8 Significance of the Study**

Divorce in general and specifically among Christians is considerably on the increase. There is a paucity of information in academic literature on divorce within the Christian community, and the church's responsibility towards curbing this trend.

Among other things, this project purports to:

- ) Add to the existing body of knowledge about marriage and divorce among Christians.
- ) Help increase awareness of any shortcomings of the Church and thereby inform our future implementation of initiatives aimed in curbing the issue of divorce with our society.
- ) Sensitise both the church and public to the current trend and phenomenon of Christian divorces by publishing this work on various media platforms.
- ) Be a credible reference point for future research on the subject.

## **1.9 Organization of chapters**

The study has been organized into five chapters. Chapter one outlines the introduction, dealing with Background of the study, Problem statement, Research questions, Aims and Objectives of the study, Scope of the study, Methodology, Literature Review, Significance of the study, and Organization of the study; Chapter two deals with historical background of the study, involving the biblical view of marriage and God's intention, God's purpose of marriage, and what divorce is, ; the third chapter focuses on divorce rate among Christians in the Kumasi Metropolis with

special emphasis on the statistics of the KMA and other courts involved. In this same chapter the issue of divorce as it pertains in the selected churchis discussed; Chapter four entails the Data Presentation Analysis and Discussion; and finally Chapter five conveys Summary of findings, Conclusion and Recommendations.

## CHAPTER TWO

### BIBLICAL VIEW OF MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

#### 2.1 Introduction

It is an undisputable fact that God is the originator of marriage. In the creation of the first couple, God made them male and female in His own image, and His main purpose for marriage was for companionship. Throughout history, the beauty of marriage has been stained in all cultures by conflict, misunderstanding, and incidents of break ups. The issue of divorce seems to be devastating and it is assuming a universal dimension since this menace is found in our societies. In an attempt to address this issue, Scripture is surveyed to understand what it has to say about marriage and divorce. This chapter seeks to explore the biblical view of marriage and divorce and also to address other contemporary challenges with respect to the issue at state.

#### 2.2 The Biblical View of Marriage and Divorce in the Old Testament

##### 2.2.1 *Marriage in the book of Genesis*

Genesis 2:24 is seen by many Bible scholars as the basis for the meaning of marriage. The definition of marriage is embodied in the text; “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh”.<sup>26</sup> This was later quoted by Jesus when He was asked about permissible grounds for divorce (Matthew 19:4-5). Genesis 2:24 was spoken by God right after Eve was brought to Adam, and Adam recognized her as his God-given spouse.

It could be deduced that a marriage exists in God’s sight when a man ‘leaves’ his parents, with a view not merely to living apart from them but to ‘cleaving’ to his wife, and ‘become one flesh’

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<sup>26</sup> Charles F. Pfeiffer, Howard F. Vos, John Rea (eds), *Wycliffe Bible Dictionary* (Peabody:Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1999), 258.

with her.<sup>27</sup> The first description of the nature of marriage in the Bible, as consisting of leaving, cleaving and becoming one flesh (Gen 2:24), reveals the Biblical understanding of marriage as a covenant relationship. This meaning of marriage as a covenant of companionship is expressed more explicitly later in Scripture in such passages as Malachi 2:14. This would be discussed later under the Prophets. "...It is because the Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant."

A Christian perspective of the purpose and intention of marriage are vital. Marriage is a lifelong commitment between a male and a female that involves mutual sexual rights.<sup>28</sup> Some characteristics of the biblical concept of marriage are found in the statement "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." (Genesis 2:24 KJV). This verse mentions that marriage is an exclusive man-woman relationship which is publicly acknowledged and consummated by sexual intercourse. SamueleBacchiocchi expresses these as 'the components of the marriage covenant'<sup>29</sup>.

### ***2.2.1.1 'Leaving' – The first component of the marriage covenant***

The first step in establishing a marriage covenant is *leaving* all other relationships, including the closest ones of father and mother: "Therefore shall a man *leave* his father and his mother" (Gen 2:24). The key word "leave" expressed in Hebrew *asaw-zah*, means to release, forsake, leave destitute, or refuse. It is used of loosening bands, as of a beast from its bonds. The Arabic equivalent means "single" or "unmarried." The idea here is that the man forsakes his parents. He

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<sup>27</sup>John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, Great Britain: Marshall Pickering, 1999, 323.

<sup>28</sup>Benyah Francis, "Because Your Hearts Were Hard: An Examination of Jesus' discourse on divorce in Mark 10:2-12", *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology*, vol 18 No 1, March 2014

<sup>29</sup>SamueleBacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant: A Biblical Study on Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage*, (Michigan: Biblical Perspective, 2001), 16

cuts himself off from them. He breaks the “union” with them almost in the sense of divorcing himself and becoming “subsequently single.” It is as if he has been bound to them in a marriage state but, in an act of the will, departs from them regarding responsibility and dependence (if such exists) and becomes alone to unite with the chosen woman. The bridegroom cannot be both a dependent child and an independent husband in the same home. Even in a world infused with the concept of extended families, priorities must be kept straight.<sup>30</sup>

The text speaks specifically of the man in this matter. It is he who must be his own head of the household. If in family relations he is dependent upon his father, then to whom do his dependents look for authority? It would create for his wife an unworkable hierarchical arrangement: she would have two heads (i.e., her husband and his father), and that, according to Jesus (Matthew 6:24), is not right. In such an arrangement the father’s authority would probably supersede her husband’s, yet, according to the Scripture, it is the latter who is to be her final authority in family matters (Ephesians 5:22 – 34).

Of course, leaving does not mean the abandonment of one’s parents. The responsibility to “Honor your father and mother” (Ex 20:12) is applied by Jesus to adults (Mark 7:6-13). This is not evading our responsibility toward our parents as they grow old. Jesus scorned the hypocrisy of those who gave to the Temple the money they had set aside for their parents (Mark 7:9-13). As adults, however, we assume responsibility *for* our parents rather than *to* them. The Bible never suggests that married couples should sever their ties with their parents, but that they must “let go” of their former lives as sons and daughters in order to cement their relationships as husbands and wives. What “leaving” means is that all lesser relationships must give way to the

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<sup>30</sup>[www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org): date assessed – 21<sup>st</sup> March, 2015

newly formed marital relationship. A leaving must occur to cement a covenant relationship of husband and wife. This principle of leaving applies likewise to our covenant relationship with God. It is said of the disciples that “they *left* everything and followed Him” (Luke 5:11).<sup>31</sup>

Leaving is not always easy. It is often hard for a baby to leave his mother’s womb. It may look cruel to see a doctor cut the umbilical cord which binds the baby to the mother. Yet, it is necessary for the growth and development of the baby. It is also hard for children to leave their parents and for parents to let their children go, for example, to a school away from home. Just as babies cannot grow physically unless they leave their mother’s womb and just as children cannot receive an education unless they leave home to go to school, similarly a marriage cannot mature unless both partners are willing to leave their parents in order to cement a new marital relationship and establish a new family.

Leaving involves ending financial dependence upon parents to stand financially on your own feet to be able to develop your future plans independently. It again involves leaving behind parental authority, since possessive, interfering parents can threaten the best marriages. This does not imply that parental authority ends with marriage or that one ignores, abandon or forsake his or her parents. In Ephesians 6:1, it is made clear that “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right”. Also, in Exodus 20:12, “Honor your father and your mother and you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you”. Leaving mean the husband-wife relationship is now the priority relationship.<sup>32</sup>

Another aspect of leaving is learning to abandon some of our parents’ attitudes and influences. In effect, the first principle derived from the divine institution of marriage recorded in Genesis 2:24

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<sup>31</sup>Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant*, 16-17.

<sup>32</sup>[www.Logosresourcepages.org](http://www.Logosresourcepages.org):date accessed – 21<sup>st</sup> March, 2015

is ‘To establish a thrilling “one flesh” marriage covenant, we must be willing to leave all lesser relationships’.<sup>33</sup>

### ***2.2.1.2 ‘Cleaving’ – The second component of the marriage covenant***

The second essential component of a marriage covenant is *cleaving*: “Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and *cleaves* to his wife” (Gen 2:24). A leaving must occur before a cleaving can take place. This process reveals divine wisdom. A man and a woman must leave all lesser relationships for the purpose of cleaving, that is, cementing their new relationship and establishing a new home.

“Cleaving” reflects the central concept of covenant-fidelity.<sup>34</sup> The Hebrew word for “cleave” *dabaq*, suggests the idea of being permanently glued or joined together. It is one of the words frequently used to express the covenant commitment of the people to God: “You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve him and *cleave to Him*” (Deut 10:20; cf. 11:22; 13:4; 30:20). The word is used to describe Ruth’s refusal to leave her mother-in-law Naomi: “Ruth cleave unto her” (Ruth 1:14).

In the sight of God, cleaving means wholehearted commitment which spills over to every area of our being. Cleaving involves unswerving loyalty to one’s marital partner. Note that man is to cleave to “his wife.” This excludes marital unfaithfulness. A man cannot be glued to his wife and flirt or engage in sexual intercourse with another woman. The two are mutually exclusive.<sup>35</sup>

In a marriage covenant, cleaving does not allow the “freedom to leave” when the relationship is no longer satisfying. If the “freedom to leave” is retained as a real option, it will hinder the total effort to develop a marital relationship characterized by covenant faithfulness. As marriage

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<sup>33</sup>Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant*, 18

<sup>34</sup>Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant*, 18

<sup>35</sup>Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant*, 18

counselor Ed Wheat observes, “Keeping divorce as an escape clause indicates a flaw in your commitment to each other, even as a tiny crack can be fatally widened by the many forces working to destroy homes and families.”<sup>36</sup> It could be summarized that the second principle derived from the divine institution of marriage recorded in Genesis 2:24 is: To maintain at thrilling “one flesh” marriage covenant we must be willing to cleave to our marital partners, avoiding any thought, word, or action that could weaken our loyalty and commitment to them.<sup>37</sup>

### ***2.2.1.3 ‘Becoming One Flesh’ – The third component of the marriage covenant***

The third essential ingredient of a marriage covenant is that “they become *one flesh*” (Gen 2:24). Note the progression: leaving, cleaving, and becoming one flesh. As husband and wife leave lesser relationships and learn to cleave to one another, they become a new entity, “one flesh.” The phrase “one flesh” needs some explanation because it is frequently misunderstood to refer primarily to the sexual union. To become “one flesh” (Gen 2:24) means to become one functioning unit. Samuelle Bacchiocchi quotes H. C. Leupold and explains that becoming one flesh “involves the complete identification of one personality with the other in a community of interests and pursuits, a union consummated in intercourse.”<sup>38</sup>

The phrase “one flesh” does also refer to the physical or sexual aspect of marriage. Paul explicitly uses the phrase in this way when speaking of sexual intercourse between a man and a harlot (1 Cor. 6:16). Sexual intercourse per se, however, does not automatically assure that a man and a woman become *one* in a mystical, emotional, and spiritual unity. Genital intercourse without spiritual communion often leaves people divided, alienated, and bitter toward each other. Thus, sexual intercourse itself does not bring about *real* oneness.

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<sup>36</sup>Ed Wheat, *Love for Every Married Couple* (MI, Grand Rapids, 1980), 38.

<sup>37</sup>Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant*, 19

<sup>38</sup>Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant*, 19



To achieve the Biblical “one flesh” union, sexual intercourse in marriage must be the natural fruit of love, the crowning act of marital union. If sex is not the expression of genuine love, respect, and commitment, then it offers only a physical contact while keeping the partners mentally and spiritually apart. Sexual desire must become the desire for the total union and oneness of body, soul, and spirit between marital partners.<sup>39</sup>

Becoming one flesh is a gradual process, as a man and a woman who come together in marriage do not automatically become “one flesh” when they exchange their marriage vows. As they live together as husband and wife, they realize that they must safeguard their individuality while striving to become one. They must not allow their differences to divide them but must learn to accept their differences, viewing them not as antagonistic but as complementary. Their differences contribute to achieving their oneness because they are accepted as being complementary and not contradictory.<sup>40</sup>

The becoming of “one flesh” is beautifully exemplified in the children of a married couple. In their children, husband and wife are indissolubly united into one person. What happens biologically in children occurs psychologically in a husband/wife relationship as the two gradually become “one flesh,” a new functioning unity.

