

## SEXUALITY AND HUMAN NATURE: AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

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*DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.29127.37285*

### **Abstract**

*Sexuality is like a cult in which everyone belongs and of which everyone denies. There exists a “common sense belief that human beings possess the innate mechanistic urge to reproduce. This phenomenon has been recognized as a natural law. As such, the heterosexual component of human behavior is by and large viewed as being genetic, whereas its homosexuality is primarily the focus of scientific investigations into human sexual orientation. This later development is anti-African with glowing exclusive condemnation and rejection, either legally or morally or both. But is this fact rationalizable? Is it impossible that a reasonable percentage of human population is naturally homosexuals? This paper employs the critical method to attempt a general underlying explanation for human sexuality from an African point of view. The study argues that other forms of human sexual expression may be explained to some extent with the view of the metaphor of “death of the father.” Rejection or abstinence from any sexual aberrations such as cyber sex, contraception, lesbianism, homosexuality, bestialism, masturbation etc, is necessary for sustaining the human species and the society. In a traditional African society, sexual relation, in its strict sense, is carried out only for the purpose of procreation. However, there is something inherently problematic about this reality. The population would soon outgrow the economy. This would inevitably lead to poverty of the society. The phenomenon of industrialization would compound this problem as men would go in search of greener pasture in urban areas. Emergency of feminism would also compel women to resist the confines of the kitchen and child rearing to also take their place in banks, industries, markets, classrooms. To resolve these issues once and for all, science would come up with contraception and the idea of birth control. But shall evil be done that good may result?*

**Keywords:** sex, sexuality, Africa, marriage, procreation, porneia.

## **Introduction**

The sexuality of the African provides a powerful metaphor for the colonial encounter. The image of perversity personified in the promiscuous African man and the childbearing African woman are “familiar toes that announce the African sexual subject as quintessentially other” (Arnfred 2004:19). Stereotypes about the other serve to construct ideas about the self. Thus, images of African sexuality as pathological, perverse and primitive construct the sexuality of the European in opposition as healthy, normal and civilized (Monhanty 1991:51). The study of sexuality in Africa has been shaped by this false dichotomy between Africa and the West. The fact is that the European discourse on African sexuality seems to have tended to reveal more about the observer than the observed, the author than the subject (Vaughan 1991:41).

The legacy of these stereotypes lingers to this day and is evident in the nature and focus of research on sexuality that has been undertaken in Africa, for instance, in the tendency to view tradition as static and ahistorical rather than dynamic and subject to change; and in the ways in which European perceptions and preoccupations with the nature of sexuality, morality and sin are often imposed on the African. The tendency to generalize for the whole of Africa in the form of a model of African sexuality is also evident in an approach to research in Africa that lacks cultural nuance and historical specificity. The role of contemporary research on sexualities in Africa is, therefore, to challenge the dualities and dichotomies of the colonial gaze that has been so influential in shaping an understanding of African sexuality.

Consider, for instance, the question of same-sex sexual relationship. Historically, same-sex relations in Africa have either been largely ignored or concealed in inaccessible texts missionary reports and obscure anthropological writings. Among the many myths Europeans have created about Africa, “the myth that homosexuality is absent or incidental in African societies is one of the oldest and most enduring” (Murray & Roscoe 1998:xi). On the one hand, early writings tended to cast Africans as closer to nature, their sexuality being devoted to the natural functions of reproduction, and therefore free of perverse practices such as homosexuality. On the other hand, evidence of widespread same-sex experience has been used sometimes to demonstrate that homosexuality must be a natural variant of human sexuality (Reid & Walker 2005:185-186). In this argument, Africans are still seen as closer to nature and free of the corrupting influence of modern civilizations.

Nevertheless, the patriarchal nature of the society plays out even in matter of sexuality. The traditional society was a society of promiscuous male with a faithful woman. The only possible world was that of sex and no abstinence. Agriculture was the main source of survival prior to the emergence of industrialized societies. Once this occurred, however,

men who ordinarily assumed the public sphere seek for greener pasture in the cities, becoming waged laborers, while women, who occupy the private sphere of life, were content with domestic works and childrearing. What is clear is the fact of a separation, even if momentary, between the husband and the wife. Hence, in order to appease the concupiscence, there is growth in sexual and marital infidelity. Human population naturally increased. There was also the spread of sexually infected diseases.

