

CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE?

(A critical study of Christian Marriage with special  
reference to Samoan Society).

A Thesis

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## INTRODUCTION

This work is an attempt to examine some of the basic ideals of Christian Marriage. The writer believes that too often emphases have been misplaced in determining the validity of a union as a Christian one. The Christian ideals that should be of significant importance are often obscured by Church Acts, as well as societal and family pressures.

What are these ideals? The writer feels that the Bible provides the basic foundation of one's understanding of what marriage ought to be. Marriage though a secular institution is also a divine one - a provision of God for man. Marriage therefore has to be viewed in the light of God's purpose for man.

The first part of the work deals with the Biblical teaching on marriage. The Old Testament teaching is very significant for the understanding of Christian Marriage. It provides the background against which Jesus' teaching should be understood. It also throws light upon God's purpose in marriage for man. The New Testament as a whole provides very significant contribution to the ideals that should embrace and govern the lives of christians as well as of any two in marriage.

Part Two deals with the development of thought concerning marriage in the history of the Christian Church. It reflects the various attitudes and emphases that Church and society have laid upon Christian Marriage. This section seeks to see how far the Church's thought on the question of sex and marriage has

advanced as the Church continued to grow and develop in history. The advance in the fields of science, psychology and sociology has opened up many new questions concerning marriage for Christians in any society. Traditional attitudes and values which the Church and society continue to hold are seriously challenged.

The Third Part deals with marriage in a specific setting - Samoa. This section aims at defining the Samoan concept of marriage - its primary functions, and the kind of values that the society upholds. The writer believes that societal and family values are of great significance in any Christian union. But they must not be allowed however to undermine the basic Christian ideals that should be of prime importance in any Christian Marriage. Much of these societal and family pressures have influenced the Church's attitude toward the whole question of marriage. This provides a live issue for the Church in Samoa to think about. The Church may require to reformulate its own ideas and views so that it can be true to its message and faith.

Part four - the conclusion attempts to bring out two things.

1. The writer hopes to present the very essence of what Christian marriage ought to be. This section aims to reflect the basic ideals that should be of prime significance in determining the validity of marriage as a Christian union.

2. In the light of these Christian ideals, the writer



considers the values and attitudes among the Samoan people with regard to this institution. In this way the Church in Samoa may be helped to see how much remains to be transformed of the Society's traditional attitudes and understanding of this whole question of sex and marriage. It may also help the Church to re-examine and reformulate its own teaching on the matter.

Much of this work is largely the result of library research as well as field study in Samoa during the holidays.

I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to many people who helped me in this work. Special thanks to Father Thornton, Rev. Lopeti Taufa, and Rev. Alan Quigley for their guidance and invaluable suggestions and comments. In particular to the latter for going over the script patiently and correcting the English. I would like also to thank Professor Harre' of the University of the South Pacific for allowing me to sit in, in some of his lectures, and having access to his notes on "Family and Marriage". Lastly but not least is a word of thanks to Mrs. Eita Mone for her work with the typewriter.

P A R T I - MARRIAGE IN THE BIBLE.

## CHAPTER I

### OLD TESTAMENT

#### THEOLOGY OF MARRIAGE

To understand fully the theological meaning and implications of marriage one has to know something of the Hebrew teaching about man woman and God. Much light can be shed upon our subject if one comes to grasp the nature, character and relationships of these three, as according to the Hebrew understanding. However it is not the concern here, to exhaust ourselves with a full and detailed study of the Hebrew concepts of man woman and God. But what is more important to me are the very aspects of their nature and character which have tremendous impact upon their understanding of marriage.

In the background of the Biblical teaching about marriage, is the idea of the marriage of the gods which is adapted to the faith of Israel.

In Canaanite world the cycle of the seasons was believed to be intimately associated with sexual relations between gods and goddesses. These relations were momentous for the welfare of the agricultural community.

Among the Canaanites, as well as in Egypt and in Babylonia its neighbours, the marriage of the gods was a popular cult. The idea behind this belief, was that the gods through their inter-marriage and sexual intercourse, bestow fertility and fructifica-

tion upon crops and livestock as well as people. As according to  
 Johs Pederson - Vol. 3 & 4:

Both in Egypt and in Babylonia, the marriage of the God accomplished in the person of the king, formed part of the fertility rites. Bands of priestesses were attached to the Babylonian temples, whom men could visit. We do not know according to what rules, but sexual intercourse with the hierodules in the holy place contributed to strengthen fertility - i.e. the blessing for the participants and the community (1926:468).

Such practice is also found in Canaanites temples too. Sacred prostitution so they believed would help stimulate the gods to give rain for the crops and fertility to the livestock. Thus marriage for the Canaanites as well as the Babylonians and the near East, can be understood not merely as a personal union of man and wife based upon sex for procreation and pleasure nor as a social institution maintaining race and family, but more important as a religious act, a part of the ritual related to the cycle of the seasons and the vegetational and animal life. This concept of marriage and sex was very much opposed by the prophets. Men like Amos and Hosea were shrewd enough to see that such sensuality was certainly a threat to ethical demands of Israel's faith Amos 2:6-8.

The God of Israel as Hosea asserted, is the source of fertility and fructification. Hos 2:8. He is God the father and creator. Therefore there is no need of a female counterpart; Is 45:18; 63:16. God is the source of sexuality and He demands its use for the perpetuation of his people and for the glory of

his name. Marriage therefore was understood to signify the fulfilment of God's purpose in creation by the spiritual and sexual union of man and his wife.

In the Book of Genesis we are given two accounts of the creation of man - Gen 1:26-28; 2:7,21-25, which present to us much of the basic facts which help us to understand the concept of marriage as understood in the Old Testament. The creation stories reveal the importance of marriage in the lives of the Israelites. Man and woman was regarded as the crown of God's creation, and on their union was laid the blessing to which later generations owe their existence. In Genesis 1:27 we read:

So God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him,  
male and female he created them.

This Priestly version of the creation states that male and female together make man, adham. Here singular and plural are used indifferently about the same being. Man is a whole which consists of two parts - male and female. Thus in marriage, the totality of adham is made real, and this is consummated through one knowing, yadha the other. Thus in other words male and female were created for each other, and by living together they carry out the intention of their creator.

Because they are both parts of one complete whole they are therefore able to become one flesh. Marriage unites the separate portions of our broken humanity. Marriage therefore may be said to do two things, both of which belonged to the purposes of God in

creation. As W.P. Wylie puts it:

Marriage brings together the two halves of the complementary being Adham. Thus it makes that new union which alone really shows forth the infinite glory, both of God, and of man his image. Marriage bridges the rift or breach in the human heart which arises from the fact that everyone of us mere male or mere female is incomplete. (1958:40)

The Priestly account kept silent about the relationship, of man and woman, except that they are indispensable to each other, and not till they are united do they together form a whole being.

The Yahwistic source of creation (Gen 2:7,21-25) which is the older account relates how Yahweh first created man. The man is in himself man, but he lacks something that he may be so wholly. God saw that it was not good that he should be alone. Man must have someone to help him and this help-meet he finds in woman. She was taken out of him literally and thus she must be there, in order that he may be man wholly. She is part of him, that which makes her fit to make him whole is that she is of the same flesh, as himself. This is why one should leave his father and mother and found a new house, thus uniting himself with and becoming a man - a man wholly. God by giving man a female rather than another male, indicates that sexual differentiation and the resultant sexual desire have meaning apart from pro-creation and that the partnership of the husband and wife must be regarded as life's chief blessings. Genesis 2:24 reads:

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother, and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.

This is central in the biblical interpretation of sex and marriage.

Here Piper expresses three ideas:

- a) Sexual intercourse establishes and inner union between two persons concerned.
- b) Union is a unity of flesh, which really affects the vital wills of these persons.
- c) This union can never be dissolved

(1960:22)

The unity of the flesh in the biblical sense depends exclusively on the consummation of the reciprocal sexual relationships between the husband and the wife. The nature of this unity is unique, and can actually be in conflict with other existing relationships. Relationship with families and parents can be broken or minimised for the sake of this new unity in marriage.