Becoming “one flesh” also implies continuity. This is why the modern practice of serial monogamy<sup>41</sup> must be rejected as immoral: it defeats the Biblical purpose of marriage which is to develop a permanent “one flesh” relationship. The “one flesh” principle excludes polygamy and extra-marital relationships of all kinds, because no man can become “one flesh” with more than one woman. The Old Testament persons who violated the “one flesh” principle by taking more

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<sup>39</sup>Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant*, 21

<sup>40</sup>Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant*, 21

<sup>41</sup> According to the urbandictionary.com, “Serial Monogamy is the custom or practice of having one mate at a time. Each relationship may be serious and committed, or not. The term is used in contrast with strict ‘monogamy’, which can imply just one partner over a lifetime.

than one wife paid the price for their transgressions. Problems of all kinds developed in their families as their wives became jealous or felt exploited, degraded, or hated. In summary, the third principle derived from the divine institution of marriage recorded in Genesis 2:24 is as follows: To become a “one flesh” functioning unit, husband and wife must learn to accept their differences as complementing their oneness and must reserve their sexual expression exclusively for each other.<sup>42</sup>

Marriage is therefore defined by John Stott as “an exclusive heterosexual covenant between one man and one woman, ordained and sealed by God, preceded by a public leaving of parents, consummated in sexual union, issuing in a permanent mutually supportive partnership, and normally crowned by the gift of children”.<sup>43</sup>

### **2.2.2 God’s intention for marriage**

With reference to the components of marriage as stated in Genesis 2:24, it can be inferred that God intended marriage to be a permanent union. The man was to leave his parents in order to “be united to his wife, and ...become one flesh” with his wife. Jesus himself quoted this same text as the foundational word of God for marriage when He was asked about permissible grounds for divorce (Matthew 19:4 – 5).

In addition, God intended marriage to be monogamous. The divine order of marriage as stated in Genesis 2:18 is monogamy, one man and one woman relationship. There were polygamous marriages in the Old Testament (OT) era. The first case was in Cain’s line (Genesis 4:19) with many OT examples, including some of the patriarchs. But polygamy is never held up to be the ideal. The OT writers indirectly criticize polygamy by showing the resultant strife (for example,

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<sup>42</sup>Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant*, 21

<sup>43</sup>Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, 323

Genesis 21:9, 10; 37:2 – 36; 2 Samuel 13 – 18). Passages that idealize marriage normally do so by speaking of one husband and one wife (see Psalm 128:3; Proverbs 5:18; 31:10 – 29; Ecclesiastes 9:9). Jesus also affirms that God’s ideal from the beginning was monogamy, speaking of “man” and “wife” in the singular, with the “two” becoming one flesh (Matthew 19:5,6). Polygamy was not encouraged in the Early Church.<sup>44</sup>

As stated by John Stott, “Classical theology has followed the biblical revelation in identifying three main purposes for which God ordained marriage”. The first purpose relates to the command ‘Be fruitful and increase in number’ (Genesis 1:28) indicating, marriage was for the procreation of children with their upbringing within the love and discipline of the family. The second purpose is when God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him’ (Genesis 2:18). Thus, God intended marriage for companionship - ‘the mutual society, help and comfort that the one ought to have of the other both in prosperity and adversity’. Thirdly, marriage is intended to be that reciprocal commitment of self – giving love which finds its natural expression in sexual union, or becoming ‘one flesh’ (Genesis 2:24).<sup>45</sup>

These three purposes have been very necessary due to the fall. The loving discipline of family life has become all the more necessary because of the waywardness of children, mutual support because of the sorrows of a broken world, and sexual union because of temptation to immorality. But all three purposes existed before the fall and must be seen as part of God’s loving provision in the institution of marriage.

Finally, marriage is a covenant. It is a solemn binding agreement made first before God and then among people in society. The very first description of the nature of marriage in the Bible, as

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<sup>44</sup>Benyah “Because Your Hearts Were Hard: An Examination of Jesus’ discourse on divorce in Mark 10:2-12”, (2014), 122.

<sup>45</sup>Stott, *Issues Facing Christians today*, 320.

consisting of leaving, cleaving and becoming one flesh (Gen 2:24), reveals the Biblical understanding of marriage as a covenant relationship. This meaning of marriage as a covenant of companionship is expressed more explicitly later in Scripture in such passages as Malachi 2:14. This will be discussed under the prophets.

The preceding study of the divine institution of marriage has shown that God intended marriage to be a sacred and permanent covenant. The following section of this chapter considers briefly the teachings of the prophets, of Jesus and of Paul to find out how they viewed marriage and what they said about divorce.

## **2.3 The teachings of the Prophets**

To help His people understand and accept the unrelenting nature of His covenant of love, in the Old Testament God often used the metaphor of the husband-wife relationship. The obvious reason was that the marriage covenant, characterized by love, compassion, and faithfulness, fittingly exemplified God's covenant relationship with His people.

### **2.3.1 *Hosea's marriage***

Hosea was told by God to marry a prostitute, Gomer, and raise a family by her. Through this experience, Hosea was to act out God's unrelenting covenant of love to His people. When Gomer went after her lovers, Hosea was sent to take her back and love her again. Through Hosea's marital experiences, God revealed Himself to Israel as a compassionate, forgiving husband: "In that day, says the Lord, you will call me; 'my husband,' . . . And I will betroth you to come to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will betroth you

to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord” (Hos. 2:16, 19-20 ESV). By revealing Himself as a faithful, compassionate and unrelenting husband, God sets a pattern for the husband-wife relationship. What God does on a larger scale as Israel’s husband, a human husband is called to do on a smaller scale in his relationship with his wife.

### ***2.3.2 Later Prophets***

The imagery of the marriage covenant is used by later prophets to remind the people of their covenant relationship with God. For example, Jeremiah reminded the people that God had entered into a covenant with them and had become their husband (Jer. 31:32). Even though they had broken the covenant, God remained a faithful husband who would make a new covenant with His people, working to transform their hearts (Jer. 33:33). The implication is clear. Marriage is a sacred covenant in which the husband and wife must be faithful to their commitment as God is faithful to his promise. Jeremiah’s message was ignored. Eventually Judah was captured by the Babylonians and all her leading citizens were taken into exile. There in exile, Ezekiel graphically portrays God’s unflinching love as that of a husband wooing and winning back an unfaithful wife (Ezek. 16:8, 15, 38, 59).

In a similar vein Isaiah describes the final restoration of Israel in terms of a loving husband forgiving and restoring his unfaithful wife (Is 54:5-8).

The above examples suffice to show how the Old Testament prophets often describe God’s covenant relationship with His people in terms of an ever-loving, faithful husband who never tires of wooing back an unfaithful wife. This example of God as a faithful and loving husband reveals what God intends marriage to be: a sacred covenant where love and faithfulness prevail.

### ***2.3.3 Malachi's teaching***

Malachi, one of the last Old Testament prophets, fittingly sums up the Old Testament view regarding the sacred and inviolable nature of the marriage covenant. In his time, the Jews were languishing in a ruined Jerusalem and lamenting that God no longer accepted their offerings. Malachi responded by pointing out that the cause of their suffering was found in their unfaithfulness to God manifested especially through their unfaithfulness to their wives:

“You cover the Lord’s altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor at your hand. You ask, ‘Why does he not?’ Because the Lord was witness to the covenant between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant” (Mal 2:13-14 ESV).

Here the Scripture tells us explicitly that marriage is a covenant to which God is a witness. Since God does not break covenants (Lev. 26:40-45), the marriage covenant is all the more binding. This means that what we do to our marital partner we do also to the Lord. Christian commitment and marital commitment are two sides of the same covenant. For this reason, Malachi admonishes the people, saying: “So take heed to yourselves, and let none be faithless to the wife of his youth. ‘For I hate divorce, says the Lord God of Israel, and covering one’s garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts’” (Mal 2:15-16). God states that He hates divorce, not the divorcée. This implies that Christians should reflect Christ’s attitude of loving concern toward those who have suffered marital disaster (John 4:6-26) while at the same time upholding the Biblical imperative of the sacred and inviolable nature of the marriage covenant. Malachi admonishes the people that in the best interest of their families and communities they should not violate their marriage covenant by divorcing their wives. The reason is that divorce violates not only God’s original plan for marriage but also the marriage covenant to which the Lord is a

witness. Divorce betrays life's most intimate companion and as such is a grievous sin which God hates.

Being a sacred covenant, human marriage serves in the Old and New Testaments as the prism through which God reveals His covenant relationship with His people and Christ with His church.

To appreciate the Biblical view of marriage as a sacred covenant, it is helpful to distinguish between a contract and a covenant. Samuelle Bacchiocchi in "The Marriage Covenant" quotes Paul E. Palmer as offering a helpful clarification of the difference between the two: "Contracts engage the services of people; covenants engage persons. Contracts are made for a stipulated period of time; covenants are forever. Contracts can be broken, with material loss to the contracting parties; covenants cannot be broken, but if violated, they result in personal loss and broken hearts. . . . Contracts are witnessed by people with the state as guarantor; covenants are witnessed by God with God as guarantor."<sup>46</sup>

## **2.4 New Testament teaching on marriage and divorce**

### ***2.4.1 The teachings of Jesus Christ***

In response to the Pharisees' question regarding the concession of Moses regarding divorce (Matthew 19:8; Mark 10:3-5), Christ pointed back to the institution of marriage, saying: "For your hardness of heart he [Moses] wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation 'God made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two

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<sup>46</sup>Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant*, 16.

but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder” (Mark 10:5-9 NASB). In this memorable statement Christ appeals to the divine institution of marriage (Gen 2:24) to point out that marriage is the strongest human bond that transforms two people into “one flesh.” Moreover, Jesus affirms that God Himself is the one who actually joins a couple in marriage. This means that when Christian couples exchange their marital vows in the presence of witnesses, they are in actual fact uttering their vows of mutual commitment to God Himself. A man and a woman marry by their own choice; but when they do, God joins them together into one permanent union. It is evident that for Jesus marriage is not a mere civil contract, but a divinely ordained union which God alone has power to establish and to terminate. The full force of this truth was explained by Christ privately to His disciples in these terms: “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery” (Mark 10:11-12). By this statement, Jesus declares unambiguously that the marriage covenant must not be violated by divorce and remarriage because it is a sacred inviolable bond. To do otherwise is to “commit adultery,” a sin clearly condemned by God’s moral law (Ex 20:14; Deut. 5:18). Jesus thus refutes the view that divorce is a viable option for a married couple. The covenant structure of marriage makes divorce an act of covenant breaking, a failure to keep a moral obligation.

The Mosaic provision in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 generated a controversy which was presented to Jesus. In the pre-Mosaic period, divorce was common among the heathen nations. A man could divorce his spouse for any reason simply by telling her before witnesses, “You are no longer my wife.” The divorced wife would have no recourse but to leave her home with only the few



belongings she could carry on her back. This explains why women wore all their rings, jewelry, and coins on their bodies, since these provided a financial resource in the case of divorce.<sup>47</sup>

The practice of easy divorce became common among the Hebrews, encouraged by the absence of regulations restricting it. "Men were divorcing their wives for a 'weekend fling' and then taking them back again when the dirty laundry had piled up and the house needed cleaning."<sup>3</sup> It was this situation that occasioned the legislation found in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. The chief concern of the law is to discourage hasty divorce by preventing remarriage after divorce. The law contains three elements: (1) the grounds for divorce (Deut 24:1a), (2) the process of divorce (Deut 24:1b), and (3) the result of divorce (Deut 24:2-4). Divorce was not instituted by Moses, nor was it approved as an intrinsic right of the husband. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 indicates that Moses sought to curb the evil of divorce by requiring the husband to give a bill of divorcement to his wife to protect her after her marriage to another man. The Mosaic concession does not alter God's original plan for marriage to be a sacred, permanent covenant. It simply provides protection for the divorced wife when sinful hearts violate God's original plan for marriage.<sup>48</sup>

One significant Matthean contribution is the exception clause of Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 which teaches that to divorce and to remarry, "except for unchastity [*porneia*]" is adultery: "But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the cause of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery" (Matt 5:32 NAS). "And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery" (Matt 19:9).<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant*, 130.