Population was increasing while the economy was decreasing. This will inevitably lead to the emergence of a poverty stricken society. Society, including the Church as well as science and technology, has to stand up in search for an answer to this situation. To provide solution to this phenomenon, contraceptives of various kinds were produced by science and technology. These materials were also used to encourage and propagate the idea of birth control. The Church is not unanimous in their resolution about the use of contraceptives; while the Anglican Church permits it, the Catholic Church rejects it and proposes birth regulation instead. But where does all this leave the African? For the African, there is more to sex than mere procreation.

### **Historical Conceptual Approach**

Sexuality is the way people experience and express themselves sexually (Cavendish 2010:384). Sexuality, in other words, encompasses all the ways people experience and express themselves as sexual beings. This may include biological, physical, emotional, or social feelings and behaviors (Anne et al. 2009:32-42). The biological and physical aspects of sexuality largely concern the human reproductive functions. They also deal with the influence of biological factors on other aspects of sexuality, such as heredity, gender issues, and sexual dysfunctions (Spencer et al. 2008:12). Emotional aspect of sexuality includes bonds between individuals that may be expressed through profound feelings or physical manifestations of love, lust, trust, and care. Social aspects deal with the effects of human society on one's sexuality or sexual orientation. One's sexual orientation is one's pattern of sexual interest in the opposite or same sex.

Sexuality also affects and is affected by cultural, political, legal, philosophical, moral, ethical, and religious aspects of life (Jerrold et al. 2016:4-10). Human sexuality is a part of our total personality, involving the interrelationship of biological, psychological, and socio-cultural dimensions. Indeed, human sexuality can be understood as part of the social life of humans, which is governed by implied rules of behavior and the status quo. This can then narrow the view to groups within a society.

The socio-cultural context of society (including the effects of politics and the media); influences and forms social norms. Throughout history, social norms have been changing

and continue to change as a result of movements such as the sexual revolution and the rise of feminism (Escoffier 2003:3). Nevertheless, sexuality has been an important, vital part of human existence throughout history. All civilizations have managed sexuality through standards, representations, and behavior.

Before the rise of agriculture, groups of hunters and nomadic groups inhabited the world. These groups had less restrictive sexual standards that emphasized sexual pleasure and enjoyment, but with some definite rules and constraints. At this time, some underlying continuities or key regulatory standards contended with the tension between recognition of pleasure and interest on the one hand, and the need to procreate for the sake of social order and economic survival on the other. A common tension in hunter societies is expressed in their art, which emphasized male sexuality and prowess, but also blurred gender lines in sexual matters. An example of this male-dominated portrayal is “the Egyptian creation myth, in which the sun god, Atum, masturbates in the water, creating the Nile River” (Stearns 2009:213).

Once agricultural societies emerged, the sexual framework shifted in ways that persisted for many millennia in much of Africa and other parts of the world. One common characteristic new to these societies was the collective supervision of sexual behavior due to urbanization and the growth of population and population density. Children would commonly witness parents having sex because many families shared the same sleeping quarters. Due to increase in childbearing, land scarcity resulted, determination of children’s paternity became important, and society and family life became patriarchal (Stearns 2009:213). These changes in sexual ideology were used to control female sexuality and to differentiate standards by gender. With these ideologies, sexual possessiveness and increase in jealousy emerged.

While retaining the precedents of earlier civilizations, each classical civilization established a somewhat distinctive approach to gender and sexuality, and to behavior such as homosexuality. Before the High Middle Ages, homosexual acts appeared to have been ignored or tolerated even by Christian Churches. During the 12th century, hostility toward homosexuality began to spread throughout religious and secular institutions. By the end of the 19th century, it was viewed as a pathology (Stearns 2009:214).

During the beginning of the industrial revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries, many changes in sexual standards occurred. New artificial birth control devices such as the condom were introduced. Doctors started claiming a new role in sexual matters, urging that their advice was crucial to sexual morality and health. New pornographic industries also emerged. In Western societies, the definition of homosexuality was constantly changing; Western influence on other cultures also became more prevalent. New cultural

contacts created serious issues around sexuality and sexual traditions. There was also a noticeable shift in sexual behavior. For instance, during this period, puberty began to occur at younger ages, so a new focus on adolescence as a time of sexual confusion and danger equally emerged. There was a new focus also on the purpose of marriage; it was increasingly regarded as being for love rather than for economic and reproductive reasons (Stearns 2009:214).