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife. The unity of the flesh designates a unity that embraces the natural lives of the two persons in their entirety. Two persons of perhaps different wills and individuality achieving real unity. Sexual unity in marriage is not confined to physical union. Flesh in the biblical sense denotes not only the body but ones whole existence in this world. Oneness of flesh creates a mutual dependence and reciprocity in all areas of life. However this mutual relationship does not extend beyond the field of natural life.

According to Jewish understanding, every man is expected to

marry in order to beget children - for not only the perpetuation of the race - but also for the sustenance of the family name. Failure to do so would mean diminishing the image of God, thus causing the divine presence to depart from Israel. Man is created in the image of God Gen 1:27. Marriage therefore is the means by which the divine image is implanted on generation of the human race through the procreation of children. This is looked upon in the Old Testament as the blessing bestowed upon the union of man and woman by God. Man is now able to live on in his children. Through their descendants, the people of the covenant would be kept in existence and thereby the blessing given to man and woman would be perpetuated. A childless woman would always feel forsaken by God, Gen 30:23; ISam 1:3-9; Is 4:1, but she who bore a child will praise God for his blessing. Thus therefore, to a Jew, marriage is much more than simply an institution set up by social groups as an arrangement to ensure the order, stability of permanence of group life. It is more than a kind of bond which ensures life, safety and rights of women and children. In fact marriage is seen as a divine gift of creation - God taking a hand in earthly events. According to Schillebeeckx:

Israel's belief in the divine institution of marriage is expressed in Genesis. It was God himself, who in this first marriage and thus in every marriage in Israel, gave the woman to the man - Gen 2:22. Marriage was thus a good and holy undertaking, bearing God's blessing in the structure that God intended it to have (1965:16f).



Man and woman become one flesh only because of God's creative action Gen 2:21-24. Therefore when they use their sexuality apart from his relation to it, a curse falls upon them, and upon their children.

In the Old Testament, marriage is regarded as a covenant entered into by two families who thereby form an alliance, through their representatives, the bride and the bridegroom. In the books of Prov 2:17 and Mal 2:14, marriage is spoken of as a covenant between the spouses. This covenant involved the use of gifts as of any other covenant between two parties in the near Eastern communities. However, peculiar to biblical idea of possession, the use of gifts in this covenant symbolises the transfer to the recipient of a part of the life of the giver. An object a biblical man possessed was not detached from his self and his life - it was a genuine part of his self. Sometimes a covenant of blood would symbolise this concept.

Since marriage was known in terms of a covenant between the spouses, it therefore serves a theological purpose, of defining the meaning of Israel's God, and of her obligations to him.

Israel regarded marriage between human beings as a representation and reference to the saving covenant of God and his people. God's intimate relationship with his people - a relationship of grace and mystery which transcends all human understanding-is made understandable by the prophets in their everyday and human experience of married love. As according to Schillebeeckx:

Married life of human beings with its ups and downs, its certainties about the past and its uncertainties about the future,

recollections of happiness, bitter memories of infidelity and deprivations of love - all these formed the prism through which the prophets saw the saving covenant of God with his people and enabled the people to comprehend the covenant (1965:32)

In the book of Hosea, we find this image being used very often by the prophet to reflect the kind of covenant relationship that God the bridegroom holds with his bride Israel. This relationship which should be true also of marriage relationship between the spouses, can be best understood in terms of the word 'hesedh'. This term entails loyalty and love creating a rich, deep and beautiful relationship between both parties. When a man and a woman make a covenant together in holy wedlock, they declare that they will love and cherish each other till death do them part. But theirs is what we may call an equal covenant, for the woman promises to love and obey her husband in the same terms as the man promises to be a loving and dutiful husband to his wife. But perhaps this is where the difference comes between marriage between the spouses, and the marriage of Yahweh with Israel at Sinai. Yahweh had everything to give and Israel could only receive. Therefore Yahweh's hesedh entailed indeed not only the loyalty and the love that the husband promised to give to his wife, but it entailed as well the grace and condescending mercy of one who has all to give. For Israel's part, she ought to be loyal to the covenant, and this loyalty could be best expressed through obedience to God's spoken word at Sinai.

The book of Jeremiah constantly refers back to the image of marriage as used by Hosea. Jeremiah saw the infidelity and unchastity of Israel, as a complete failure to present a reciprocal faithfulness and obedience which would validate her marriage to Yahweh at Sinai. For marriage to be valid, both spouses should keep and fulfil his - her vow faithfully. The book of Ezekiel: 5, 16, 23 also brings out clearly this failure of Israel to play her part in her marriage contract with Yahweh. Ezekiel emphasizes the fact that there was a perfect marriage, equally contracted and made in love, between Yahweh and Israel, a covenant relationship which would permit no infidelity and which was indissoluble.

The prophets did not intend to provide a theology of marriage, however they were more concerned in using the day to day experience of a human marriage to explain the covenant relationship between Yahweh and his people Israel. However in this way, we could become aware of some of the basic things involved in human marriage. Thus faithfulness chastity and reciprocal responsive of the spouses are also very important in determining the validity of marriage.

In the post-exilic writings, the vision of marriage continues the line of thought begun in the second creation story. The Song of Solomon carries the idea that marriage is good for the man who fears Yahweh. A wife is regarded as a treasure, the priceless value of which is frankly extolled in the Wisdom literature.

"He who finds a wife, finds a good thing, and obtains favour from Yahweh", Prov. 18:22. One of the things which delights the sage is "a wife and husband who live in harmony". A happy marriage is therefore a blessing from God, Prov. 18:22; 19:14. The wisdom books contain repeated warnings against adultery and infidelity, Prov. 5, and insist on caution with regard to other men's wives Prov. 5:2-14. Wisdom writings therefore testify to the Israelite and Jewish faith, in the goodness of marriage based on the firm foundation of religion and morals.

In summing up the theological assertion of the Old Testament concerning marriage, we say that marriage at its deepest level, is a personal, sexual and spiritual companionship ordained and instituted by God. This interpretation rests upon the biblical experience of marriage in the light of the biblical faith in the God who is both creator and redeemer. This is affirmed by Genesis 2:24, which says "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother, and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh."

## CHAPTER II

## HEBREW MARRIAGE -- FACTORS INVOLVED

## Arrangement:

Hebrew courtship in the Old Testament times was not so much the concern of the individual boy or girl. Rather it was the concern of the whole family or more strictly the head of the family. Hebrew society with its patriarchal form of family set up, regarded the father as the head of the household. He was responsible for initiating plans for marriage on behalf of his son. This would certainly include the selection of the bride. On the part of the girl too, she was more or less a passive participant. The father is responsible for giving her away to any man he wished. In most cases neither the girl nor the youth was consulted. As W.P.

Paterson, "Marriage" in the Dictionary of the Bible vol. III writes:

In societies in which the family organization is strong and stable the betrothal is treated as a concern of the family, group or of the tribe. The powers are vested in the head of the tribe, or they may be devolved upon particular members of a family group - under the patriarchal system upon the father or nearest paternal relative, under the patriarchal, upon the maternal uncle or the eldest uterine brother. From this standpoint betrothal is viewed in Old Testament (1900:270)

This nature of Hebrew marriage arrangement is clearly shown by many incidents in the Bible. In Gen 24:4, Abraham made plans for his servant to go and find a wife for his son Isaac. Here we are

not told whether Isaac was consulted but we can assume that he had remained passive to all these. In the story of Laban and his daughters, Gen.29:23, 28. we read that Laban gave his daughters to Jacob. Hamor also negotiated with Jacob to arrange marriage between his son and Jacob's daughter Dinah, Gen.34:8.