<sup>48</sup>Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant*, 130.

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.groverproctor.us/sb/sb-adul.txt>

The exception clause found in these two texts has been the object of countless studies. A major reason is that many find in this clause the only legitimate grounds for divorce and remarriage. Scholarly opinion on the meaning of the exception clause is divided, reflecting the lack of unanimity among scholars about the precise meaning of the key word of the clause, namely *porneia*. The word is generally translated as "fornication" (KJV), "unchastity" (RSV), and "marital unfaithfulness" (NIV).

The Greek word *porneia*, from which the word "pornography," is derived, comes from the root word *pernemi*- "to sell." The original idea was to offer one's body for a price. The word was used especially of slaves and meant "a harlot for hire." Historically, *porneia* has been used with wider and narrower meanings. The wider meaning includes unlawful extra-marital intercourse such as prostitution, fornication, and adultery. The narrower meaning can refer to sexual aberrations such as homosexuality (cf. Rom 1:29), incest (cf. 1 Cor 5:1), and unlawful marriages within the forbidden degrees of relationship (Acts 15:20, 29). The question then is what is the exact meaning of *porneia* in the exception clause (Matt 5:32; 19:9)? Is Jesus using the term in its wider or narrower meaning?

It is important to do an overview of the different views which cause the debate over the meaning of the Matthean exception clauses. The popular view held by most contemporary evangelical scholars is described quite often as "the majority view (also known as the Erasmian or Protestant view) interprets *porneia* as a reference to adultery."<sup>50</sup>

Basically, the view sees the word applying to any sexual immorality with anyone outside of a person's spouse. Spurgeon assumes that the word is synonymous with "infidelity to the marriage

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<sup>50</sup>David W. Jones. "The betrothal view of divorce and remarriage." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 165, no. 657 (January 2008): 68 -73.

vow,” mainly adultery. He states that one “who commits adultery does by that act and deed in effect sunder the marriage bond, and it ought then to be formally recognized by the state as being sundered.”<sup>51</sup> Janzen would describe this view by defining *porneia* as “intercourse with someone other than her husband on the part of the woman during betrothal or marriage.”<sup>52</sup> Jones agrees saying that the exception for marriage includes “nothing but adultery,”<sup>53</sup>

Vernon Mcgee would concur wholeheartedly saying that “unfaithfulness” or “immorality” is the only grounds for a biblical divorce.<sup>54</sup> Yet many hold to a specific betrothal view of the passages. Proponents of this view take a holistic view of the use of *porneia* throughout the Gospel of Matthew. As David Jones says: “it is not just the proximate context of the exception clause that gives the word *porneia* its meaning, but rather the milieu of the entire Book of Matthew.”<sup>55</sup>

This is the critical aspect of the betrothal view which must be understood. Those who hold this view are simply trying to understand the meaning of the word based upon its usage in the book of Matthew. They believe, as Guenther points out, that “In both our Matthean texts, the scope of *porneia* must be narrower than that of *moicheia* (adultery).”<sup>56</sup>

David Jones sums up the betrothal view: betrothal view advocates point out that nearly every Christian view of divorce and remarriage limits the meaning of *porneia* in some sense...the question is not whether to limit the meaning of *porneia* but rather how to limit its meaning.<sup>57</sup> But does the betrothal view limit the meaning of *porneia* to an unnecessary strict sense? Mahoney

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<sup>51</sup>Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The King Has Come* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1987), 59.

<sup>52</sup>David Janzen, “The meaning of *porneia* in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9: an approach from the study of ancient Near Eastern culture,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*(December 2000): 67.

<sup>53</sup>David Clyde Jones. “The Westminster Confession on divorce and remarriage.” *Presbyterion*16, no. 1 (Spr 1990): 17.

<sup>54</sup> Jones, “The betrothal view of divorce and remarriage,” 76.

<sup>55</sup>Jones, “The betrothal view of divorce and remarriage,” 76.

<sup>56</sup>Allen R. Guenther. “The exception phrases: except *porneia*, including *porneia* or excluding *porneia*? (Matthew 5:32; 19:9).” *Tyndale Bulletin*53, no. 1 (2002): 96.

<sup>57</sup> Jones, “The betrothal view of divorce and remarriage,” 84

says that such views of the exception clauses “are so construed as to remove the grounds for a real divorce in Christ’s teaching.”<sup>58</sup>

The majority view seems to suggest that, as Charles C. Ryrie points out, “the weakness [of the betrothal view] lies in the technical meaning given to *porneia*.”<sup>59</sup>

They would say that this technical meaning is not supported by any context of the Greek word. There are several variations to these two opposing views, but none are held so commonly as to deserve attention. This paper explains the support for both of these views trying to come to the proper interpretation of the passage and the correct meaning of *Porneia* so as to understand the biblical teaching of Christ on divorce.

it is important to realize that it is broadly used and understood to mean: the general term for all illicit or immoral sexual intercourse. The specific form may sometimes be indicated by the context. If payment of wages is involved, it is prostitution. If it involves close relatives, it is incest. If it involves persons of the same sex, it is homosexuality. If it involves an unmarried couple, it is unchastity. If it involves a married person outside of marriage, it is adultery.<sup>60</sup>

Jesus’ use of the word *porneia* may be somewhat specific in the Matthean contexts, but the word’s nature itself does not indicate any precise meaning. It definitely applies to some kind of “sexual unfaithfulness,”<sup>26</sup> but to establish what this may be definitively requires several other influences and characteristics of the word to be explored. *Porneia*’s meaning will depend crucially on the specific Matthean contexts, which will be explored after some broader contexts. All that can be firmly stated at this point is to say that *porneia* is a serious sexual sin which seems to make divorce permissible through the dissolving of the marriage bond. Both the

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<sup>58</sup>Aidan Mahoney, “New look at the divorce clauses in Mt 5:32 and 19:9,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (January 1968): 29.

<sup>59</sup>Charles C. Ryrie, “Biblical Teaching on Divorce and Remarriage,” *Grace Theological Journal* 3 (Fall 1982): 188.

<sup>60</sup>David Clyde Jones, “The Westminster Confession on divorce and remarriage,” *Presbyterion* 16, no. 1 (Spr 1990): 31.

betrothal view and the majority view fall into the broader lexical definition of the word but the context, will determine the actual usage in Matthew 5 and 19.<sup>61</sup>

#### **2.4.2 Paul's teaching**

Following the teaching of Jesus, Paul affirms in different words that marriage is a lifelong and indissoluble covenant. In Romans 7:1-3, Paul sets forth the principle that death ends the dominion of the law and then illustrates the principle through the marriage relationship. The point of the illustration is that death and death alone releases a person from the bond of marriage: “For example a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies she is released from the law concerning the husband. So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man.” (Rom 7:2-3 NASB). Paul’s illustration sheds light on his view of marriage as a lifelong covenant which can be terminated only by death. The same teaching is presented by Paul again in 1 Corinthians 7:39 where he declares: “A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives.”

Paul writes, “To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife” (1 Cor. 7:10–11 ESV). In giving this command, Paul refers to Jesus’ own instructions regarding divorce and remarriage (see Matthew 5:32; 19:3–12). While Paul rarely appeals directly to the teaching of Jesus, this qualification notes that Paul’s command in verses 10–11 is equivalent to what Jesus himself taught (unlike

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<sup>61</sup>Philip R. Leineweber, PORNEIA IN THE MATTHEAN EXCEPTION CLAUSES: The Greek Word Porneia in the Matthean Exception Clauses. (A Senior Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation in the Honors Program Liberty University Fall 2008)

verses 12–16, which did not originate from Jesus’ own words).<sup>62</sup> Because Paul does not attempt to quote Jesus verbatim, there appears to be an assumed familiarity among the Corinthians with the content of the Lord’s original teaching.<sup>63</sup>

Citing the command of Jesus, Paul charges the wife not to separate from her husband and commands the husband not to divorce his wife. The verb “to separate” (ἀποχωρεῖν) is defined as “to separate by departing from someone”<sup>64</sup> while the verb “to divorce” (ἀπομύω) means, “to dismiss or release someone or something from a place or one’s presence; in a legal sense, divorce.”<sup>65</sup> These two verbs are repeated throughout 1 Corinthians 7:10–16. Notably, these two verbs are synonyms and are likely the result of stylistic variation.<sup>66</sup> In Greco-Roman society, the very act of separation was considered to be a divorce, though one without legal documentation.<sup>67</sup> This type of “divorce by separation” was common for the era.<sup>68</sup> Thus, interpreters should not place too much emphasis on the semantic difference between these two verbs.<sup>69</sup> In fact, if the woman were merely separating physically, i.e., not divorcing her spouse, then Paul would not have needed to instruct the separated wife to remain single—she would have been legally unable to remarry. However, because “to separate” and “to divorce” are synonymous for Paul, he is directly charging the woman not to divorce her husband. Thus, the apostle does not prohibit the modern idea of the temporary, physical separation as part of an ongoing attempt for marital reconciliation; he prohibits the wife from legally divorcing her husband.

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<sup>62</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1987.

<sup>63</sup> David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 282.

<sup>64</sup> Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, rev. and ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. [BDAG] (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), s.v. “ἀποχωρεῖν.”

<sup>65</sup> <http://www.vernonking.org/papers/exegesis-of-1-cor-7-10-16/#fn:5>

<sup>66</sup> David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 198–199. Cf. Garland, 281.

<sup>67</sup> Instone-Brewer, David. *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002, 199.

<sup>68</sup> Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 292.

<sup>69</sup> D. Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. 292

Paul continues in verse 11, instructing that if a Christian wife does divorce her husband, she ought to remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her spouse. Roy Ciampa and Brian Rosner contend that Paul gives the wife two options because, as in Mark 10:11–12, “divorcing one’s partner is judged to be a legalized form of adultery.”<sup>70</sup> However, David Garland argues that, rather than presenting the wife with two options, Paul “directs her to remain unmarried in order to be reconciled with her husband.”<sup>71</sup> Regardless of the potential nuance of the options, the better option must be reconciliation. However, when the option for marital reconciliation becomes impossible, e.g., via the husband’s own remarriage, Paul’s injunction appears to stand: the divorcing wife is to remain unmarried. Today, there is two years separation as a prelude to divorce. It is to enable the couple reconsider their request for divorce and possibly withdraw the application and re-unite.

In verses 10–11, Paul addresses first the wife and then the husband; Ciampa and Rosner argue this ordering suggests that wives were instigating the divorces in the Corinthian church, perhaps as an application of the celibate asceticism addressed in verse 1.<sup>72</sup> Regardless, Paul addresses the husband with the same command as the wife: do not divorce your spouse. Fee avers that Paul’s lack of an explicit exception for the husband further suggests that the problem lay with the women of Corinth; however, Fee concludes, “What is said of the wife would apply to the husband as well.”<sup>73</sup> Thus, Paul charges the married Christian not to divorce her (or his) spouse; if the Christian disobeys even this admonition, Paul exhorts her to remain unmarried or else remarry her wronged spouse.

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<sup>70</sup>E. Roy Ciampa, and S. Brian Rosner. *The First Letter to the Corinthians*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2010, 293.

<sup>71</sup>E. David Garland, *1 Corinthians*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003, 283.

<sup>72</sup>E. Roy Ciampa, and S. Brian Rosner. *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 291.

<sup>73</sup>D. Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. 296

In their analysis of these verses, Wenham and Heth—who conclude Scripture permits no remarriage after any divorce—interpret that Paul “permitted only two courses of action after *any* divorce: remain single/unmarried or be reconciled.”<sup>74</sup> However, their view fails to recognize that Paul is speaking here only to Christians who initiate a divorce; he offers no command in verses 10–11 to Christians receiving a divorce. Others, such as John Murray and William Luck prefer to read Paul’s exception-less command as one with implied exceptions in Matthew 19:9.<sup>75</sup> However, this view demotes the perspicuity of Mark 10:11–12, which states that a Christian should not divorce his or her spouse (without exception). Indeed, Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 7:10–11 accords more directly with Jesus’ address in Mark 10:11–12 than Matthew’s rendition in 19:9. Thus, Paul charges Christians, without any stated exception, to stay married and not to divorce their spouses. If they fail to do that, Paul exhorts them to remain unmarried or else be reconciled.