### **Culture, Religion and African Sexuality**

The cultural diversity and richness found within the African religious and cultural communities lend to its versatility and beauty. Our historical and colonial legacy of pluralistic legal systems and multi-religious traditions holds both advantages and disadvantages. African religious and cultural plurality spawns many contradictions and some absurdities. So one can only imagine the complexity involved in exploring varied African sexualities within such shifting paradigms and crosscurrents of discourses. In order to make sense of such exploration, we approach the topic from a common ground where the plurality of culture, religion and religiosity (and even law) finds convergence in their engagement with African sexualities. Such common ground can be found in the forces of patriarchy and capitalism.

Our use of the term “African sexuality” is not because we are unaware of African people’s heterogeneity and the significance of such difference. We are aware that because of the rich and diverse socio-cultural, as well as some political differences across African societies, the statuses of African peoples differ based on gender, class, race, ethnicity, religion, age, sexual orientation, etc. However, our reference to Africans as a collective in relation to sexuality stems from two important factors. The first is to highlight those aspects of cultural ideology that are widely shared among vast majority of people within the geographical entity called Africa. More importantly, the term is used politically to call attention to some of the commonalities and shared historical legacies inscribed in cultures and sexualities within the region by forces such as “colonialism, capitalism, imperialism, fundamentalism and globalization” (Tamale 2014:122).

A careful mapping of religions on the continent reveals that about 90% of its population subscribe to the monotheistic religion of Christianity or Islam (Tamale 2014:124). These religions do not approve of African Traditional Religions, which formed an integral part of African sexual cultures. Despite this, African Traditional Religions currently exercise considerable influence on the populations and, indeed, a significant number of people tend to practice them concurrently, even if discreetly, with the monotheistic religions. This constitutes one of the inherent contradictions of plurality referred to earlier. The influence

of religious traditions, especially Christianity on African sexuality has been enormous, for worse or for better. Mutua (2017) remarks on this saying that:

Africa – from top to bottom – was remade in the image of Europe completely with Eurocentric modern states. Christianity played a crucial role in this process: wearing Africans from their roots and pacifying them for the new order. Utilizing superior resources, it occupied most political space and practically killed local religious traditions and then closed off society from other persuasion...Progress, culture and humanity were identified entirely in Islamic or Christian terms, never with reference to indigenous traditions.

Many sexual practices that were acceptable in pre-colonial Africa were thus illegitimated. African sexualities were reduced to a universalized, essentialised cultures and integrated into the wider 'enlightened' culture. This lends some support to the claim that sexuality is not exclusively driven by biology. For a very significant part of it is socially constructed through legal, cultural and religious forces driven by a politico-economic agenda (Bordo1989:24). As Africans, how we do and experience sexuality can be influenced heavily by society and culture. How and with whom we have sex, what we desire, what we take pleasure in, how we express that pleasure, why, under what circumstance and with what outcomes, are all forms of learned behavior communicated, *inter alia*, through the institutions of culture, religion and law (Bordo1989:24). It is through these social institutions and social relationships that sexuality is given meaning.

So when we speak of African sexuality, we are relying on discourses of culture and religion and the way that these structure African realities. Religious and cultural factors fashion African people to conform to the mainstream notions of sexuality. A radical example of this can be seen in the acts of young women voluntarily submitting themselves for virginity testing in search of public approval. In South Africa and Zimbabwe, for example, "many young women 'voluntarily' submit themselves for such tests in a bid to gain public approval, respond to demands for communal belonging and on account of the dignity and pride associated with it" (Sclyster 2009). So Tamale's doubtful assertion can come in here. He noted that "whereas ATR generally tolerated practices such as masturbation, fornication, infidelity, adultery, non-penetrative sex, prostitution and homoerotics" (Tamale 2014:122), the Christian religion condemns it as sinful. I called it doubtful assertion because some of the claims ascribed to ATR is actually taboos in many African societies. In Africa, for instance, not only does the discourse reveal same-sex relations boldly as unnatural, but also as distinctively un-African. Indeed, same-sex practice is not only a disgrace to God but also humanity; it is a taboo that cannot be tolerated in any normal society.

### **Patriarchy, Capitalism and the Exploitation of Women**

The ideological frameworks from which African religions and sexualities operate dictate a separation of the public and private realms. They emphasize domesticated female bodies designed primarily for reproduction and production, on the one hand, and public male bodies, on the other (Tamale 2014:125). The private nature of African religions lends support to this development. At the same time, because African other Western religions in African states, particularly Christianity, is practically in the public square, it forms part of the mechanism that regulates women's domesticated bodies and sexuality. Thus during the last four decades the growth of the human rights and feminist movement has operated to reshape sexualities in Africa.