In marriages by arrangement, the initiative is usually made by the bridegroom's family, except in cases where the superior rank of the bride's family, justified them in taking the first step. In Exo.2:21, Jos.15:17, I Sam.18:27, we have references to such cases. Once the proposal of marriage had been put to the girls parents and accepted, then the fathers would discuss the conditions especially the amount of mohar or bride price to be paid by the bridegroom and his family to the bride's father, Gen.29:15f, 34:12.

Although arranged marriage was the most popular practice in ancient Israel, yet parental authority was not such as to leave no room for the feelings of some young couples. In fact there were love marriages in Israel, though very rare. David's marriage to Saul's daughter Michal I Sam.18:20, was one of this kind. Sometimes, a young man could make his preferences known Gen.34:4, or take his own decision without consulting his parents, or even going against their wishes, Gen.26:34-35. Such could create bitter resentment on the part of the parents or guardians, whose traditional authority had been repudiated, when the young man took such matters in his own hands.

The custom of allowing the individuals concerned to arrange a

marriage according to their own wish is a late and exceptional concession in Hebrew society. This may be a sign of the loss of rigidity and disintegration of Israel's family system.

#### Who Should Marry Whom:

All societies have more or less institutionalized a set of rules governing the selection of spouses. Usually the rules say whom a person shall not marry, and then leave freedom for selection outside this forbidden circle. Hebrew marriage is no exception. Marriage in biblical society was restricted to members of the group, both by custom and conscious support of custom. Therefore marriage was exogamy with respect to relations between Israelite clans, and endogamy with respect to non Israelite people. It is customary to take a wife from one's own kith and kin. Abraham sent his servant to find a wife for Isaac from his own kinsmen, Gen.24:4. Laban declared in Gen.29:19 that he would rather give his daughter to Jacob than to a stranger. Samson's father was very disappointed when Samson did not choose a wife from his own clan, Judges 14:3. Marriage between first cousins were common e.g. the marriage between Isaac and Rebecca and those of Jacob with Rachel and Leah.

This whole idea of marrying within the clan circle was supported by both sociological and theological considerations. The Jews for fear of a social and cultural breakdown, and also of a threat to Israel's faith, tried to keep marriage as strict as possible within the framework of Israelite clans.

Marriages also are forbidden within some well defined "incest group" of kinsmen. Therefore marriages with very close relatives were forbidden, why, because one does not unite with the flesh of ones body Lev.18:6. De Vaux defines, who these close relatives, were:

An impediment of consanguinity exists in the direct line between father and daughter, mother and son, father and granddaughter and in the collateral line between brother and sister (1961:31f).

A detailed account of these prohibited marriages is found in the book of Leviticus 18. For the members of the priestly line special restrictions had been inflicted upon them. According to Lev.21:7, they could not take a wife who had been a prostitute, or divorced by her husband. Ezekiel 44:22 adds also widows, unless they were widows of priests.

Mixed marriages were very much avoided by the Israelite community. Prophets as well as post exilic men like Ezra and Nehemiah spoke very strongly against such practices. Kings' marriages with foreign women for diplomatic motives were also opposed for fear of tainting the purity of Jewish blood, and also endangering the religious faith of the people. Ex.34:15-16, Deut.7:3-4.

Pedersen vol.1-11 writes:

A woman must not be so far removed from the family of the man as to introduce quite new and strange elements which the husband cannot assimilate. It would disrupt the house and remove the children from the family characteristics of the father (1926:64)



However despite all the pains taken to keep marriages pure within kinship and Jewish circle, there were still many references to such marriages in the Old Testament period. In Gen.26:34 we find a reference to Esau and his two Hittite wives, Joseph married an Egyptian Gen.41:45, and Moses a Midianite Ex.2:21. In Ruth, we find that Naomi's daughters in law were Moabite women Ruth 1:4. In the post-exilic period marriages with foreign women, Canaanites Hittites and Ammonites took place, Ezra 9:1-2.

Thus despite all the prohibitions, and attempts against such marriages, this by no means freed Israel from such practices.

#### Marriage Age:

In the Old Testament there is no clear information about the age at which girls were married. However it seems certain that girls and therefore presumably boys too were married very young; for centuries this has been the custom of the East, and in many places it still obtains today. Our main source for scanty information would be the books of kings. According to de Vaux:

The books of kings however usually give the age of each king of Judah at his succession, followed by the length of his reign and the age of his son (normally the eldest) who succeeded him. From these figures we can deduce that Joiakin married at sixteen Amos and Josiah at fourteen (1961:29).

Though we can say that these figures are not all reliable, still there is some truth that girls and boys did marry when they were

very young. In later days the rabbis fixed the minimum age for marriage at twelve years for girls and thirteen for boys.

Perhaps under these circumstances it is understandable why parents took all the decisions when a marriage was being arranged.

#### Mohar - Bride Price:

The mohar was the sum of money, the fiance pays to the girl's father or brother. This was regarded as the first important stage in the betrothal procedure. In Genesis 34:12 and Exodus 22:17, the dowry of the Old Testament was not a portion brought by the bride into the husband's family, but a price or ransom paid to the father or brothers of the bride. In primitive conditions, it was naturally claimed as compensation for the loss to a family of a valuable member. Other suggestions raised questions whether gifts were used as compensational payment, or as a sign and symbol of friendship and goodwill, or even as an indication that the bridegroom was able to keep a wife.

The mohar may not necessarily be paid in the form of money or kind, but might take the form of service, as in the case of Jacob Gen.29. Jacob had to render service to Laban for so many years before he was able to take Leah and Rachel as his wives. The mohar might also take the form of some special act for the benefit of the bride's father. In such cases, a city could be taken; Joshua 15:16,17, the killing of Goliath; 1 Sam.17:25,

or a hundred Philistines killed and mutilated; 1 Sam.18:25-27, II Sam.3:14. In return for such deeds the hero received a wife without presumably the payment of the mohar as such.

The bride price amount in money form, would vary from girl to girl, depending on the girl's father. The price would also vary according to the social standing of girl's family; 1 Sam.18:23. Daughters of prominent men in society would be very expensive. For a compulsory marriage after raping a virgin, the law in Deut.22:29 prescribed the payment of fifty shekels of silver. But this was a penalty and so we can make a fairly rough guess, that the average mohar should be a little less than fifty shekels.

The settlement and payment of the mohar was the decisive act in the betrothal. Usually marriage will take place immediately after the mohar had been paid. Thus, this mohar gives Hebrew marriage an outward appearance of a business transaction. No doubt there was bargaining between the fathers of the bride and the bridegroom. This tended to make daughters a source of capital for their parents.

In Assyrian law, the tirhatu or mohar was given to the girl herself. This was not a purchase price, but either compensation for the loss of virginity or capital intended to assist her if she lost her husband. Similar development can also be seen in later Hebrew marriage. Paterson writes:

In later times the appropriation of the

dowry to the wife became customary, it was conserved as capital; and in the event of the death of the husband, or an arbitrary divorce, it furnished a useful provision (1900:270).

According to O.T. Baab, "Marriage," in the Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible vol. III:

The use of gifts in Hebrew marriage was an important element. The gift was an object of value which was tendered for a number of reasons. One of these was to establish the prestige and social standing of the giver. This was doubtless one purpose of the bride gift or bride price - the mohar (Gen.34:12; Num.18:11) Another was the expectation of a return which would reflect in some manner the value of that which was given. A third purpose - and this is peculiar to the biblical idea of possessions - was the transfer to the recipient of a part of the life of the giver (1962:287).

Such were some of the significances a Hebrew man would attach to this particular aspect of marriage - the mohar.

#### The Marriage Ceremonies:

The culmination of all the preparatory contracts is found in the actual physical possession of the wife. This is made real through the actual ceremony of marriage. In Israel, marriage was a purely civil affair, not sanctioned by any religious rite. This is quite surprising, after all we find in the Old Testament references to marriage contracts in terms of the covenant. In Malachi 2:14 the bride is called the "wife of thy covenant" and

berith is often used for a religious pact; but here the pact is simply the contract of marriage. In Psalm 2:17 marriage is called the covenant of God and in the allegory of Ezekiel 16:8 the covenant of Sinai becomes the contract of marriage between Yahweh and Israel.