The covenantal nature of the marriage relationship is expressed by Paul again in Ephesians 5:31–32 where he uses the marriage union to illustrate the covenant relationship between Christ and His bride, the church: “‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one.’ This is a great mystery, and I take it to mean Christ and the church.” Just as the prophets in the Old Testament used the marriage covenant to portray the relationship between God and Israel, so Paul in the New Testament uses the marriage union to represent Christ’s covenant of sacrificial love and oneness with the church. Since the marriage covenant represents the permanent relationship between Christ and His church, it must be

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<sup>74</sup> Wenham and Heth, 138 (emphasis added). Notably, William Heth changed his position from no-remarriage to remarriage in the case of adultery or desertion. William A. Heth, “A Response to Gordon J. Wenham,” in *Remarriage after Divorce in Today’s Church: 3 Views*, ed. Mark L. Strauss, Counterpoints: Church Life (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 43–45.

<sup>75</sup> John Murray, *Divorce* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1961), 56; William F. Luck, *Divorce and Remarriage: Recovering the Biblical View* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 165.



permanent; otherwise it would be an inaccurate representation of the indissoluble relationship between Christ and His church.

The use of marriage in the Old and New Testaments to reveal God's covenant relationship with His people serves also to demonstrate what marriage today should be like. This may be called "reciprocal illumination." By revealing through human marriage His covenant of salvation, God simultaneously revealed the unique meaning of marriage as a sacred and permanent covenant.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

This chapter reviewed the Biblical background to the issues of marriage and divorce. The teachings of Genesis, the prophets, Jesus and Paul regarding marriage, have shown how the Scripture consistently upholds marriage as a sacred and permanent covenant, witnessed and protected by God. It has been observed that marriage as a sacred covenant was effectively used in the Old Testament to portray God's relationship with Israel and in the New Testament to represent Christ's relationship with His church. If God used marriage as a metaphor to represent His commitment to His people, He must surely have thought of it as a sacred, permanent covenant. The recovery of the Biblical view of marriage as a sacred and permanent covenant, witnessed and guaranteed by God Himself, is indispensable in counteracting the secularization of marriage. This trend has influenced many Christians to view marriage as a temporary social contract governed by civil laws, rather than as a permanent covenant, witnessed and guaranteed by God Himself. To counteract this trend, it is essential for Christians to recover and accept the Biblical view of marriage as a sacred covenant. In the following chapter, the current rate of

divorce in Christian marriages within the Kumasi metropolis, and the issue of marriage and divorce as it pertains in the selected church would be reviewed.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **DIVORCE RATE IN THE KUMASI METROPOLIS**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

In the early 1950s, the word divorce was almost unheard of among couples in most parts of Africa, especially in Ghana. The sanctity of the institution of marriage was very much intact and respected. However, in recent times, there seems to be a siege against marriages. Marital institutions are facing major setbacks.

This chapter focuses on divorce rate in the Kumasi Metropolis and its effects. It takes a close look at the statistics at Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly (KMA). As part of the study, the researcher sought to find out why divorce was on the increase in the Kumasi Metropolis. This was done through interviews with some selected resource persons as well as relevant institutions in the Kumasi Metropolis. In the analysis, the researcher presents the views of those interviewed, alongside her own analysis of the issues.

#### **3.2 Demographic features of the Kumasi Metropolis**

The Kumasi Metropolis is the most populous district in the Ashanti Region. Kumasi has attracted such a large population partly because it is the regional capital, and also the most commercialized and educational centre in the region. Culturally, Kumasi has and still maintains a very rich cultural heritage. The Asantehene the king is the embodiment of the culture of the people. He presides over the other paramount chiefs in the Ashanti Region. The rich cultural heritage of the people of Kumasi is visible in Akwasidae festival, funerals, child-naming ceremonies, etc.

In terms of religious composition, the people of Kumasi can be described as pluralistic, even though Christianity has taken a centre stage in the day to day religious lives.<sup>76</sup> Despite the religious nature of the metropolis, there are a number of issues that have become detrimental to the growth, development and healthy nature of the metropolis. One of such issues is the alarming rate of divorce cases in the metropolis.

### **3.3 Types of Marriages in Ghana**

There are three forms of marriage which may be contracted by a couple in Ghana. These are Marriage under customary law, statutory marriage under the Marriage Ordinance (Cap 127), and Marriage according to Islamic rites.<sup>77</sup>

#### *3.3.1 Customary marriage*

A customary marriage is contracted when a man and a woman agree to marry and certain formalities are observed. These formalities may vary from one part of the country to the other or from one ethnic group to another. There are certain essential features however, which are fairly common. The intended husband must ask for the hand of the intended wife from her parents or family. This is done usually by sending emissaries from the man's family to the woman's family with various tokens which vary from place to place; the family of the woman accepts the tokens; the couple live as man and wife. It must be noted that they need not necessarily live under the same roof. They will generally hold themselves out as man and wife and be seen as such by their respective families. Customary marriage is potentially polygamous. This means that a man may

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<sup>76</sup> Reinhart Hummel, 'Contemporary New Religions in the West', in Allan R. Brockway and J. Paul Rajashekared., *New Religious Movements and the Churches* (Geneva: WCC, 1987), 21.

<sup>77</sup> Women in Law Series; Marriage Laws-FIDA Ghana Legal Literacy project

marry as many wives as he could afford. It is the polygamous nature of customary marriage which distinguishes it from an ordinance marriage.

A customary marriage can be registered and a certificate of marriage issued by applying to the Registrar of Marriage in the District in which the marriage was entered into. A marriage under customary law may be dissolved by customary procedure or by an action in a District Court. It is necessary to register customary marriage because according to PNDCL 113 registration is compulsory. Also, registration provides proof of the marriage and will prevent people in future from denying its existence. Again, if one of the parties dies intestate, the surviving spouse will be able to enjoy a share in the estate of the other under the provisions of the Intestate Succession Law, PNDC Law 111.

A customary marriage may be dissolved at the instance of either spouse, on a number of grounds, for example, adultery by the wife, infertility of the wife, impotence of the husband and general incompatibility of the couple.

Before dissolution, it is almost invariable practice that the complaints of the spouse seeking divorce will be considered by the families of the parties and attempts made to reconcile the couple, if possible. If reconciliation is impossible for any reason, the marriage will be declared dissolved by the families on presentation of drinks by the party who wanted the divorce to the family of the other party and the couples are then free to leave. Either the wife or the husband can take steps to have a marriage dissolved by informing the family of the partner that he or she is no longer interested in the marriage and would want it dissolved.

### *3.3.2 Marriage under the marriage ordinance (CAP 127)*

This is a monogamous marriage. A man or woman who has chosen to marry under the ordinance cannot, after the marriage, go through any other form of marriage under any law with someone else other than his wife or husband. Until his wife or husband dies or the marriage is validly dissolved according to law, he cannot validly marry anyone else. Therefore, a purported customary marriage by a man already married under the ordinance to a woman other than his wife is invalid. The woman is not a wife recognized by law and is not entitled to any of the rights and privileges of a wife.

The ordinance has laid down the procedures for contracting a statutory marriage and these must be strictly complied with before a marriage is sealed by the issue of a marriage certificate and it is this certificate which validates the marriage. A wedding in a church for example, does not create a valid monogamous marriage unless the requirements of the ordinance have been complied with. It is important to bear this in mind because some couples who have had their marriages “blessed” in some churches without complying with the provisions of the ordinance mistakenly believe that they have contracted a valid monogamous marriage especially if the woman assumes the name of the man thereafter. Such “blessing” does not create valid marriage unless the particular church has been licensed to perform such marriage.

In an interview with Lawyer Osei Poku, the lawyer in charge of marriage and divorce at the KMA, he affirmed that the fact that a church exists does not give the church or the pastor the right to perform marriage. The church ought to have been registered and gazetted and the pastor too ought to have been registered and also gazetted. In that situation, the pastor or priest can perform the marriage within the premises of the church. He also said that all other district

Assemblies also have the right to contract or facilitate the performance of marriage. The Registrar General Department can also perform ordinance marriage.

The three forms of marriage under the Ordinance include: Marriage under a Registrar of Marriage's certificate; Marriage under Marriage Officer's certificate; or Marriage under special license from the Registrar-General.<sup>78</sup>

The courts dissolve a marriage under the Ordinance for the following reasons: the marriage has never been consummated; the marriage has broken down beyond reconciliation; persistent cruelty by one party against the other; one of the parties to the marriage has left the matrimonial home and taken up residence elsewhere without the consent or knowledge of the other party to the marriage.

### *3.3.3 Islamic marriage*

This is a marriage contracted by Muslims in accordance with Islamic rules of marriage. It is potentially polygamous and the man can marry up to four wives. An Islamic marriage is valid under the following conditions; there must be mutual agreement to marry; there must be a *wali* (a matrimonial guardian who is the legal representative of the bride); there is the payment of dower (dowry). It is either cash or in the form of property; two irreproachable witnesses must be present to witness the marriage ceremony; the marriage must be registered in a District Office; the marriage must be performed by a licensed Islamic priest.

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<sup>78</sup>A Registrar of Marriages is an officer appointed by Government to perform marriages under the Ordinance in the Registrar-general's Office or district, municipal and city council offices.

A Marriage Officer is an officer of a religious body authorized to perform marriage ceremony in church or premises licensed for that purpose.

A marriage under Special License is where the Registrar-General, after satisfying himself that there is no lawful impediment to the proposed marriage, shall waive the notices and proceed to issue the Certificate of the Registrar authorizing the celebration of the marriage between the parties. Any such marriage may take place in a Registrar's office, a place of religious worship or any other place to be determined by the Registrar.

In an interview with Lawyer Osei Poku who is in charge of marriage and divorce issues at the KMA, he disclosed that, there is another type of marriage that currently exists in Ghana. This is the Concubanage marriage or *mpenaawaree*.<sup>79</sup>

### 3.4 Divorce

Divorce or dissolution as it is increasingly becoming known, is a legislatively created and judiciary administered process that legally terminates a marriage no longer considered viable by one or both spouses. This permits both to remarry. A. Ambert, asserts that divorce is the final termination of a marital union, canceling the legal duties and responsibilities of marriage and dissolving the bonds of matrimony between the parties involved.<sup>80</sup> Seneadza, also concurs that the breakdown of marriage always precedes a breakup of the marriage. In other words, before a breakup in the marriage (divorce) there must be a breakdown of the relationship.<sup>81</sup>

Another writer Sasseas stated by Oppong, Osafo and Nyamekye, sides with Seneadza's view that:

Before the final stage of divorce, the couple's relationship goes through three general stages. In the first stage of isolation, the couples become separated from each other as intimacy behavior breaks down, although they might still converse and be polite to each other. In the second stage of invalidation, the couples begin to negatively assess each other's worth and belittle one another, which give rise to accusations. In the third stage of betrayal, trust is broken down and there is no support from each other.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup>Concubanage marriage or "mpenaawaree" Under normal circumstances it is not marriage. It is where under customary law the man has not performed the customary rites of a woman he lives with as his "wife". No matter the number of years they live together and the number of children they bear, it is still regarded as concubanage. Both the so called "husband" and "wife" have no right in case any of them dies. But if there are children involved, they have right to the property of the father or mother.

<sup>80</sup>A. M. Ambert, *Divorce: Facts, causes and consequences* 3rd ed. (Ottawa, Canada: Vanier Institute of the Family, 2009)

<sup>81</sup>O. Seneadza, *Judicial divorce in Ghana: The causes, procedures and related issues*. Retrieved from <http://www.articlesbase.com/law-articles/judicialdivorce-in-ghana-the-causes-procedures-and-related-issues-2388782.html> (2010).

<sup>82</sup>Oppong, Osafo, Nyamekye, *An Exploratory Study of Factors Contributing to Divorce Among Married Couples in Accra, Ghana*, 17.