It is against this backdrop that we can now analyze how African people experience and express themselves as sexual beings. Note that gender relations and sexuality play a crucial role in creating and sustaining patriarchy and capitalism (Tamale 2011:11-16). Male dominance and female subordination, from the level of family unit to the community and state levels, have to be maintained for the survival and supremacy of the two systems. The need to control and regulate women's sexuality and reproductive capacity is crucial in a patriarchal-capitalist society. First, as one of the central tenets of the institutionalization of women's exploitation, such control consolidates male domination through their control of resources and their relative gender economic power over women. The patriarchal family engenders these economic relations whereby the man, as head of the house, exercises control over the lives of women and children who are virtually treated as his property ((Escoffier 2003:22). In this way hetero-normativity forms one of the essential power bases for men in the domestic arena.

Capitalism, in Africa at least, requires a form of patriarchy. It is essential that the man's acquired property and wealth is passed on to his male offspring in order to sustain the system of patriarchy. Hence, it becomes important to control women's sexuality in order to guarantee the paternity and legitimacy of children when bequeathing property. To this end, monogamy of women is required, without necessarily disturbing men's polygamous sexuality. Such double standards and inconsistency in sexual morality are clearly reflected in traditional African society and elsewhere: for example, the crime of adultery applying to women and not to men. The inconsistency in sexual morality is also seen in the offence of prostitution around the continent that penalizes only the sellers (the majority being women) and not the buyers of sex.

At another level, capitalist patriarchal societies are characterized by a separation of the 'public' sphere from the 'private' sphere. The two spheres are highly gendered with the former representing men and the locus of socially-valued activities such as politics and

waged labour, while the latter is representative of the mainly unremunerated and undervalued domestic activities performed by women. This necessitated the domestication of women's bodies and their relegation to the 'private' sphere, where they provide the necessities of productive and reproductive social life gratuitously and are economically dependent on their male partners.

In Africa, the process of separating the public-private spheres preceded colonization but was precipitated, consolidated and reinforced by colonial policies and practices. Tamale (2014:125) noted that:

Where there had been a blurred distinction between public and private life, colonial structures (la, religion) and policies) for example, educational) focused on delineating a clear distinction guided by an ideology that perceived men as public actors and women as private performers. Where domestic work had co-existed with commercial work in pre-colonial satellite households, a new form of domesticity, existing outside production, took over. Where land had been communally owned in pre-colonial societies, a tenure system that allowed for absolute and individual ownership in land took over. At the same time, politics and power were formalized and institutionalized with male public actors.

In this light the Western capitalist, political ideology that was imposed on the Africa people focused on the individual, submerging the African tradition that valued the collective.

### **The Rise of Feminism and a New Paradigm**

Needless to say, not all Africans passively conform to the hegemonic or dominant sexual discourses constructed by the establishment. Indeed, the turn of the century witnessed the growth of social movements which put up a courageous challenge and provided different inflections to the various practices regarding sexuality. African communities which have been punished to the margins of sexual citizenship, particularly women, have made real attempts to construct a counter-hegemonic sexual discourse through subversion, activism, advocacy and research (Lichbach & Zuckerman 1987). Their discourses always throws up critical issues of intersectionality whereby "the interactive influence of culture, religion, gender, class, race, ethnicity, age, disability, geographical location, and so forth, on one's sexuality are taken into account" (Tamale 2014:129).

The feminist movements seek to explode the sexual myths based in essentialist attitudes towards African sexuality and demands for inclusion, justice and dignity. Today, sexuality is indeed on the cutting edge of human rights activism and research on the African continent. In these struggles, the law is a double-edged sword. Even as it can be deployed



to construct the hegemonic discourse and to control and regulate the African sexuality, it can also be used by activists to challenge and overturn unjust practices and to effect fundamental change to the *status quo*.

Due to the activism of feminist movements, a new paradigm has been adopted in many African countries as several of these have reformed their laws pertaining to gender and sexuality. So, not only do feminist movements around the continent lobby for legal reform, but they also engage in strategic action to engender social change in the area of sexuality. Today women are no longer confined to the domestic works and for child rearing; they now engage fully in waged labor as well. In this way, the regulation of sexuality and the maintenance of patriarchal-capitalist inequality is more or less, kept in check. This, however, is not without any implications.