In the Old Testament, there is no reference which speaks of any written contract of marriage - apart from the Apocryphal book of Tobit 7:13. However in Deuteronomy 24:1-3 we read of the acts of divorce which were drawn up before the exile, and it would be surprising if contracts of marriage did not exist at the same time. The assumption is quite true, since we have in the book Ancient Near Eastern Texts edited by James Pritchard (1950:638) the text of marriage contracts from Elephantine in Egypt where there was a colony of Jews. This contract was dated about 459 BC.

In a typical Hebrew marriage, the ceremony will involve a procession of some sort, the wedding feast or supper, the skirt spreading ceremony and finally the ritual of the formal proof of the bride's virginity.

Quoting W.P. Paterson:

The wedding procession naturally fell into two parts. First the bridegroom and his friends may be supposed to have marched to the home of the bride, then in a return procession, the festal company, reinforced by the brides friends conducted the pair to their

future home (1900:271).

The processions were accompanied by music Jer.7:34 and rejoicings.

We can see the garlanded bridegroom in his splendid attire;

Isaiah 61:10, and his veiled bride surrounded by friends.

The wedding feast was usually held in the house of the bridegroom, however there were some exceptions as in Gen.29:22, Judges 14:10, where the feast was held in the house of the father in law. The feast was a great social event and would normally last seven days or could even be prolonged.

Another interesting feature of Hebrew marriage can be seen in the ceremony of skirt spreading. According to O.T. Baab:

The ceremony proper may have included a skirt spreading ceremony, symbolising that a woman is taken as a wife (1962:285)

Evidence for such practice can be drawn from the book of Ruth.

In Ruth 3:7 Ruth requests Boaz to spread his skirt over her.

This certainly signifies an effort on Ruth's part to secure Boaz as her husband.

The final ritual before the consummation of the marriage may have been the formal proof of the brides virginity. This practice is perhaps reflected in the provisions of Deuteronomy 22:13-21. If a man marries a girl and fails to find in her the "token of virginity" then her parents shall submit tokens of virginity before the elders as a proof of the falsity of his accusation. According to de Vaux:

The blood stained linen of this nuptial night was preserved; it proved the bride's virginity and would be evidence if she were slandered by her husband (1961:34).

Such ceremonies were thus the highlights of a typical Hebrew marriage. One other minor ritual - that of the presentation of a ring to the bride was not very popular in Hebrew marriage though used in some.

## CHAPTER III

### THE ETHIC OF HEBREW MARRIAGE

#### Founding of Family - Married Love:

Procreation was one of the foremost priorities of Hebrew marriage. Marriage was highly valued because it was the foundation of the family. Perpetuation of the family through its sons was strongly emphasized in Israel. Thus fertility was regarded as the great blessing God bestows on marriage Gen.4:1, Ruth 4:13, 1 Sam.1:5-18. Throughout the Old Testament the cry for children was heard from all women, and first and foremost for male children 1 Sam.1:11. For the continuance of the father's life, and for solidarity of family and tribe, sons were desperately desired, and therefore marriage was regarded as the prime instrument. The importance of procreation in Hebrew marriage was clearly brought out by the fact, that motherhood was the patent of nobility of a woman - through it she acquires her place in life, and has a share in the family. Childlessness can lead to divorce or despising the woman. Husbands too tended to be closely united with the woman who has born him sons.

Although children are given such prominence in any reference in the Old Testament, and far less is said about love between husband and wife, this does not mean that married love was regarded as of purely secondary importance. Theoretically love between



the husband and wife was central in the divine institution of marriage given by Genesis. Two strange beings come together to found a new clan, and in this way they become "blood relations" or "one flesh". One flesh suggests real unity between the spouses through love. Also it must be noted that married love between the spouses made marriage a symbolic image of the covenant between God and his people. Though it may be true that this ethos of marriage was practically insignificant to many Hebrew marriages, yet on the other hand too, the image would have been meaningless if marriage itself had not to some extent been lived as a covenant of love.

A few references in the Old Testament, showed that this married love was in fact practically lived out in some marriages. In 1 Sam.1:5-8 Elkanah answered the complain of his wife, Hannah who bore him no child, "Am I not more to you than ten sons?". In Gen.29:20 we read that Jacob served Laban another seven years and they seemed to him but a few days, because of the love he had for her.

Therefore, even though married love did not seem very significant in Israel's institution of marriage, yet it was not put right in the background, in fact love if not practically, theoretically could assume first priority with procreation in Hebrew marriage.

#### Polygamy and Monogamy:

Polygamy literally means many marriages. It can take two forms -polyandry and polygyny. Polyandry suggests more than one husband, and polygyny more than one wife. In ancient Israel the practice of

polygyny was quite popular and acceptable. This may have been due to the Hebrew's excessive emphasis upon the perpetuation of the family.

This is clearly brought out by Pedersen vol I & II:

Everything is grouped round the man; it is his life which is to be continued in the family. Therefore polygamy is a natural type of marriage among the Israelites. It is not the outcome of masculine licentiousness, but a mere consequence of the fact that two or three wives do more than one to satisfy the husband's demand for progeny. Polygamy is one of the ethical demands of ancient Israel because the maintenance of the family is the greatest of all. (1926:70).

Normally a man would keep his wife and perhaps one or more concubines, Deut.21: 15-17. This custom became wide spread in ancient Israel and throughout Mesopotamia. Possession of many wives was a sign of power prestige and wealth. II Sam. 5:13, I Kings 11:1-8. Especially in seminomadic and agricultural periods in Israel's history, the possession of several wives made valuable capital for the husband. They provided a large working force to tend the flocks and the fields. Polygamy seems to be most common among such people as the patriarchs, who can afford to pay the bride price or mohar as well as providing a house for each wife. Perhaps poor people could not afford to have more than one wife. A good example is seen in Jacob, who had two legal wives, Laban's daughters, Leah, and Rachel, with concubines also. However social changes and the breakdown of the semi-nomadic way of life, as well

as the impact of other cultures, helped reduced the practice of polygamy, encouraging monogamy.

The practice of polygyny certainly created rivalry jealousy and ill-feelings between the wives. As Schillebeeckx puts it:

In a polygamous marriage, one wife, was regarded as the 'chief wife' or beloved where the other was frequently called the hated, the less beloved Deut. 21:15-17, Gen. 29:30, Is. 40:15, and occupied a position subordinate to that of the first wife, and who automatically thought of her as her rival or enemy. I Sam. 1:6, Gen. 30:1, 29:30-31 (1965:90).

The practice also certainly indicated very strongly the inferiority of the women in relationship to the men - men having the freedom to have more than one wife, whereas women did not have this privilege. It is only when a man died, or in some divorce cases, that a woman was then allowed to take up another husband.

Perhaps the Deuteronomic writers were aware of these weaknesses in the polygamous system, which pressed them to make clear protests against this harem system Deut. 17:17. This tendency to oppose polygamy and upholding monogamy is also apparent in the Genesis account of the creation Gen. 2:24 "They become one flesh". In the wisdom literature the monogamous marriage was clearly regarded as both normal and ideal, Prov. 5:15-19, 12:4, Psalms 128:3, Eccl. 9:9. After the exile it became very difficult to reconcile polygamy with the ethics of marriage seen from the standpoint of faith in Yahweh and those who practiced it were probably despised by some.

It may be true that the perpetuation of family through children was the prime factor that encouraged polygamy, yet there cannot be dismissed altogether the presence of sexual lust, diplomacy, and economic factors - somehow selfish personal motives that strongly supported such practice among the Israelites.