The researcher deems the above insight relevant to the research. Here, the emphasis is on breakdown of marriage relationship preceding divorce, according to the various writers, if the church concerns itself with intensifying its teachings of pre-marital and post-marital counseling, it could help maintain the sanctity of marriage to curb the rampant issues of divorce in the Metropolis.

### **3.5 Divorce rate in the Kumasi Metropolis**

For the past three decades, the issue of divorce is on the ascendency and has increasingly affected a number of lives in the Kumasi Metropolis. Statistics or records from the Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly's Marriage and Divorce Department revealed that between January and September in the year 2013 alone, 1,956 marriages were contracted under the Ordinance and 346 under Customary Marriage. The records from the Marriage and Divorce Department of the KMA further indicated that between the year January 2000 and September 2014, only 187 customary marriage dissolution cases were registered at the KMA, while as many as 14,538 marriages were also registered. In the same period, the KMA registered 35,915 marriages under the Ordinance but could not provide up-to-date records of divorce cases under marriage by ordinance. This was because such cases always took place in either the Circuits Court or High Courts.

However, in an interview with Mr. Samuel Oppong Mintah, the Registrar at the Circuit Court KMA, it was disclosed that between July 2013 and November 2014, as many as 665 cases of dissolution of marriages from the courts were also recorded. According to the Registrar these were those that were brought to the law court. However, those who divorce with their

ownknowledge and are not brought to the law court are not counted. The Registrar emphasized that majority of the dissolution were Christian marriages.<sup>83</sup>

According to the Registrar at the High Court Mr. Francis K. Gedzeah, between January 2013 and July 2014, 98 cases of dissolution of marriages from the court were recorded. It was observed that families with larger estate and people of the higher class of society sent their marriages to the high court for dissolution.

A lot of researchers have identified various factors that are associated with a risk for divorce. Understanding these factors may help one take certain precautions against divorce. Some of the contributing factors of divorce are as follows:

### *3.5.1 Misunderstanding of the concept of marriage*

First and foremost, there seem to be misunderstanding as far as marriage is concerned. In an interview, Lawyer Osei Poku argued that he would put the blame on some Pastors and the Imams. According to him, people do not understand marriage. They think that it is like instant tea or coffee. The two people involved in the marriage are coming from different backgrounds which make the marriage life complicated. It therefore needs hard work to make the marriage work. He asserted that even between siblings there are some frictions, how much more someone you have not even known for several years in that intimate friendship. There will definitely be some initial friction. A person may like to sleep with the lights on, another may like otherwise. He is of the view that it takes time to learn about the differences between couples. He cited one particular incident which came from a couple with an evangelical background, the woman complained that her husband was prone to anger and therefore does not have the Holy Spirit

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<sup>83</sup>An interview conducted on the 13<sup>th</sup> of November, 2014

living in him. And so she was of the opinion that she has made a mistake in marrying him and came to divorce.<sup>84</sup>

He also argued that pastors are not helping. According to him, some pastors too are divorcing on flimsy excuses. He said that in one particular instance, a pastor came to him to file for divorce and his excuse was that he had dreamt and saw the wife sitting in a man's car in the dream and according to him his dreams are 100% real or right. So the fact that he saw the wife in a man's car pre-supposes that the wife was cheating or having an affair with another man.

Another issue with regards to this point is that, some also have wrong perception about marriage. They spend all their money on the wedding and may even incur debt which then becomes a problem after the marriage ceremony.

### 3.5.2 "*Borger*" marriages

Secondly, one major issue also affecting divorce rate in the KMA is "*Borger*" Marriages. According to the Lawyer in charge, some men come from abroad and marry. The woman will enjoy the initial "funfair" for about three months and the man leaves. They keep in touch for about a year and later change their contact numbers and the woman does not hear from him again. Most of them are fake marriages. They just want somebody to enjoy for the three or six months they are doing their projects. So they marry only to end it. So if the woman stays for several years, say six or seven years without hearing from him, the woman at times goes to the man's parents and they tell her they do not also hear from their son while in real case they might

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<sup>84</sup> Interviewed on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November, 2014

be hearing from him.<sup>85</sup> Then the woman realizes she has been fooled. The researcher is of the opinion that people should not enter into such kind of “burger” marriages if there are no clear cut plans for the woman to join the man.

### *3.5.3 The issue of sex in marriage*

Thirdly, one major reason why people are divorcing today is because of sex. According to the Lawyer Osei Poku, sex accounts for about 75% of why people seek divorce today. According to him a couple is able to endure a lot of problems in marriage when they enjoy a good sex life. But if the sex life is bad the least provocation stimulates nerves about the issues. He continued to argue that there is the need for sex education. The marriage counselors, pastors and elders should make an effort to take sex education in marriage seriously.

He is of the opinion that pastors must be real. People presume pastors do not become angry and that everything is fine about their marriage. People compare their pastors and elders to their own spouse and begin to judge them. They should not pretend that all is well in their marriages. As they teach, if they need to use their own experience to advise, they should be real in themselves. From his own experience, Lawyer Osei Poku disclosed that he attended a seminar and asked pastors to share what kind of sex life they enjoyed and none of them could speak about their sex lives, thus depicting the kind of teachings they give on sex education. He said that mostly, when people come to him with flimsy excuses to divorce, he would usually let one partner go out and interview them individually. Sometimes the woman complains that the man does not know how to make sex, they have premature ejaculation and then you realize that is where the problem lies. On the other hand, the man also complains that the woman is not romantic enough. In the researcher’s own opinion, the moment one is not able to satisfy the other partner in terms of sex

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<sup>85</sup> In law if you do not hear from a person for seven years it is presumed the person is dead.

it could lead to divorce. When couples make what they see about marriage on television to be their standard, it could also cause divorce. For instance when people watch a film and someone has had long time sexual intercourse and they think it is normal and that their own sex lives should be the same. This can be misleading and detrimental to their sex lives.

#### *3.5.4 Immaturity*

In reacting to the increased divorce cases pending at the KMA and other courts that had been already annulled, the Assistant Registrar of the Gender Court, Mr. Yaw Domfeh De-Graft, indicated in an interview that immaturity on the part of couples was a contributory factor. In an explanation he said that most 'to be couples' do not spend adequate time to prepare and appreciate their values and shortcomings. He said in such cases, any little conflict between the partners create extensive tension, making it impossible for them to come together again. He explained that adjusting to each other's attitude was very important because each person was brought up in a different environment and family background.<sup>86</sup>

#### *3.5.5 Infidelity or extra marital affair*

Mr. De-Graft also said that infidelity or extra marital affair was one major cause of the increase in divorce. Unfortunately, too many couples face the challenge of infidelity, that is, one or both spouses have been sexually unfaithful. He explained that in this new age, society has got different avenues which enable people to get closely acquainted. There is increase interaction in the workplace and regular clubs also provide chances of greater interaction with others. It is much easier to make friends and remain in constant touch with them. Also, through the use of social media, thus, Facebook, Whatsapp, Skype, etc., people engage in greater interaction with

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<sup>86</sup> Interviewed on the 15<sup>th</sup> of November, 2014

outsiders and they spend lesser time with their spouses. As a result of this, some start to flirt around and begin having extra marital affair. According to him, the above is on the increase and consequently has impact upon the rate of divorce.

In a separate interview with the Registrar of the High court, Mr. Francis Gedzeah confirmed the above by also indicating that infertility was one of the major causes of separation and the increasing rate of divorce cases among the youth. He pointed out that in most cases, pressure was brought to bear on the partners “if they are not able to give birth after a few years of marriage, and when that happens, one of the partners sometimes indulges in extra-marital sex, leading to divorce when their partners find out”.<sup>87</sup>

### *3.5.6 Maltreatment or physical abuse*

Another well mentioned cause is maltreatment or physical abuse. According to Mr. Yaw Domfeh De-Graft, there are behaviors that are clearly outside the moral boundaries of marriage. Any marriage couple has the right to be safe that is physically, emotionally, and sexually in their marriages. This includes adults and children. He argued that sometimes, pressure from the workplace and peer pressure may result in an individual leading a highly stressed out lifestyle. As the stress accumulates, it automatically searches for avenues to let out the steam. The easiest avenue is one’s spouse. Thus, a small argument may turn into a big fight and it may result in applying a violent method on the part of the husband or wife. Long term physical abuse can be a major factor in the decision to file for divorce.

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<sup>87</sup>Interviewed on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March, 2015

### *3.5.7 Monetary issues*

To add up to this, one major determinant Mr. Yaw Domfeh De-Graft mentioned as a contributing factor to the alarming rate of divorce in the Kumasi Metropolis is, monetary issues. In today's world, money plays an important role; perhaps more than before. The status of individuals is increasingly determined by material wealth and a lack of the ability to keep abreast with the peer group in this regard may cause unnecessary and avoidable stress on the marriage of two people. Even if there is a dearth of money to meet the basic household expenses, there is bound to be a lot of friction between a husband and a wife on this account. Any intolerable increase in finance related troubles could be a cause that leads to divorce.

This was also confirmed by the Registrar of the High court. He intimated financial insecurity of couples as another cause of divorce, but said, in all cases, "divorce should be the last resort because marriage is a lifetime contract between couples. "Marriages may only break down beyond reconciliation but some couples find flimsy excuses to seek divorce, which should not be encouraged."

### *3.5.8 Ex-boy-girl friend's re-union*

He also indicated that ex-boy-girl friend's re-union also creates the cause for divorce. He explained that some married couples after marriage meets their ex-boyfriend or girlfriend and they rekindle their former love again. When this happens it creates mistrust and confusion between the couples sometimes leading to divorce. He also explained that sometimes, the denial of sex by one partner also contribute to the breakdown of marriages.

He further expressed that sometimes divorce cases are brought to the court on the basis of incompatibility. Incompatible couples may divorce more than very compatible couples. He said that at times there may be nothing wrong with the marriage itself. It may be that both the given individuals are truly honest people—yet differences may occur. He argued that individualism is the hall mark of our age. Thus, lack of compatibility amongst the husband and wife is turning out to be an ever-increasing cause for divorce.

### *3.5.9 Distant marriage*

In another interview with the Registrar of the High Court Mr. Francis K. Gedzeah, it was pointed out that, people traveling abroad and leaving their spouse in the country after so many years of marriage also contributed to the divorce rate. According to him, in one case, a man travelled abroad immediately after marriage. Unfortunately for him, he was arrested and imprisoned in Germany for committing an illegal act. He explained that, when that happened, there were no remittances for the woman. So the court ruled on the case and the woman was given all the property. In another instance too, a female pharmacist traveled to work in the US and when she returned, the man had married.

### *3.5.10 In-laws interference*

Mr. Francis K. Gedzeah said in-laws who live with their children in their matrimonial homes are also causes of the numerous divorce cases in the metropolis. Such in-laws, he explained, interfere with almost all issues affecting the couples, creating much tension at home, leading to divorce.



### *3.5.11 Improper marriage*

In another interview with DSP Benjamin Dokurugu, the Ashanti Regional Coordinator of the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU)<sup>88</sup>, he asserted that most people are not properly married. There are some people who perform the initial rites which is referred to as “korkorko” or “knocking” just to show respect to the lady’s family that he is interested in the lady and ends there without completing the rites. There are yet others who enter into a relationship without any initial commitment but along the line pregnancy sets in and they are compelled or forced to marry. But with time the reality keeps hunting them that the partner was not the man or woman he or she wanted and this could also lead to divorce.<sup>89</sup>

### *3.5.12 People’s ignorance of what the Bible says about marriage*

From his Christian point of view, DSP Dokurugu stated that people ignore what the Bible says about marriage. According to the Bible, “For this cause shall a man leave the father and mother” (Genesis 2:24). He explained that there should be a physical leaving to establish one’s own home so as to bond with the wife. But there are many people who are married but are still living in their father’s house with their wives. Sometimes, they might have left physically but are still living there in their mind. This is because it is their father’s and mother’s ideologies that are ruling the marriage. Every little matter the man will go and seek the consent and advice of the mother, father, brothers and sisters. Some women also do the same thing and these things are recipe for divorce.