### **Industrial Revolution and Sexual Revolution**

An increased rate of illegitimacy is caused by the employment opportunities outside the home that opened up with industrialization. Men are ordinarily known, since the emergence of industrialization, to seek greener pastures in the cities leaving their wives at home. But women too have gained access to waged labor outside their homes, thanks to feminist activists. This, according to Edward Shorter: “will lead to the sexual emancipation of the unmarried, which are the working-class women” (Shorter 1973:609). In Shorter’s view, a nineteenth century sexual revolution happened due to the capitalism revolution. Young men and women work for wages because of the value of self-interest and competitiveness of market economy. Thus, it changes the value system of the proletarian subcultures. The workers get the meaning of independence by having their own money. Most of the women are struggling to get their own personal freedom and they look at sex as one of the ways to fulfill their own self-satisfaction. They mainly cared for their independence from family control. This resulted in a rise in the rate of illegitimate sexual relations.

Initially, culture has restricted women to mere domestic works and to childrearing. While men pursued self-interest in addition to family interest, women pursued only the family interest. They focused on domestic services, laundering, cooking and in childrearing. From these works they cannot gain economic independence from their male partner. But the pressures eventually loss, thus women moved on to other work or better opportunities. This entrance into the capitalist labor force enabled women to create a mechanism to control female emancipation, birth and fertility. This female emancipation simply involves the replacement of cultural or men subordination with independence (Mitchell & Mitchell 2011). Married women acquired for themselves first, practical leverage on

household political power, and second, a family ideology stressing their own rights to sexual gratification and emotional autonomy.

Similarly, unmarried women became increasingly convinced of the impropriety of family and community restraints upon social and sexual relations, so that they came to ignore the strictures of both parents and community in order to gratify their own personal needs (UKEssays 2018). This can be referred to as “death of the father,” highlighting the circumstance that comes to play when tradition and traditional institutions are totally ignored. Therefore, women’s emancipation means disregarding outside controls upon personal freedom of action and sexuality for the sake of individual self-fulfillment. Hence, consequence of capitalism for women is the weakening of traditional moral taboos and destruction of conventional anti-sexual values.

There is an unwillingness to accept the dictates of tradition and a new readiness to experiment with personal freedom and gratification. It quickened the interest in intercourse as an aspect of personality development. These shifts in economic structure, culture, and individual mentalities affect marriage, procreation and sexuality in general. There was increased birth rate while the economy of the society was not increasing proportionally. If this is left unattended, it will result in poverty of society. Science as well as the Catholic Church finds that there is need for family planning. But how do we go about the planning? There are two options: (1) reliance on human intelligence or on mechanical system, (2) respect for specific rhythm for regulation.

### **The Response of Science**

The response of science to this phenomenon is the massive production of contraception (UKEssays 2018). Contraceptives are believed to prevent some sexually transmitted diseases, prevent pregnancy, and sometimes, induces abortion. Contraception is a mechanical method of controlling birth. There are various types of it (Green 1972:140). Some are preventive – preventing the egg and the sperm from meeting. Some are interceptive – not preventing but intercept, interrupt or frustrates afterwards. Some are contra-gestative – against gestation. Gestation is the movement of fertilized egg to the uterus through the uterus lining (between eight to nine days). Contra-gestatives ensure that the fertilized egg does not gestate or implant. It is used to frustrate the fertilized egg by making the uterus lining hostile for its movement into the uterus. Making the uterus hostile for formation of baby, it expels the fertilized egg from the uterus. It is, therefore, an abortifacient.

### **The Response of the Church: the Traditional Principles**

The Church's first document of June 16, 1880 spoke of periodic continence, also referred to as sacred penitentiary (Smith 2021:1056). Couples are to have sex only during infertile periods. In 1951 the Church broadly permits the adoption of *safe period method* (O'Reilly, 2010). But if contraception and safe period both avoid pregnancy, what then is the difference? It is simple. Contraception controls birth, causing blockage and frustration to the pregnancy by means of mechanical method. Safe period method regulates birth by means of natural method and it recognizes the natural rhythm of life.

Resolution 15 of the Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Communion in 1930 asserts itself to the question of marriage. It holds that based on Christian principle, the primary approach to the problem is abstinence. Nevertheless, other methods may be used, provided it agrees with the same Christian principles; not out of selfishness or luxury (McSweeney 2011:80). This enabled many Christian families to subscribe to the use of contraceptives as a method of family planning. Pius XI's Encyclical, *Casti Connubi* of 1930 (nos.55-56) ended the speculation by providing a response to the Anglican position, namely: either natural family planning or no way.