#### Status of the wife:

In the conjugal family, the husband was the head. He was the baal - the possessor and master of the family. The wife called her husband baal or master, she also called him adon or lord, Gen. 18:12, Judges 19:26, Amos 4:1, the same way a slave would address his master or a subject his king. It is clear that the position of the wife was that of <sup>a</sup>subordination<sup>e</sup>. The man was the centre of the family. The will of the husband was the will of the family, the wife could only conform~~ed~~ to this will.

The wife was the husband's helpmeet, who would help him to create a house for him. She was first and foremost a sexual being who entirely belongs to her husband. She was classified as one of the husband's possession, whom he had already bought. De Vaux clearly sums up the position of an Israelite wife:

The Decalogue includes a man's wife among his possessions, along with his house and land, his male and female slaves his ox and his ass. Ex. 20:17, Deut. 5:21. Her husband can repudiate her, but she cannot claim a divorce; all her life she remains a minor. She does not inherit from her husband, nor daughters from their

father, except when there is no male  
heir (1961:39)

Israel's marriage laws, right and wrong are determined from the standpoint of the husband. The wife was always at the mercy of the husband. The husband was fully entitled to sexual intercourse with other women than his wife, as long as he <sup>did</sup> ~~does~~ not violate the rights of some ~~other~~ <sup>did</sup> man. But for the woman, she ~~does~~ not have this freedom, in fact a corresponding act, was counted as a deadly sin.

The wife in an Israelite household, was somehow treated as a domestic servant. All the hard work at home certainly fell to her; she looked after the flocks, work<sup>ed</sup> in the fields, cooked the food, did the spinning and so on. All these duties and work she performed earned her consideration in the family.

However despite all these, ~~an~~ Israelite wife was by no means <sup>at</sup> ~~the~~ level of a slave. In fact she had at least certain rights and and privileges, which protected her from extreme injustice. A man could sell his slaves or even his daughter; Ex. 21:7, but he could never sell his wife. The husband can divorce his wife, but she was protected by the letter of repudiation, which restored her freedom. The wife also had the right to part of the mohar paid to her father, by the husband during betrothal. This money ~~can~~ <sup>could</sup> become very handy when the wife was repudiated by the husband. The wife may have her own property; Gen. 24:67, 31:33, Judges 4:17,

but it was the duty of her husband to support her. She had the benefit from his property; Gen. 31:16, and on the whole she must share good and evil with him.

#### Divorce:

Initially divorce was the almost unrestricted right of the man. A woman was neither able nor permitted to repudiate her husband; Judges 19:2-10. This unrestricted right of the man to divorce his wife was moderated by the mosaic cult of Yahweh. Thus we have in Deut. 24:1 reference to the right of the husband to repudiate his wife only if he found some indecency in her. Childlessness was a good enough excuse for effecting a divorce.

In cases of divorce, it was sufficient for the husband to give her a bill of divorce; Deut 24:1-4. The form was quite simple; the husband made out a declaration contradicting that which had sealed the marriage contract: "She is no longer my wife, I am no longer her husband". With this, the marriage was annulled and both were free to remarry. We can assume that since divorce was an easy affair, it must have been therefore a popular and common undertaking in the Hebrew society.

This of course would be<sup>a</sup> negative response to the conviction that God gave the woman to the man, and thus bestowed a measure of indissolubility upon their union. Some of the Old Testament writers speak against such practice. The wisdom books praise conjugal

fidelity; Prov. 5:15-19, and Malachi teaches that marriage makes the two partners one person, and that the husband must keep the oath sworn to his partner; Mal. 2:14-16, "I hate divorce, says Yahweh the God of Israel."

## CHAPTER IV

### THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING ABOUT MARRIAGE

Jesus:

In the gospels, there are few references which point to Jesus dealing with the question of marriage. There is one clear reference in Mark 10:2-12, which has a parallel version also in Matt 19:3-8, and Luke. In this passage, Jesus was asked a question of divorce by the pharisees. "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife" Mark 10:2.

In contemporary Jewish society, the school of Shammai regarded adultery and moral misconduct as the only acceptable grounds for divorce. The other school - that of Rabbi Hillel - maintained that all kinds of reasons, even quite trivial ones, were quite sufficient grounds for legal divorce. In the version of this episode in Matthew, it is this debate which is presented to Jesus and he is asked to take sides on the question. According to Matthew 19:8, Jesus answer declares that divorce except for fornication was wrong. Thus here, Jesus takes the side of the school of Shammai in the debate.

However in Mark's Gospel, Jesus' answer is correspondingly <sup>?</sup> sweeping and allows for no exceptions. Branscomb suggested that Markan version could be more correct. His suggestion is based upon three points:



- 1) Luke 16:18 contains no hint that it dealt with the permissible causes of divorce or listed adultery as such.
- 2) Paul cited Jesus teaching on divorce in I Cor. 7:10 and again there is no indication of exceptions to his general condemnation of divorce.
- 3) One notes that the rest of Jesus' answer as reported by both Matthew and Mark appeals to the teaching of Genesis over against the law of divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1 (1937:177f)

In the light of Mark's version, Jesus' answer showed that he did not want to identify himself with any of the contemporary schools of thought. Rather he appealed directly back to the origin and purpose of marriage. He reasserted the great marriage charter of Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, that man and woman are meant for each other, and are only complete when they are together. "From the beginning God made male and female, and therefore, for this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one."

God has made people in such a way that a man and a woman can enter into such a close relationship that they can be described as "one flesh."

This affirmation of Christ presupposed without doubt family as the natural product of marriage, however the stress is deliberately laid on the nuptial union between man and woman; "the two shall become one." Jesus directed attention to the character of this union set up by God between husband and wife. Jesus asserted that in view of the fact, that marriage had been brought about by God

himself, it could not be dissolved by any secular authority.

Mark 10:9, "What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder." As according to the Roman Catholic theologian

Schillebeeckx:

Jesus was asserting that the essential indissolubility of marriage was far from being something totally arising only from the eschatological redemption but on the contrary had its roots in the human essence of marriage itself, as called into existence by the creator who from the very beginning had been the God of Salvation (1965:143f)

Thus Jesus' answer therefore, declares divorce <sup>to be</sup> ~~as~~ contrary to the divine purpose as in the story of creation. We must take into account also, what lies behind Jesus' insistence on obeying Genesis rather than Deuteronomy - i.e. a perception of the cruelty and unfairness of the law of divorce. In this repudiation of the unlimited right of divorce on the part of the husband, it is obvious that Jesus becomes one of the outstanding historic champions of the cause of women.

This saying of Jesus on divorce strikes harshly on modern ears - It is so sweeping and unqualified, and seems so ill - adapted to be the regulatory rule for the great variety of situations which modern circumstances create. It tends to make Jesus look very legalistic in his approach to marriage - a rare aspect of Jesus ministry and teachings. However we must in the first place, take into account, that Jesus was speaking to a people among whom divorce

was easy, and had been so from the past. Thus Jesus was once again placing emphasis on the basic principle of the permanence of marriage. Secondly, it must be remembered that Jesus' teachings in nearly every instance, were in general and sweeping form. He was not interested in classifying and listing the exceptional cases which can arise. Rather he was more concerned in declaring the basic ethical principles in human relations which must be regarded. Thus thirdly, and quoting Pierre Grelot:

*h. marriage?* In effect Christ's words are only made intelligible by a gift of God, [through faith can one perceive both the meaning and purpose of the new law, and the possibility of its being put into practice. It is hardly surprising, therefore that many of those without faith today remain insensible to this ideal. It is true that it is part of the natural law, since it is no more than a return to the normal order of creation, which was disturbed by human sin. Nonetheless, it is only in the kingdom of God, and by his grace, that human nature regains its order (1964:89)

Other references to marriage in the Gospels, reflect Jesus as the bridegroom and his followers are the bride: they are prepared and intended for each other to eternity, Mark 2:18-20, Matt. 22:2-12, 25:1-13, Luke 12:35f. Christ loves his body, the church, as a man loves his wife who is his own flesh. Paul also takes up this marriage metaphor to depict God's relationship to his Church, Eph. 5:22-23. (this we deal with later when we come to Paul). However Christ's use of the image, shows that marriage is a holy

precious relationship, based on mutual trust and fidelity, a thing which though human is capable of expressing divine truth.