### *3.5.13 Misunderstanding of the wife’s submission and husband’s love*

Most physical abuses against wives stem up from the Bible’s emphasis on “wives submitting to their own husbands” (Eph. 5:22; 1 Peter 3:1-2). Some men command their wives to be

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<sup>88</sup> Interview date 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 2015

<sup>89</sup> Interviewed on the 10<sup>th</sup> of April, 2015

submissive to them, but it is not the man's responsibility to command the wife to submit. It must come willingly from the woman in obedience to God's Word. If she does not do it she is accountable to God. Husbands are also commanded "to love their wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it" (Ephesians 5:25). This means husbands must love their wives even to the point of dying for them. The misapplication of the concept of the wives submission which is over stretched can cause divorce.

#### *3.5.14 Extended family interference*

Extended families interferences with the lives of couples would lead to divorce. If it happens that the extended family wants to rule the couple from outside that could lead to the divorce. The DOVVSU Coordinator declared that since May 2013, their office has encountered so many of these. In one instance a man and wife had a problem with maintenance and the man explained to the unit that he used to take care of the family until he lost his job. The Unit was trying to calm the wife down to support the husband till he gets another job, which she was willing to do but her uncle who followed her to the Unit was bent on destroying the marriage and so polluted the wife's mind to proceed to court which she did and they ended the marriage.

### **3.6 People's Indigenous views and Divorce in Ghana**

In a critical examination, there are major indigenous views and practices that are also currently influencing the divorce rate in Ghana. Notably, the communal nature of the African society together with the African Traditional and cultural issues directly and indirectly influence the views of Christians in Ghana on divorce and remarriage. Traditionally in Ghana, not being able to give birth after some years of marriage is seen as an abomination in many societies. People are sometimes insulted with it and called all manner of names. Traditionally, giving birth is seen as

an obligation in marriage and not a blessing or gift to marriage as the Christian faith teaches us. This traditional mind-set has had a dominant grip on people whether they are Christians or not. Gaskiyane rightly observes that, childless couples are usually harassed by relations or the community to produce children. Women are normally at the mercy of friends and relatives who are anxious about their offspring.<sup>90</sup> This traditional view is also affecting a lot of marriages today in Ghana.

Notwithstanding the various traditional practices and beliefs that influence divorce, there is a traditional court (Asantehemaa's Court) that stands tall in its fight against divorce. In the words of Nana Akua Agyeman, the Linguist of the Ashanti Queen Mother Nana Afia Kobi, "we do not split marriages in this our traditional court, neither do we have option for divorce. Our court is to foster unity in Asanteman of which the family is the vital unit. This is illustrated by this court's philosophy that Nana Afia Kobi who sits on the biggest stool in the court is a mother with the biggest breast sucked by everyone and so does not like anything that will disintegrate the family". In one of the sittings the researcher observed one issue that was being dealt with in the court. The issue had to do with a lady whose mother was not in support of the man of her choice but had gone ahead to marry the man with the support of her uncle. The mother then reported the lady and her brother to the court to deal with them. In the long run, the uncles were asked to apologize to the mother and were charged with a token. Meanwhile, the mother was advised to accept the son-in-law and support the marriage.<sup>91</sup>

There is also the dynamics of the in-laws-another major perspective of divorce among African Christians. Heman-Ackah in his book entitled *Marriage Problems in Ghana*, observes that, some

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<sup>90</sup> I. Gaskiyane, *Polygamy-a cultural and biblical perspective*, (London: Piquant Press, 2000, 2- 9).

<sup>91</sup> Interview date 5<sup>th</sup> May, 2015

in-laws in Ghana have contributed to the breakdown of a number of marriages.<sup>92</sup> The Christian in Africa is also exposed to these extended family interferences which in many cases lead to either separation or divorce. According to Kwame Gyekye marriage in Ghana is an affair between “four families”. In the matrilineal family, the child belongs to the mother’s family, but it is the father or the representative of the father who gives the woman in marriage.<sup>93</sup> This presents a complex web of relationships, which also directly or indirectly influence nuptial relations in terms of divorce and remarriage. This is what the Christian in Ghana grapples with in handling his or her marital problems.

Ahadjie concludes that, the relevance of this observation, lies in the fact that since in-law conflicts sometimes lead to the “husband’s mother and/or sisters succeeding in removing or replacing the wife altogether” it provides a basis to view its relevance in the current research.<sup>94</sup> Ahadjie continues that, if the wife is barren, then she and her husband may arrange for him to have another wife, so that children can be born in that family. If the problem lies with the husband, then a close relative or friend is asked or allowed to sleep with the wife in order that she may bear children for the family. The roles of the relatives of the couple, in other words the in-laws, are crucial in determining the functionability and the sustainability of the marriage. Even some matured Christians have fallen prey to the whims and caprices of some in-laws.<sup>95</sup>

Poverty and immigration is one of the growing factors that cause divorce in the Kumasi metropolis. A UNDP report puts Sub-Saharan Africa within the poorest countries. Again, a Ghana Statistical Service Survey for 2010 revealed that poverty accounted for 65.7 percent of

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<sup>92</sup> D. Heman-Ackah, (2004). *Marriage problems in Ghana* (London: Hazell Watson and Viney Ltd., 2004), 12.

<sup>93</sup> Kwame Gyekye, *African cultural values: an introduction*, (Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company, 1996), 13 – 18.

<sup>94</sup> Nicholas Ahadjie, *The Effect of Premarital Counselling on Marriage*, Unpublished long essay, Central University College, 2005, 12 – 15.

<sup>95</sup> Ahadjie, *The effect of Premarital Counselling on Marriage*, 12 – 15.

children of poor parents on the street. It must be noted that, poverty exerts undue pressure on families resulting in both migration to the urban centres and immigration to Western countries in search of greener pastures.<sup>96</sup> The issue of poverty in the view of this researcher becomes relevant in assessing how well couples are doing financially, and provides another window for viewing divorce among Christians in the Kumasi Metropolis.

Again, the polygamous nature of the African society encourages infidelity and promiscuity which consequently lead to divorce. Some Christians have been caught in this trap or web. Gaskiyane asserts that, the major problem that an African polygamist who becomes converted to Christ is confronted with is the issue of divorcing all but one of his wives, so he could participate in the sacraments of the church, and also be entitled to leadership positions in the church. The paradoxical nature of this position by the church is that on one hand, the church is against divorce, yet on the other hand the church is instructing the Christian polygamist to divorce his multiple wives and marry only one of them. The question some theologians like Gaskiyane are asking is that, ‘is the church not presenting “double standards”?’<sup>97</sup>

In his book entitled, *Polygamy-A cultural and Christian Perspective*, Gaskiyane discusses the cultural reasons for polygamy and what the Bible says about this difficult and controversial subject? In order to come to a more thorough understanding of these issues, Gaskiyane recommends nine questions in this book for serious consideration. One key question he posed is: What is the biblical basis for the policy of some churches which require polygamists to put away

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<sup>96</sup>Ghana Statistical Service, 2010.

<sup>97</sup>Gaskiyane, *Polygamy-a cultural and biblical perspective*, 2- 9.

all but one wife? According to Scripture, should polygamists who retain their multiple wives be baptized?<sup>98</sup>

The researcher is of the view that the above mentioned points ultimately make divorce cases sometimes even difficult in the church. It brings about a number of contentious decisions in drawing conclusions, making decisions, and finally stating one view on divorce.

### **3.7 Effects of Divorce**

The effects of divorce on marriage couples and children cannot be over emphasized. Sometimes, divorce does not even affect the couples and children alone but some family members or relatives of the couples. A broken marriage has consequences in terms of pain and suffering and problems of many kinds which are not removed by forgiveness. The divorced partners will still have to come to terms with, and live with, these consequences.<sup>99</sup> John Stott has argued that “marital breakdown is always a tragedy. It contradicts God’s will, frustrates His purpose, brings to husband and wife the acute pains of alienation, disillusion, recrimination and a guilt, and precipitates in any children of the marriage a crisis of bewilderment, insecurity and often anger”.<sup>100</sup>

Kwaku Oppong Asante has listed a number of consequences of divorce on the marriage couples. According to him, although participants have cited various reasons for initiating divorce, a number of them regretted their decision, as they indicated that they never considered the potential negative consequences following divorce. One of the consequences he noticed is

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<sup>98</sup>Gaskiyane, *Polygamy-a cultural and biblical perspective*, 2- 9.

<sup>99</sup>Powers B. Ward, *Marriage and Divorce*, 9.

<sup>100</sup> John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, 320

stigmatization. According to him, a female respondent to an interview he conducted notes that, “Society will really compress you more than the issue itself. Divorce becomes freedom for the one who so much want it, but there is no freedom in divorce. You feel labeled and stigmatized. They will ask about your rings and your husband among other things when they meet you and you always have to be explaining to them. I wished it never happened”.<sup>101</sup> He argued further that, this participant explicated that the perceived liberty that divorce is purported to offer is an illusion. She mused about stigmatization following divorce. Her experience of stigma appears to be socially driven as in her subsequent social interactions, her acceptance appears demeaned. She indicated that perhaps to secure her place in such social interactions, she had to do further explications, which she found uncomfortable. Especially, one area where stigma occurred most was in the religious circles. One female responded that,

Yes, I was judged especially at church. It got to a time I was not affected by the divorce but the environment, gosh! It was so piecing. For about 9 months I could only go to church in the evenings and I always had to rent a taxi cab as soon as church was over and as soon as I got out of the house, I never walked. I was also not looking into people’s faces because the smiles in their eyes were different from that of their heart because I hear so many things. I had to leave the church because the whole blame was shifted on me.<sup>102</sup>

This respondent found her church blaming her for the divorce and thus found the congregational environment judgmental. In Ghana most marriages contracted in traditional homes of partners end up in churches for official endorsement. Additionally, the leaning toward a theology proscribing the dissolution of marriage by many churches might make a divorcee appear to have violated a religious injunction—“what God has joined together . . . let no man put asunder” (Matthew 19:6)—and thus she might be perceived as a sinner.

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<sup>101</sup>Oppong, Osafo, Nyamekye, *An Exploratory Study of Factors Contributing to Divorce Among Married Couples in Accra, Ghana*, 17

<sup>102</sup>Oppong, Osafo, Nyamekye, *An Exploratory Study of Factors Contributing to Divorce Among Married Couples in Accra, Ghana*, 17

Another aspect of the consequences of the divorce is its effect on children. Some researchers have argued that children from divorced families drop out of school at least twice the rate of children from intact families. Boys, especially if they are living with their mothers, respond with more hostility to parental divorce than girls do, both immediately after the divorce and for a period of years thereafter. Girls often fare worse when living with adult men, either their father or a stepfather. Divorce has been found to diminish the capacity of children to handle conflict. In their own marriages, children of divorced parents are more likely to be unhappy, to escalate conflicts, to reduce communication with their spouses, to argue, to shout when arguing, and to assault their spouses physically when they argue.<sup>103</sup>

In addition to this, Wallerstein has done a research to determine the effects of divorce on both parents and children of divorce families. Below are listed few of her findings of the aftershocks of divorce: Three out of every five children felt rejected by at least one parent. Five years after their parents' divorce, more than one-third of the children were doing markedly worse than they had been before the divorce. Half grow up in settings in which the parents were warring with each other even after the divorce. One-third of the women and one-fourth of the men felt that life had been unfair, disappointing, and lonely.

Wallerstein postulate that, researchers have come to the following conclusions on the impact of divorce on children: Children of divorced parents do poorer in school; exhibit greater behavioral problems at home and in school. They engage in sexual activity and criminal behavior earlier in life than children whose parents remain married. Compared with those from intact families, adults who experience divorce as children have poorer psychological adjustment, lower

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<sup>103</sup>Todd E. Linaman, The Newsletter of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, Summer 1997.



socioeconomic attainment, and greater marital instability. Divorced men and women experience far greater health problems than their married or never-married counterpart. A greater number of divorced men and women are admitted for psychiatric care than married or single persons.<sup>104</sup>

### **3.8 Conclusion**

In this chapter the different types of marriage that exist in Ghana have been dealt with, also factors contributing to divorce in the Kumasi Metropolis have been discussed. Notable factors that cause divorce are the issue of sex life among couples, and this is an area that many couples are not living up to expectation, misunderstanding of the concept of marriage, indigenous views and practices that mitigates against the healthy growth of the family lives of couples, for example the communal nature of the African society do not give room for a solid relationship building. Childlessness in marriage in most cases is a panacea to divorce in Africa. The above mentioned points ultimately make divorce cases sometimes even difficult for the church to handle. At a time when our society is experiencing an all-time high divorce rate, Christians should be emphatic in proclaiming the divine plan for marital stability and permanence, as prescribed by the Bible (Matthew 19:5-7). In the next chapter, what the church is doing as a response to the high rate of divorce would be discussed.