Vatican II document, *Gaudium et Spes*, remarks that "the Council does not intend to propose concrete solution to this matter since the question has been submitted by command of the Pope to a Commission for careful study" (GS. footnote 118). Nevertheless, it states that "marriage and married love are by their character ordained to the procreation and upbringing of children, and for mutual love between the couple" (GS. No.50) Hence, it condemned abortion and infanticide as abominable crimes (LG. no.51). It ends by remarking that it is not lawful to regulate procreation by embarking on ways which the Church's teaching authority, in expounding the divine law, condemns.

The Commission referred to above is the Pontifical Commission on Birth Control established by Pope John XXIII. As in the past documents on marriage and family, the majority report stressed the sacredness of marriage, the dignity of sex, and the importance of openness to new life. The document reinforces the notion that mutual love in marriage complements the couple's responsibility for having children. However, the report broke from Church teaching and tradition when it based itself on the principle of totality: a part may be sacrificed for the good of a whole (Rausch 2003:158). Hence, it recommends that it may be permissible to make use of certain means of birth regulation. For, every marital act does not have to have procreative intent. For this reason, the majority report of the commission was rejected in favor of that of the minority.

The teaching of the Catholic Church is that man and woman are privileged co-creators with God, and this comes with a high sense of responsibility. Responsible parenthood

should, therefore, pay attention to the welfare of the spouses, welfare of children (born and unborn), material and spiritual well-being, current state of life, the interest of the family group and the large human society LG. no.50). *Humanae Vitae*, an Encyclical of Pope Paul VI, dated 25 July, 1968, and subtitled “On the Regulation of Birth,” (Rausch 2003) reaffirms the teaching of the Catholic Church regarding married love, responsible parenthood, and the rejection of artificial contraception. Here he explained why he did not accept the conclusions of the *Pontifical Commission on Birth Control* established by his predecessor, John XXIII. The Encyclical affirms traditional Church moral teaching on the sanctity of life, the procreative and unitive nature of conjugal relations and condemns the use of artificial birth control.

According to the Pope, marital relations are much more than a union of two people. In his view, they constitute a union of a loving couple with the body, while God creates the unique soul of a person. For this reason, the Pope teaches that a transmission of human life is a most serious role in which married people collaborate freely and responsibly with God the creator. Since it is a divine partnership, there is no room to allow for arbitrary human decisions, which may limit divine providence. For him, marital relations are a source of great joy, but also of difficulties and hardships. Accordingly, he observed that circumstances often dictate that married couples should limit the number of children; and that the sexual act between husband and wife is still worthy even if it can be foreseen not to result in procreation. Nevertheless, it is held that the sexual act must retain its intrinsic relationship to the procreation of human life (Rausch 2003).

Every action specifically intended to prevent procreation is forbidden, except in medically necessary circumstances. Also therapeutic means necessary to cure diseases are exempted, even if a foreseeable impediment to procreation should result – provided that infertility is not directly intended. Abortion, even for therapeutic reasons, is absolutely forbidden as is sterilization, even if temporary. If there are well grounded reasons, natural family planning methods are allowed, since they take advantage of a faculty provided by nature. Natural family planning or birth regulation is all about abstinence from intercourse during certain parts of the menstrual cycle.

The above conclusion is in line with the opinion of the early fathers. According to Augustine it is based on the social character of human nature and its capacity for friendship that God created all men from one so that they may be held together in society by means of natural ties – first of which is man and wife – the one being made from the other to also indicate the power of union. Thus, Augustine believes that the marriage of male and female is something good and that it is commanded by scriptures. But why precisely is marriage a good? Augustine provided the following answers: for procreation of children, for companionship between the two sexes, and turning of concupiscence to

the honorable task of procreation. Others are: fidelity, by which he meant the right which that each spouse has over the body of his/her partner (Augustine 1955:16), and lastly because marriage is sacrament sanctity of which renders divorce impossible (Augustine 1955:48). Even if divorce occurred, nuptial contract is not destroyed, and the parties of the compact remain wedded persons even though separated. From the above, it follows that marriage is not a good sought for its own sake but necessary for something else. Nevertheless, the crown of marriage is the chastity of procreation and faithfulness in rendering the carnal debt. Continence, meanwhile, is a greater virtue than marriage, yet we are no better than the early patriarchs who used their marriage nuptially, though they had more than one wife. He concludes by asserting that "...bond of fellowship between married couples is so strong that, although it is tied for the purpose of procreation, it is not loosed for the purpose of procreation (Augustine 1955:18).

For St. Augustine, Marriage is a good on account of procreation, fidelity, sacrament, companionship, and turning of concupiscence to the task of procreation. Therefore, sexual intercourse is morally permitted only between married couples. The couples however can have intercourse only for the purpose of procreation which is the primary good of marriage. Any intercourse outside of this is a venial sin. Marriage, however, cannot be dissolved for the purpose of procreation. Hence, should the married people separate, as a matter of the sacrament, they ought not to remarry while the other party still lives.