Paul:

In Eph. 5:22-33, Paul<sup>1.</sup> clearly presented the union between the spouses in marriage in terms of the existing relationship between Christ and the Church. Christ is always being spoken of, as the bridegroom and the Church His bride. As Christ's union with the Church begins only beyond the cross, the Christian couple therefore can't be constituted if the man does not first renounce himself fully in favour of his wife, Eph. 5:25 - man acquiring his wife at the cost of his own self. As Christ and his bride, the Church's union, is a sanctified and holy undertaking, the couple therefore, likewise, is the consecration of a man and woman who have the gift or charisma I Cor. 7:7 of it for their true destinies. To take a wife in marriage therefore means that the man for his wife's sake has renounced himself, and he gives her, her rightful place and complete fulfilment - in this way he becomes her saviour Eph. 5:23. The wife also in return fulfils her husband, completes and perfects him.

The rights and duties of the married couple corresponds<sup>nh</sup> to those of Christ and his Church. Reciprocal fidelity and love should show in their relationships. The husband owes love to his wife, and this should be manifested in protection, affection, in concrete and

1. The Pauline authorship of Ephesians is still a controversial subject among the New Testament scholars.

practical relationship. Wife is to fear her husband Eph. 5:33. Not that she should be afraid of him, but she must not wish to act independently of him.

To Paul, as Christ is the head of the Church, so also the husband is the head of the 'one flesh' he formed with his wife. The unity of the husband and wife, is therefore a corporate entity which can't function independently of the other.<sup>7</sup> The woman is the body of the man - he calls her his glory, i.e. the one who gives expression to him. The woman is then the body of the couple, in as much as she is its glory, and the man is the head of the couple. As the head, the man must perform his role by loving his wife: Eph. 5:33, Col. 3:19, the woman her role of body by submitting to her husband Eph. 5:22, Col. 3:18. To Paul, the true exercise of authority, as of man as head, is through love, as is clearly seen in the lordship of Christ over his Church. To form a faithful couple, the husband is to love his wife and the wife herself is to submit to her husband. In this way it can clearly show that she is the body of this 'one flesh' which they make of their two selves. On the question of submission, I here quote J.J. Von Allmen as saying:

Submission of a woman does not then diminish her in the slightest, but marks a place for her: and just as the man might not find cause for vanity in his authority, as the woman might not be ashamed of occupying the place made for her (1963:45)

Subordination of the wife is not that of compulsion and fear, rather it originates in her freedom and love. Such submission can only be maintained as her freedom and love is maintained. Should her freedom and love be destroyed, so will her ability to be subject to her husband.

Christ was willingly and lovingly subject to the Father; likewise the husband is to be subject to Christ, and the wife to her husband. In other words, the husband rules the wife from his own position of subjection to Christ. This diminishes the possibility of the wife's subjection being degrading, for it is actually subjection to God through her husband. This in fact exalts rather than degrades her.

In the light of the bond between Christ and his Church, Paul saw marriage as an alliance which brings forth two people from their isolation and joins them together in such a way, that one is unthinkable without the other, it brings them into a new state which touched their inmost and profound being. The alliance is not merely a one - way contract - i.e. a purely human association which may be broken at will. But rather a way of self dedication, each one at the same time being fully conscious of the promises and warnings of God. Entering into a marriage state, through a vow, signifies an act of renunciation - a total and willing self - surrendering in order that the true self may be found in an eternal union with another being. All these aspects of marriage are reflections of

the alliance between Christ and His Church.

In I Cor. 7, Paul deals with the question of marriage and celibate living. Generally what Paul says in his Epistle, there is absolutely nothing wrong about marriage, but that he himself prefers and would recommend celibacy especially in a time of crisis.

In dealing with the problem of asceticism within the context of marriage, St Paul explains how it is possible to integrate sexuality into christian life, I Cor. 7:1-7. But the husband and wife must be sensitive to their duties to each other. They no longer belong to themselves, but in fact they had become one body through marriage. Conjugal love should do justice to the needs of the flesh, and both husband and wife should have an attitude of self - offering rather than self - centredness to each other. The true couple can legitimately use the desires of their flesh, in accordance with Christian precepts, without turning their backs on holiness. D.S. Bailey stated that:

The apostle denies that coitus is, as the Corinthians would have it, merely a detached and peripheral venereal function, involving no more than an appropriate exercise of genital organs. On the contrary, he insists that it is an act which by reason of its very nature, engages and expresses the whole personality in such a way as to constitute a unique mode of self disclosure and self commitment  
(1959:10)

Sexual intercourse is an act of the whole self which affects the whole self; it is a personal encounter between man and woman

in which each does something to the other for good or for ill which can never be obliterated. Thus it cannot therefore be treated simply as a sensual indulgence. Sexual intercourse in its true perspective is without meaning unless it consummates a true love, and expresses their acceptance and affirmation of the consequent change in man and wife concerned, and their relation. In this sense sexual union is more significant for marriage, and is the criterion with reference to which the character of all sexual relations must be estimated.

However despite the fact that Paul did not openly forbid marriage in favour of ascetic life, still one can never deny the fact that the ascetical strain in his writings is prominent. He clearly displays his pious preference for the single state, since it hinders less the service of the lord. However on the other hand, he sees marriage to represent something of a concession to human frailty - helps to avoid any sin of fornication. "It is better to marry than to burn" I Cor. 7:9. D.S. Bailey writes:

In this idea of marriage as an accomodation to human weakness and a hindrance to the fullest service of God, there is but little appreciation of its dignity and high calling nor do the writers of the New Testament show much sense of the joys and privileges of family life, or that love of children which our lord himself displayed (1959:14)

As regards the question of divorce, Paul appeals to our lord's authority repeating the general prohibition of divorce. But he



recognises the possibility of separation I Cor. 7:10ff. If for any reason the husband and wife are separated, they are to remain single or become reconciled to each other. In the second place Paul deals with the case of a marriage between a Christian and an unbeliever. Paul asserted that the initiation of a divorce should only come from the unbeliever. If the unbeliever dissolves the connection, then the Christian is free, to marry again.

However apart from these exceptions, Paul believed that the life of a couple should last from its institution right up until the decease of one of the partners Rome 7:2, I Cor. 7:39. God alone is the author, and therefore he alone puts an end to the union.

Other references in Pauline Epistles as well as other writings, to marriage, all deal with guiding principles which would govern the fundamental attitude of husband and wife towards one another - Col. 3:18-19, I Tim. 2:9-15, I Pet. 3:1-7. Love, respect, understanding, and submission, are some of these virtues which should flourish in the lives and attitudes of man and wife in marriage.

In summing up the respective teachings of the New Testament concerning marriage, one realises that marriage is being treated as an established social institution with accepted broad and general principles of conduct, demanding faithfulness and uprightness in the discharge of all recognised duties. It is also worth

noting that the spirit and teaching of the New Testament tend to put the mutual love of husband and wife in the foremost place. The general outlook to the position of woman is very much improved, and this of course changed the whole outlook towards marriage.

Divorce on the whole is prohibited, though exceptions are expected.

The Christ - Church relationship had <sup>^</sup>very profound effect on the New Testament understanding, thus elevating and purifying the conception of marriage. Marriage is therefore more than a mere social institution. It is a holy and sacred undertaking between ~~man~~ and woman.

P A R T    I I    -    M A R R I A G E   I N   T H E   H I S T O R Y   O F   T H E   C H U R C H .

## CHAPTER I

### MARRIAGE IN THE EARLY CHURCH

It is clear from the literature of the first four or five centuries of christianity that the interest of the early church in sexual and matrimonial questions was generally occasional, limited and practical, rather than theoretical and speculative. This was perhaps due to the fact that there was no major controversy in the history of the church, arising out of this very aspect of its teaching, otherwise we would have had a thorough and systematic treatment of the theological principles governing sex and marriage.