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<sup>104</sup> Judith S. Wallerstein and Joan Berlin Kelly, *Surviving the Breakup: How ... Divorce*, *Journal of Marriage and Family* 56 (1994): 45-56

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE CHURCHES RESPONSE TO DIVORCE CASES IN THE KUMASI METROPOLIS

#### 4.1 Introduction

The tragedy of divorce has spread so widely that almost every Christian has encountered it not only in his or her church, but also among his or her close friends and relatives. In this chapter, the researcher looks at the churches response to the issue of divorce in the Kumasi Metropolis. However, the researcher also throws some light on the church, its purpose and mandate on the issue of divorce.

#### 4.2 What is the church?

The word translated “church” in the English Bible is *ekklesia*. This word is the Greek words *kaleo* (to call), with the prefix *ek* (out). Thus, the word means “the called out ones.” A more accurate translation would be “assembly” because the term *ekklesia* was used to refer to a group of people who had been called out to a meeting.<sup>105</sup> It was also used as a synonym for the word synagogue, which also means to “come together,” i.e. a gathering, “Body of Christ”, Since believers have been united with Christ through spiritual baptism, they are sometimes corporately referred to as the body of Christ (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:11, 13, 18, 27; Col. 1: 18; Eph. 5:30). There is a metaphor which demonstrates the interdependence of members, at the same time it demonstrates their diversity from one another (Rom. 12:4; 1 Cor. 12:14-17).

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<sup>105</sup>[www.alanknox.net/2007/07/ekklesia-and-kuriakon/](http://www.alanknox.net/2007/07/ekklesia-and-kuriakon/): dated assessed- 20<sup>th</sup> October, 2014.

#### 4.2.1 *The purpose of the church*

The purpose of the church according to David Kpobi is to tell people about God's purpose for the world and for individual lives and to introduce Jesus as the one who can give true meaning to life. In addition, Christian mission is meant to teach people not to separate the practice of their faith from other aspects of their lives; in other words, to encourage Christians to make a difference where ever they find themselves.<sup>106</sup>

M. G. McLuhan stresses that, "the growing disregard for the sanctity of marriage in the secular world is causing many believers who were married to unbelievers to come back into the arms of the church after and unwanted divorce. The rising tide of self-centeredness and narcissistic behavior is penetrating the church, and this, together with other problems now attacking the home, has certainly caused the divorce rate to rise within the fellowship of believers in Christ". McLuhan moreover asserts that the issue is not only how to defend and preserve the sacredness of marriage among believers but also how to scripturally restore to fellowship, self-respect and forgiveness among thousands of people who have been involved in divorce.<sup>107</sup>

In commenting on the purpose of the church, McLuhan expresses that the N. T indicates that the real purpose of the church in the world is to effect reconciliation between God and man and between man and man. This he supports with Christ's own declaration of the purpose of His coming into the world in Luke 4:18. According to the writer, Christ certainly indicated that the church is to continue His ministry in the world. The writer asserts that committed Christians who

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<sup>106</sup> David N. A. Kpobi, "Unless the Lord Watches over the City..."Urbanisation and Christian witness in Ghana (Asante-Opoku Reinforf Lecture for 2011 in *Journal of African Christian Thought* Vol. 14, No.2 Dec. 2011

<sup>107</sup> McLuhan, *Marriage and Divorce*, xx.

have been caught up by the web of divorce have experienced the indignity of being immediately classified as spiritual untouchables and social outcasts by the church.<sup>108</sup>

The assertions of David Kpobi and McLuhan are very much needed as a source of information for this research as a result of the fact that the research aims toward looking at the church's responsibility towards the rampant divorce cases in our contemporary era. The researcher believes that the church has the core mandate to proclaim peace, understanding, oneness and reconciliation to the world and therefore has the responsibility of rising up in contributing towards curbing up the issue of divorce through pre-marital and post-marital teaching on marriage.<sup>109</sup>

#### **4.3 Churches response to Divorce cases in the Kumasi Metropolis**

Since this study focuses on the response of churches to the divorce cases, the researcher in this section examines how churches are responding to divorce cases and the divorcees among them. It particularly examines the issue as it pertains in the selected church.

In the light of the aforementioned, the researcher would like to consider how the churches are responding to divorce cases through pastoral care and counseling. Pastoral care and counseling is very crucial for the sustainability of marriages. What models for pastoral action could the Church adopt? In the work of stabilizing marriage relationships, the priest, the pastor and the counselor in Ghana has a great task to perform. His or her task is to use all means in his or her power to guide married people to gain a mature understanding of themselves, of each other in marriage and thus strengthen their marital bonds. The duty of pastors and counselors are therefore, to

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<sup>108</sup>McLuhan, *Marriage and Divorce*, xxi.

<sup>109</sup>Powers B. Ward, *Marriage and Divorce*, 10.

minimize the confusion and to build up healthy, Christian relationships in the family and in society as a whole. Whatever pastoral models are proposed for marriage will have to remain within the will of God as it is found in the Holy Scripture.

#### *4.3.1 Responses from divorcees and couples with marital challenges*

Using thematic analysis, four broad themes were identified. The first theme is ‘availability of post-marital teachings’. This theme was to find out if there are activities to monitor or nurture married couples after their marriage. The second theme was ‘the divorce experience’, here what triggered divorce or the reasons for divorce are explored and elucidated. Key reasons that appeared were infidelity, non-submissiveness, lack of commitment, and the issue of sex. The third theme was ‘the churches response to the decision of divorce’. This contextualizes what the church did to avert the decision to divorce. The fourth theme is ‘what the church’s stand on divorce is and how divorcees are handled in the church’.

##### *4.3.1.1 Availability of post marital teachings*

All the ten respondents indicated the unavailability of post marital counseling in their church and that the only times they could hear any teachings on marriage are during weddings or family week celebrations which is organized once in a year.

##### *4.3.1.2 What effort did the church make to counsel you in order to avert the decision to divorce?*

On the issue of what the church did to prevent the divorcees from divorcing, these were their responses; one man who was divorced said; “Well to me they did their best but I had already made up my mind not to marry that deceiver again’. Another man who has not divorced but has gone through serious marital challenge said that:

“I think that the church should intensify its teachings on responsibilities or roles of the husband and that of the wife. The teachings about equality should not override our culture. I think that the Pastors teaching about husbands supporting their wives in house chores should not be done in such a way that the wives will think that they have to share house chores with their husbands.”

One of the divorcees also had this to say: Well I think the church should have persuaded me not to divorce but they left me and never followed up to find my where about. One woman who felt cheated said this: “I think the church should streamline their counseling sections towards a professional line, where qualified persons who would not be biased towards one side are brought in to handle delicate issues”.

It could be assumed from the preceding quoted that attempts are made by the church to counsel members who intend to divorce. Nevertheless, some of the respondents also think that the church should not wait till marital problems get to the verge of divorce before they come in. They expect some form of monitoring after the marriage so that issues pertaining in any marriage could be identified and solved. It could also be deduced from the above that in handling marital issues gender balance in terms of expertise should be considered.

#### *4.3.1.3 What triggered the desire to divorce?*

With respect to what triggered the quest for divorce, all ten respondents expressed reasons why at some point in the marriage, they wanted to divorce. The major reasons that emerged were: infidelity, disrespectfulness, confused responsibility, disobedience and lack of love and affection.

With respect to infidelity, one man had this to say:

My wife was very responsible and supportive. If I was asked to give a description of a suitable helper, my wife was an epitome of the word suitable. Our marriage was blessed with two children, a boy and a girl. We enjoyed a happy marriage until I found out that I was living with a chameleon. My heart got broken when it was revealed that I was not the biological father of our daughter of 6 years.

Commenting about disrespectfulness, one man had this to say:

I used to support my wife very well. One day there was football match (African cup) at the stadium so I told my wife that I was going out to watch while she was about preparing fufu. My wife told me that I will come back and meet the fufu unpounded. Lo and behold my wife pounded her portion and left my own dried. Meanwhile there were people at home who could have helped her to pound the fufu at that time. But she took it as my job, my responsibility and this collapsed the marriage.

The man in question has also left the church.

One male respondent who is not divorced but with marital challenge also had this to say:

I used to support the home by carrying the baby and fetching water for the family. One day I closed from work and was relaxing in my sofa when my wife approached me and asked me, “why won’t you go and fetch water today?” We need to know our cultural background and how to handle it. We should not let it be like because we are Christians and married we can just get rid of our cultural background. It is not like that. In our culture a woman must give respect to the man.

Moreover, one male respondent who is divorced mentioned disobedience as his reason for divorce and said that:

We agreed to give birth to two children. After our second child, I was there one day when she came with a laboratory test that she was pregnant with our third baby. I was so upset and felt that my wife was deceptive. Why did she have to get pregnant after our decision not to give birth again? I had to divorce her because she deceived me.

From the researcher’s inference there seem to be a missing link in communication among the aggrieved couples. This lack of communication could have been avoided if they had exercised some form of patience for their partners. In addition, with all due respect, most of the reasons that triggered divorce could be considered as flimsy.

#### *4.3.1.4 The church's response to the decision to divorce*

With respect to what the church did to avert the decision to divorce, majority of the respondents indicated that they did not allow the church to come into their decision. Among the responses are the following:

“Well the pastors were trying to speak with us but her very present and her behavior put me off. I stopped responding to the pastor’s call and I think that discouraged them from continuing. I stopped attending church.” (Male respondent)

“I left the church. I realized the church was being biased. All who spoke to us were males and did not see into my point of view. They seemed to be supporting my husband and so I felt cheated, rejected and so left the church.” (Female respondent)

From the above, one could realize that the church attempts to counsel couples who decide to divorce but it is not able to do much since majority of those who decide to divorce leave the church before the church is aware.

#### *4.3.1.5 The church's stand on divorce and how divorcees are handled in the church*

On the issue of the church's stand on divorce the following responses were received;

“My church does not advocate for divorce in any way. Even in the case of adultery it is expected that you forgive your spouse and continue with the marriage. I could not forgive her. There is no activity for divorcees.”

“My church does not advocate for divorce in any way. No programme for divorcees.”

“My church does not advocate for divorce. No room for divorcees. If you are a leader of the church, you will be stripped off your position.”

“I do not know.”

“No room for divorce.”

It can be inferred from the preceding responses that the church under study does not advocate for divorce in anyway and does not have any programme for divorcees.



#### *4.3.2 Interview with marriage counselors of Grace Baptist Church*

For fair view and for consistency of information the researcher also took the pain to interview some counselors from the case study organization. The following were the responses to the questions asked.

Among those marriage counselors interviewed was a marriage life span ranging from ten to forty years. They had been marriage counselors in the church for twenty two, twenty years, four years and six years respectively.

##### *4.3.2.1 Criteria for choosing counselors*

To the question ‘what criteria was used to choose you as a counselor in your church? These were the responses that came up:

In this church we look at one’s commitment towards God, church activities, and one’s support and contribution towards the church’s goals and vision. You are also assessed. We go through orientation and through this we are taken through marriage teachings. The Head Pastor then calls you to interview you personally to see if you could be a marriage counselor and then you are selected as a married counselor.

Another respondent also expressed his dissatisfaction with the criteria for choosing counselors. According to him, whenever someone is appointed a deacon, he becomes a potential counselor which to him was not appropriate.

##### *4.3.2.2 Period for pre-marital counseling*

Counselors were also asked for how long the Pre-marital counseling last. To this they asserted that pre-marital counseling was three months for would be couples from the church and six months if one party is from a different church. This was because they might not know the person’s background and therefore would need ample time with the person.