Similarly, in questions 151 and 154 of the second part of the second part of his *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas discussed the issues of chastity and lust respectively. He identifies chastity as a virtue since moderates and chastises concupiscence. He noted that the word can be employed properly and metaphorically. With respect to the former, chastity is a *special* virtue but regarding the later, chastity if a *general* virtue. Meanwhile, the virtue chastity is to be distinguished from that of abstinence since they chastise different kinds of pleasure. For while chastity is the virtue for venereal pleasures/pleasure of touch (which are more oppressive on the reason), abstinence is the virtue for pleasures of the palate. He noted that purity and chastity are sometimes used interchangeable but the same, for while purity pertains to signs of sexual union such as looks, kisses, touches chastity pertains to sexual union itself. With regards to lust, Aquinas remarked that the sin of lust consists in seeking venereal pleasure not in accordance with right reason, hence inconsistency with the end of the venereal act. Accordingly, whenever we find something incompatible with the right use of venereal actions, there must necessarily be a determinate species of lust (Aquinas 1947, q.151, art.9). Hence, he identifies the following as species of lust in this order of gravity: natural vices, incest, rape, adultery, seduction and fornication. Natural vices is the greatest sin because in addition to being contrary to reason (which is common to all others), it is also contrary to nature.

According to St. Thomas Aquinas, chastity is the virtue which excludes or moderates the indulgence of the sexual appetite. It is a virtue different from abstinence since by it the nature of species is preserved while by abstinence the nature of the individual is maintained. On the other hand, lust is the inordinate craving for the carnal pleasures which is experienced in the human organs of generation. It is divided into six species all of which are aggravated under the heading of sacrilege. Hence, we ought to avoid the sin of lust in its various forms and embrace the virtues of chastity, purity and abstinence.

Aquinas concluded by remarking that, “Whenever we find something incompatible with the right use of venereal actions, there must necessarily be a determinate species of lust” (Aquinas 1947, q.151, art.9). This paves way to the Church’s traditional moral principles. They are certain rules or standard upon which sexual acts are evaluated as right or wrong, good or evil. They are as follows (Rausch 2003):

1. *Contra natura* – contrary to nature. This principle condemns all lustful acts as sinful and as contrary to right reason. Here Aquinas provides two distinctions: *peccata secundum natura* – sin according to nature such as fornication and adultery, and *peccata contra natura* – sin against nature such as homosexual acts and incest.
2. *Ex toto genere suo grave* – grave from the totality of its nature. This forbids all sexual acts outside of marriage as intrinsic evil acts (*intrinsece malum*), contrary to the final end (*contra finem*), and contrary to charity (*contra caritatem*).
3. *In re venereal* – *in sexually pleasurable matters*. It states that sexual pleasure can only be expressed within marriage otherwise it is gravely sinful.
4. *Parvitas materiae in sexton* – there is no parvity in matters of the sixth commandment, “You shall not commit adultery,” This is to say that every sin about the 6th commandment; every violation of sexual freedom, is objectively serious and grave. For, as Aquinas asserts in his *Summa Theologiae*, “Fornication and all intercourse with other than one’s wife is a mortal sin” (Aquinas, 1947, art.2).
5. *Dues impossibilia non jubet* – God does not command the impossible, which implies that whatever is commanded by God (such as the five moral principles) is within our capacity to do, and we have the grace to do it. The basis of this principle is grace: “My grace is sufficient for you...” (cf. 2Cor.12:9).

### **Questioning the Traditional Paradigm**

From the ongoing the following conclusions may be drawn. In regulation, there is only one licit means, namely the natural family planning method, according to the Church’s moral teaching. Contraception cannot be accepted because it will lower moral standards,

lessen the respect for women, increases government control and interference, and increase poverty of the world as it does not encourage abstinence. Therefore, marital love must be total, with no impediment, unitive and open to procreation. Among Pope Paul VI's prophetic utterances are the facts that a society that becomes contraceptive would lead to more divorce, more abortion, less love, less concern, and irresponsible parenthood (Rausch 2003). Indeed, the *telos* of sexual activity is nothing but procreation within the context of marriage (Rausch 2003). The Church thus remains opposed to every conjugal love that excludes procreation; sex is only valid, licit and moral when open to procreation in a marital relationship.