Therefore, the early fathers' concern with sex and marriage was relatively slight and narrow, in particular they confined their attention almost exclusively to the unions of the baptised, and did not touch more than casually marriage in the natural order. While dealing with Christian wedlock, they made no attempt to work out any satisfactory doctrine of the 'one flesh' relationship.

It is hardly surprising that much of the small volume of early church literature dealing with sexual topics, is devoted to a vindication of celibacy over against marriage. There was a general feeling among the church fathers, that living a celibate life is a better ideal than marriage. This may have

arisen from the suspicious and negative attitude they displayed towards physical sexuality. Tertullian himself declared against Marcion, that christians prefer celibacy to marriage as superseding, not a bad thing by a good, but only a good by a better. John Chrysostom also though he did not condemn the wedded state as evil and bad, yet he never put it on the same level as the celibate state. Quoting Bailey:

John Chrysostom held that the wedded state per se is an obstacle to Salvation or to the performance of religious duties, for with zeal and fervour every married man can observe the law of Christ and accomplished the prescribed acts of piety. Yet he could not regard it as the perfect state for it hinders the priests possible service of God. (1959:22)

St Augustine likewise did not condemn marriage though he shows preference <sup>for</sup> ~~to~~ celibate life. Gregory of Nyssa discusses marriage as a "sad tragedy". This general outlook of the early church fathers very much represented the general feelings of the early christians towards marriage and celibacy. There was certainly excessive emphasis laid upon the sanctity and purity of celibacy and virginity. Surely we can see that on the whole the patristic literature adopts a pessimistic view of matrimony, nor do they show much appreciation of the family. Little indeed is said of the happiness of life in the true Christian home, of the joys of parental self-sacrifice, rewarded in the success and gratitude of the children.

Marriage in the first three or so centuries of the church, was

very much a civil affair. The Christian church was born within the Roman and Hellenistic Communities which had well established various social institutions - of which marriage was one. Marriage then, was very much an affair of the family. Early Christians, did not try to adopt or create a different form of marriage procedure which would be only for Christians. However they continued to adopt the existing civil marriage procedure for their own marriages. There was no set marriage service for Christians.

In the beginning of the second century A.D. Ignatius of Antioch, suggested <sup>it</sup> as fitting for the faithful to conclude a marriage only after the bishop's approval. The aim was neither to create a separate marriage procedure for Christians, nor to give the baptised an exceptional civil position. Rather it was more of a question of the pastoral care of christian marriage, and of a christian spirituality of marriage; so that marriage may be, according to the Lord and not according to desire. Ignatius' statement was never taken very seriously, in fact was never put to any great extent <sup>in</sup> to practice.

The contract of marriage in the first Christian centuries was felt to be a straight forward secular act, though the participants would have shared some Christian ideals and at times the union might be blessed by a Minister. Marriage in the presence of the church was not known at this time. Intervention of clergy in the marriage procedure was only exceptional. It was only in the fourth century,

that evidence of priestly prayer and blessing, is found regularly in connection with marriage. These ceremonies - the prayers and blessing by the bishop or priest laid the foundation of what later developed into a church service. What the church had then was an outward form of Christian framework, however the real marriage was contracted civilly within the family circle, where all the social ceremonies and customs which constituted marriage were performed.

Marriage in the Lord, in the early centuries of Christianity means marrying a fellow Christian, or implying a marriage to be experienced according to Christian principles. Most of the early church fathers condemned mixed marriages with pagans as evil and bad. Tertullian strongly urged Christians to marry in the Lord. A church marriage therefore is that between two baptised christians. It is only such marriages that receive the blessing and the consent of God. This marriage of two baptised Christians was confirmed by a celebration of the Eucharist and sealed with a blessing - a blessing for the continued Christian life of the marriage. Christian experience brought about by both partners sharing the same faith, by their joint participation in the Eucharist, by their practice of christian charity, and by their praying together at home, constituted an ideal church marriage.

There was another form of marriage that was sometimes present in the early church - and this was known as the 'Spiritual Marriage' or syneisaktism. Quoting Bailey:

Spiritual marriage is the cohabitation of sexes under conditions of strict continence - couple sharing the same house, same room, sometimes the same bed, yet conducting themselves as brother and sister (1959:33)

Such practice was very common among solitary ascetics of the desert, who were often accompanied by female hermits who acted as maid servants. Also in monastic establishments nuns also shared the same dwellings with monks, under this same principle of spiritual marriage. This practice became increasingly common in the third and fourth centuries of the church. However such unions became corrupted, and fell into indulgence and sentimentality, so that the brides of the soul later became mistresses to the ascetics. Spiritual marriages produced a big scandal in the church in the fourth century, which thus led to their prohibition by the church.

On the question of divorce, Augustine spoke very clearly against separation in marriages. Augustine defended very vigorously the merit of marriage. He insisted that the mutual obligations assumed by husband and wife are permanent and binding, severely restricted the right of separation or repudiation, and forbade remarriage after divorce. He even asserted that marriage is a sacrament, which demanded life-long obligation and conjugal fidelity. It is indissoluble except by death. The marriage covenant or bond will still remain even if the wife is dismissed.



From ~~this~~ we see some of the general thinking that had gone on in the early church, on the question of sex and marriage.

## CHAPTER II

### MARRIAGE IN THE MIDDLE AGES AND REFORMATION

In the first three centuries, we see a growing realisation in the church that marriage between two baptised persons, although a secular affair, had in fact a special christian and ecclesiastical significance. Thus there was an increasing emphasis upon church aspects of marriage from then onward, without any prejudice to its legal validity. From the fifth century onward there can be little doubt that the celebration of marriage with an ecclesiastical benediction was the almost universal custom. In the beginning of the ninth century, Charlemagne prohibited marriage without benediction. It was also in this century, that we have reference to a nuptial mass. Here both the bride and the bridegroom received the Eucharist during their wedding day.

As the church continued to grow and become very powerful, marriage was gradually brought under its jurisdiction. This growth of the church coincided with the decline of the power of the kings and lords throughout Europe in the Middle Ages, and too much of their power became vested in the hands of the bishops and the church. By about the eleventh or the twelfth centuries, we see the church obtaining complete jurisdiction in matrimonial affairs, and even became<sup>ing</sup> responsible for the regulation of the purely civil consequences of marriage. It was then that the church discovered, that she was

facing a very complex issue. The pattern of marriage at that time was the result of many different ideas and social factors.

*dy*  
 In ~~the~~ Western Christendom, theologians and canonists were faced with the problem resulting from two current systems of law existing - Roman and German. According to the Romans, consent alone is sufficient to create the union. To the Germans the bond seems to have been *(e)?* affected by the transmission of guardianship of bride from father to the bridegroom. And this act should be confirmed by taking an oath, or the payment of the dowry.

For the sake of uniformity in the Christendom the Church preferred the Roman practice - of consent between the two parties as the most important constitutive element in the formation of a union. However the Roman Byzantine Code also emphasised the notion of marriage as a Sacrament. Thus from the eleventh century onward marriage was officially recognized as a sacrament, in the Church.

According to St Victor, who was the first Western theologian to write a treatise on marriage, as quoted by Schillebeeckx:

Every marriage, even the marriage of a non Christian was a Sacrament, but there was a difference between the Sacrament of marriage between baptised persons and unbaptised persons. Christian marriage was a sacred and sanctifying event. The marriage of unbaptised persons was certainly a holy marital bond, but it did not bring grace. It was - to use a later term - "A valid but infertile sacrament."  
 (1965:320)

To Thomas Aquinas, marriage is a sacrament, in that sanctifying

grace is given. The Ministers of the Sacrament were the bride and the bridegroom themselves, and the form of sacrament is their mutual consent. Thus through the doctrine of the sacramental nature of marriage, marriage was elevated from that of a mere civil affair, or from a simple religious union based upon consent, to the level of ~~being~~ a vehicle of divine grace. Thus marriage was endowed with the highest possible responsibility of the spouses to each, to their offsprings and to the Lord.