#### *4.3.2.3 Content of pre-marital counseling*

Again the counselors were asked about the basic teachings for pre-marital counseling. The responses indicated the basic teachings ranges from: the Bible's view of Marriage and singleness; Role of husband; Role of wife; Making a happy home; some causes of problems in Christian marriages; and Sex education for couples. These were extracts from a handbook.<sup>110</sup>

#### *4.3.2.4 Availability of post-marital counseling*

Moreover, the counselors were asked whether they conducted post marital counseling after marriage. This was what they had to say;

No, we don't have it. We don't visit to know what is going on in the marriage. We only meet at church.

#### *4.3.2.5 The church's stand on divorce and how divorcees are handled in the church*

It was gathered from all the respondents that the church under study believes in the covenant concept of marriage and so does not tolerate divorce in marriages. As to whether the church has encountered some divorce issues, it was realized that some marriages in the church had ended up in divorce and some are also facing serious marital challenges. The reasons for divorce ranged from infidelity, misplaced priority, irresponsibility, deception, the issue of sex, long distant marriage, in-law interruptions, non-submissiveness and lack of childbirth.

It was again realized from the interview that most of the members who have divorced either left the church before the church got to know of it or left when the church decided to come into the matter for redress. The church therefore did not have any program for divorcees since they did not stay in the church.

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<sup>110</sup>Kojo Osei-Wusuh, You can enjoy marriage - a factual guide for Pre-Marital Counseling (Unpublished work)

Premarital counselling is an investment in future. There are no guarantees, even with pre-marriage counselling, but it is about putting the odds in their favour. During the counselling sessions couples learn important problem solving skills, discuss expectations, learn about their strengths and areas for growth, and they learn about how their families of origin will potentially influence their marriage. This helps them to be tolerant and be ready for all situations. The more couples attend premarital courses the less divorce becomes contemplative.

Rice's argument that the three formal ways of preparing for marriage are crucial for successful marriages is food for thought. These formal ways include Premarital Education, Premarital Assessment and Premarital Counselling.<sup>111</sup> This, in the researcher's view, is a step in the right direction because as explained elsewhere in this paper getting the right orientation for any human endeavour provides the right insight into anything that one wants to do which ensures success at the end. A medical officer or a teacher (just to mention a few) needs training to ensure efficiency. In the same way, adequate marriage education in the form of short courses involving lectures, audio-visuals, discussions, role playing etc. will certainly expose couples to proper marital stability.

Hohman, Larson and Harmer argue that premarital assessment or evaluation of the extent to which the couple is fit and ready for marriage is a necessary prerequisite for successful marriages. For the researcher, this need not be overemphasised. They cite a common form of assessment as health assessment involving physical examination and blood tests for sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis, HIV/AIDS and gonorrhoea; these tests are meant to ensure

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<sup>111</sup>Rice, *Intimate relationships, Marriages and Families*, 61.

health safety and the avoidance or prevention of sexually transmitted diseases.<sup>112</sup> They suggest that couples take a critical look at some of the problem areas in marriage such as relationships with friends, family, in-laws, religion, values, recreation, finances, children and their upbringing, sex and affection.<sup>113</sup> This is useful because it is important to resolve differences in these areas before marriage to forestall a stalemate after their coming together when it will be too late for them to agree to disagree.

Also, a third goal according to Holman, Larson and Harmer is to help the couple feel comfortable in seeking professional help in the future for marital or family problems.<sup>114</sup> To the researcher, this is very important because from the researcher's observations, in the Ghanaian context, seeking professional assistance by couples is not common. It is an entirely new phenomenon. Usually in trouble or otherwise, couples either keep their problems to themselves until they mess up after being swallowed up by the problems or they seek help from in-laws and friends who most often take sides and consequently succeed in ruining couples' marriages.

Again, the researcher is of the view that the church should institute post marital counseling whereby couples will continue at least for the first one year to receive counseling and some oversight to understand why they need to continue to submit to the Word of God. Basic things like the role of the man the role of the woman, as stated in Eph. 5:22..., should be emphasized even after the marriage. Ideally, the Counselor who counseled the couple should continue to stay in touch with them, visit them quarterly to find out how they are doing in their home, and whether there are challenges to help them address. The researcher believes that since it is the same person

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<sup>112</sup> T.D. Holman, Larson, J. H., & Harmer, S. L., *Premarital Couples: The Development and Predictive Validity of a New Premarital Assessment Instrument. The Preparation for Marriage Questionnaire*, (New Jersey: Pearson Prentice, 1994), 15.

<sup>113</sup> Hohman, Larson and Harmer, *Premarital Couples*, 18.

<sup>114</sup> Hohman, Larson and Harmer, *Premarital Couples*, 20.

who took them through counseling it will not be difficult for the couple to open up to the counselor. There are issues many couples are going through that the church or deacons are not aware of and so by the time they realize, people have come to divorce. But if they practice the idea of post marital counseling this could be addressed.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

The purpose of the church is to announce God's purpose to the world and to introduce Jesus as the giver of life and the one who gives true meaning to life. Christians are encouraged to live out their faith and practice it. The church therefore has the mandate and responsibility in curbing the alarming issue of divorce. Churches can do this by consciously and intentionally establishing pre-marital and post-marital units.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Summary

The study as a whole looked at the divorce rate in the Kumasi Metropolis and the church's role in curbing the situation. Biblically, the study supports the undisputable fact that God is the originator of marriage (Genesis 1:26-27). God made male and female in His own image, and His main purpose for marriage was for companionship. Throughout history, the beauty of marriage has been stained in all cultures by conflict, misunderstanding, thereby resulting in marriage break ups. The study also underscored the fact that the issue of divorce is very devastating and has now become a universal canker since it is found in all countries. In an attempt to address this issue, the study surveyed the scriptures to understand what it has to say about marriage and divorce. The study reviewed the Biblical background to the issues of marriage and divorce by looking at the teachings of Genesis, the prophets, Jesus and the apostle Paul. The Biblical background further shows how the Scripture consistently upholds marriage as a sacred and permanent covenant, witnessed and protected by God. The study observed that marriage as a sacred covenant was effectively used in the Old Testament to portray God's relationship with Israel and in the New Testament to represent Christ's relationship with His church. If God used marriage as a metaphor to represent His commitment to His people, then it presupposes that He regards marriage as a sacred, permanent covenant relationship.

Again, some of the factors accounting for the high divorce rate in Kumasi were also considered and among these were: immaturity on the part of partner, infidelity or extra marital affairs, maltreatment or physical abuse, monetary issues, ex-boy-girl friend reunion,

incompatibility, family interference, misunderstanding of marriage, Pastors who are also divorcing, “Borger” marriages, and the issue of sex.

Since the tragedy of divorce has consequence not only on the couples but also on the children, the study also looked at its effects on children and the following were gathered: stigmatization, children dropping out of school, prostitution, armed robbery, madness, premature death, murder, suicide, street children and juvenile delinquency, child abuse and financial difficulties.

The research also examined how the Grace Baptist church in the Kumasi Metropolis is responding to the issue of divorce. It was realized that the church allocated three to six months for premarital counseling. There was no availability of post-marital counseling. It was also realized that it is only during wedding ceremonies or during annual celebration of family life week that teachings on marriage are presented from the pulpit. Again, it was found out that there was no program for divorcees in the selected church since those who divorced did not stay in the church.

In developing counselors, deacons or deaconesses who are committed to the vision and goals of the church are assessed and taken through training to become marriage counselors. It was realized that the church has been hit by the issue of divorce and some marriages in the church have ended up in divorce while others are also facing serious marital challenges. Since the church does not advocate for divorce, leaders who divorce are stripped off their leadership positions.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

The researcher affirms that the Biblical view of marriage as a sacred and permanent covenant, witnessed by God Himself, is indispensable in counteracting the secularization of marriage.

From the researchers own examination and review of statistics from the KMA and High Court, all in the Kumasi Metropolis, it can be concluded that the divorce rate is on the ascendancy. Divorce rate is prevalent among the young couples (those who marry in their early ages). It can also be concluded that more and more young people are getting married from the Pentecostal, Charismatic and Evangelical churches. Nevertheless, the rate of divorce is somehow higher in the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches than the Mainline Historic churches. The higher rate of divorce can be attributed to western cultural lifestyle and peer pressure. For instance some follow the soap operas which give wrong picture about marriage and the young people think what they see in these films are real, and as such when these expectations are not met their marriages lead to divorce. The other factors that cause divorce include challenges in communication, bitterness, barrenness or childlessness, adultery, desertion or abandonment, persistent conflicts and abuse.

From the researcher's findings it has come to light that the selected church does not have laid down plans and procedures in responding and dealing with the issue of divorce. Moreover, it is sad to say that a lot of pastors and marriage counselors are ill equipped to handle the issue of divorce in their congregations.

## **5.3 Recommendations**

Marriage is a sacred institution and should not be easily terminated by divorce. The epidemic rate of which divorce has reached in our society is a reflection of how the sacredness of marriage



has been dishonored. In order to uphold God's standard of monogamous lifetime marriage, the researcher recommends the following:

1. Pastors and church leaders should be well trained in the Word of God as marriage counselors. Pastors who have not had formal training should be encouraged to attend Bible Schools. The researcher believes that this will contribute to their knowledge and broaden their horizon in the teaching of marriage. It will further help them to develop better understanding on certain key marital issues so that they can offer good counseling to people who find themselves in marital crisis. Church leaders should pursue courses in exegesis and hermeneutics in order to be well equipped for better and accurate interpretation of the Word of God, especially Scripture texts that deal with the issue of divorce.
2. Churches must devote time to teach on marriage as they teach on topics such as salvation, transformation, blessing and so on. Most sermons on marriage are preached during wedding ceremonies and special marriage seminars. The subject of marriage and divorce should be taught more frequently in churches.
3. The church must play a lead role in educating the youth and married couples on issues related to sex. Sex education in marriage must be given much attention during counseling. This will go a long way to help married partners to be satisfied with each other and to avoid extra marital affairs, thereby curbing the issue of divorce. This can clearly be seen from the assertion of the lawyer in charge of marriage and divorce at the KMA that about 75% of marriage issues that end in divorce at their end is as a result of sex problem.

4. Counseling should be taken more seriously in the Churches. Emphasis must be laid on both pre-marital and post-marital counseling and this should be done frequently. The researcher is of the view that the church should institute post-marital counseling whereby couples will continue at least for the first year to receive counseling and some oversight and to get couples to understand why they need to continue to submit to the Word of God. In this regard Christian marriage counselors in Ghana should develop marriage seminars at regular intervals where the marriage couples and 'would be' couples would come and learn more about the institution of marriage, their prospective roles in marriage and the challenges in marriage. This could help identify and solve a potential issue that could lead to divorce.
5. The youth should be taught and encouraged to establish themselves in their chosen professions before making marriage commitments so as to minimize the incidents of divorce among young couples.
6. The high cost of marriage must be addressed by the church. This is because many marriages that have lasted long were not because the couples were rich. Making marriage simple and less expensive should be encouraged.
7. Finally, the clergy should make it a point to encourage married couples to stay united in love, forgiving each other and living out the principles of marriage as enshrined in Scriptures.
8. The high cost of marriage needs to be addressed by ministers and church leaders. This is because many marriages that have lasted long were not because the couples were rich. Making marriage simple and less expensive should be encouraged by the church.

There is the need for the church to step out and be proactive to address this crisis in Christian marriages since the church is supposed to be the salt and light of the world.

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## PEOPLE INTERVIEWED

- |                         |   |  |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| Lawyer OseiPoku         | - | Marriage and Divorce at the KMA                    |
| Mr. Francis Gedzeah     | - | Registrar of the High court                        |
| Mr. Samuel OppongMintah | - | Registrar of the Circuit Court KMA                 |
| Mr. Yaw Domfeh De-Graft | - | Assistant Registrar of the Gender Court            |
| DSP Dokurugu Benjamin   | - | Regional Coordinator, DOVVSU – Ashanti Region      |
| Nana AkuaAgyeman        | - | The linguist of Nana AfiaKobi - Traditional court. |