But is genitalia used only for sex? What about sexual experimentation? What is the place of sexual desire? Many marriages have collapsed today because of lack of sexual desire in the relationship. No wonder 'divorce' is not a known element of the African marital relationship. There is more to sex than mere procreation. The traditional African society is a pro-life society but that is not to say that sexual relationship is tied to procreation alone. It seems that St. Augustine, an African philosopher and theologian understood this when he asserts that: "...bond of fellowship between married couples is so strong that, although it is tied for the purpose of procreation, it is not loosed for the purpose of procreation" (Augustine 1955:18). For the African, reason for sex is not only life but also love and lust. All sexual activities outside marriage is for him disgraceful and shameful, but not an intrinsic evil as the Church's traditional principles suggest.

McSweeney (2011:81) noted that the traditional monogamous marriage is being questioned, not only because of different modern practices in sexual relationships, but also because of inconsistencies and sometimes contradictions apparent in the Bible itself. One may argue, however, that Jesus' condemnation of polygamy as well as divorce which was approved by Moses shows graduality of moral journey. Nevertheless, modern society questions the assertion that traditional marriage is the only moral and lawful option where a permanent love relationship between two people can exist. Indeed, as Vardy, (1997:90) noted, "the complexity of relationships in modern society is not being accommodated in the traditional marriage." The reality of our society raises the question of whether the traditional understanding of marriage is still relevant, in terms of helping people make meaningful and responsible choices.

Marilize (2013) remarks that "the negative view on sexual intimacy started in the early Church, where it was taught that sex is meant for procreation and not for enjoyment." In the few decades after Christ, the Church got so caught up with the depravity of sexual immorality, that sex and sin almost became synonyms. By the 7th century, Pope Gregorius declared that a couple was impure if they gained any pleasure from sex. The sin of pleasure became substantial as that associated with the sex deed itself (Friesen

1990:175). This is against the lessons of the book of Song of Songs opening line of which is “Your lips cover me with kisses; your love is better than wine” (1:2). It sounds exciting, but could this centuries old song shed some light on relationships in the 21st century? Perhaps, one of the clearest biblical teaching on sexuality is found in Song of Songs. The book talks about a man and a woman who are desperately in love with each other: “How beautiful you are, my love; how your eyes shine with love! How handsome you are, my dearest; how you delight me” (1:15-16). They yearn to be together, not only because of procreation and not simply for the sake of sexual gratification. They want to be together because they are in love, and the enjoyment of sex with each other can be an expression of that love.

Here, sexuality and marriage are praised. It is, after all, not a narrative, nor a lecture – it is a song. In fact, it is named in the superlative: Song of Songs. We are invited to celebrate love, to join in, and sing and dance and be joyful about love, and be amazed that people are capable of loving each other. And, as Fox (1985:122) noted, where love is being celebrated, it brings us closer to the mystery of being human – the secret of life itself. In this way, sex is used in the service of God. For, as Ash (2003:16) astutely observed, “Contrary to contemporary culture we shall find that the answer is not in terms of ‘what sex can do for me,’ nor even of what sex can do for a sexual partner or for a couple; rather, sex is to be used in the service of God. Only when sex is understood in this context of wider service will sexual ethics make transcendent sense.”

## **Conclusion**

Sex is good and indeed sacred. But it is an activity of man, not of God. Sex is not something divine, though it has a divine origin since it is instituted by God. There can often be a misuse of anything including sex. This fact of misuse even if adopted by many does not and cannot imply “use.” Even within the African worldview, sex is valid only when it is done in complementarity between a man and a woman who are married. In other words, sexual pleasure is an exclusive preserve of the married couple. It is basically instituted for the sake of procreation but not simply and only for this reason. Sexual pleasure is required for the good of the spouses. Thus, in African worldview, unitive intimacy can be separated from procreation provided it occurs between a man and a woman who are united in marriage, and provided also that artificial mechanism are not imposed to frustrate the sexual seeds which could have otherwise resulted in pregnancy and childbearing. The use of any such artificial mechanisms is foreign to Africa and is regarded as sexual abuse. This research therefore adopts the idea of birth regulation as against birth control. We hold that if a couple does not want conception, then sex should take place when pregnancy is least expected as against the having of sex during fertile



periods and preventing conception or inducing an abortion afterwards. Rather than harming conjugal love, periods of sexual abstinence confer on sex a greater value. It is our view therefore, that adultery, fornication, incest, rape, homosexual act, lesbianism, masturbation, pornography, cyber sex, pedophilia, bestialism and the like are dishonorable sexual activities and should be rejected.

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