Derived directly from the sacramental nature of marriage is the doctrine of indissolubility of marriage. The question of indissolubility gained more strength as the Middle Ages Church succeeded in establishing its claim, that only the Church court was competent to decide a question pertaining to a sacrament including the sacrament of marriage. Divorce therefore became not simply improbable but rather impossible in the thinking of the Western Church of the Middle Ages.

What makes a marriage? The Middle Ages reflected conflicting views. Some treated consent as the efficient cause of marriage. Others maintained the necessity for consummation, i.e., of coitus as an integral part to the perfection of marriage. According to St Victor, "wedlock is simply a lawful society of man and woman, expressed by free spontaneous consent expressive of a present intention." Consummation on the other hand he held to be unnecessary for the validity of marriage: "it is merely an accompaniment to the

conjugal part." Toward the middle of the twelfth century, considerable progress had been made toward an understanding of the formation of marriage. The canonists of the Church, were more impressed by the practical considerations, and the realities of human life, so they maintained that coitus is essential to the establishment or to the perfection of matrimony. However on the other side the theologians of the Church, were more inclined to speculation, and therefore anxious to emphasise the sacramental significance of wedlock. Coitus may not be necessary, to perfect marriage.

The thought of the Medieval Schoolmen on the whole upon physical sexuality shows great advance upon that of the fathers. However despite the fact that coitus is no longer branded as sinful, and is acknowledged to be meritorious, when performed according to reason, and in furtherance of the end of marriage, it is nevertheless regarded as belonging only to the secondary perfection.

One important factor which got into medieval concept of marriage was that of love. The Middle Ages saw the emergence of Romantic love, as a cultural factor affecting various aspects of life in the western society. This is only a new factor and it shows how slightly the common notion of matrimony, and the general pattern of conjugal life in the Middle Ages was touched by any Romantic conception of relationship between husband and wife. Hugh St Victor may have been influenced by this new cultural factor, leading him to lay emphasis in his treatise, on conjugal love between the spouses,

as very important in marriage. He even asserted that marriage is a covenant of love, which involves the whole interpersonal relationship, including material care of daily life.

There was also a tendency in the Middle Ages to take marriage as a remedy for a more serious evil. Celibacy and virginity were then very much praised as the ideal and more perfect form of living for the Christians. Thus we see how little the thought of the Church had advanced during the Middle Ages, in what related to the essence of marriage and sexual relations. ~~As~~ <sup>the</sup> According to Bailey:

Marriage however in <sup>the</sup> Middle Ages is but a second best, having nothing good in itself save only in so far as it provides a remedy for a necessary evil; its sole value is that it restrains and confines the lawlessness of venereal desire.

(1959: 165)

So much for the church in the West, we should now look into the practices and ideas of Eastern Churches concerning marriage during this period. Marriage was regarded in the Eastern Church primarily as an act of the priest - i.e., a liturgical service, in which the faithful and in particular the bride and the bridegroom were actively involved. To them, marriage is a secular reality which was drawn to the sphere of divine salvation by the priests' liturgical actions. The priestly benediction, the invocation of the Holy Spirit, together with the accustomed formularies, were very essential and authoritative in constituting a marriage, in the East. Thus we see that in the East much emphasis is being laid upon the

right execution of the liturgy, in order that marriage might be valid and christian. Concerning the question of divorce, the East is different from the West, in that, divorce is permitted, not only for adultery but also for other serious causes - e.g., high treason, designs by either party on the life of the other, insanity, leprosy, but no one is permitted to obtain a divorce more than once.

During the Reformation many of the ideas held by the Medieval Church were opposed by the great Reformers, Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli. The first and principal sexual topic to engage the Reformers, was that concerning clerical celibacy, and obligatory vows of continence. According to Zwingli, God had ordained marriage, and had nowhere forbidden it. Then he denounced compulsory vows of Chastity. Luther attacked clerical celibacy and monastic vows. He asserted that all are made for marriage, and the divine law that mans' desire is towards woman cannot be restrained by oaths and regulations. Calvin was a bit more cautious. He said that continence is not for everyone's power.

Both Luther and Calvin held marriage in high esteem. To Luther, wedlock is God's gift to mankind - a state of life approved by him. Quoting what he said from Bailey:

Marriage was implanted in our nature  
instituted in paradise, confirmed by  
the fifth commandment, safeguarded by  
the seventh. It is a true heavenly  
spiritual and divine estate, a school  
of faith and love, because men and  
women learn both therein. God himself

brings husband and wife together, and all the tasks, hardships, and troubles of marriage become of incomparable value, because he has sanctioned and approved them. (1959:170)

However no matter how much Luther upheld the marriage with great fervour, as well as venereal desires and acts of husband and wife, yet he still retains in large measure the negative outlook of the Early Church fathers as well as the schoolmen of the Middle Ages. Quoting what he said from Bailey:

No matter what praise is given to marriage, I will not concede it to nature that it is no sin. It is a medicine and a hospital for the sick. (1959:171)

Calvin on the contrary took a less pessimistic, more positive view, and therefore affirmed that coitus, is undefiled, honourable and holy because it is a pure institution of God. He is not very happy about having sex in marriage simply for pleasure, rather he upheld the virtue of sex as means of procreation and the building of society. Marriage to Calvin was a high calling. Although he allowed that propagation is a special and characteristic end of marriage, yet he taught also that its primary purpose is rather social than generative. Woman was not ordained simply to be man's helper in procreation, nor was she simply a remedy for fornication and adultery. She was not created merely to be a bed companion but rather the inseparable associate of his whole life. Luther saw woman chiefly as a bearer of children, and a divinely



appointed means of venereal relief for the male. He emphasised more strongly her subordination in wedlock.

Concerning the question of divorce - Luther very much hated divorce, saying that Christ had prohibited divorce. However despite this, he asserted that adultery can bring divorce. Other possible grounds for divorce included the refusal by wife of her conjugal duties, hindrance on the part of one spouse to the living by the other of a godly life, and also rejection of conciliation by one part. Calvin added refusal of cohabitation, and desertion as other possible causes for divorce.

The reformers refused to recognise the Medieval teaching of the Church, that the rite of matrimony is a sacramental rite. According to Calvin, wedlock was a good holy and divine ordinance, but God had appointed no external ceremony of a special grace - bearing character by means of which to confirm his promise and if it is a sacrament, how can it be at the same time unclean, polluted and carnally defiling? Luther maintained that the idea of the sacrament of marriage is unfounded, and was introduced into the Church with no real scriptural basis. Though the reformers rejected marriage as a sacrament, yet they still upheld marriage services in the Church. According to Oscar Hardman:

Luther, in his Traubuchlein of 1534 and Hermann in his Deliberatio of 1543 - 5, provided marriage services in the vernacular; and Calvin ordered that, after banns had been duly read

marriage might take place before the sermon on any day of the week. The service was completely dissociated from the Holy Communion. (1937:156)

Since then the reformation Churches continued to hold marriage services for its members. Even the Anabaptists ~~they still have~~ <sup>had</sup> marriage services in the homes <sup>where</sup> the blessing of the Church was given upon the couple.

In conclusion I may say that the most positive step reformers made from the Middle Ages' teaching, was the rejection of the double ethical standard, which exalted virginity and celibacy above marriage. The Reformers added a bit more value and dignity to married life, than the schoolmen of the Middle Ages had done.

## CHAPTER III

### MARRIAGE IN THE MODERN PERIOD

We see that during the Middle Ages in Europe, the Church was the most powerful institution. Many of the matters which were originally under the authority of the state were brought under the Church's jurisdiction. Marriage was no exception. Even during the period of Reformation the Church still continued to have authority and influence over the state. Church and state <sup>were</sup> ~~was~~ so closely united that they were more or less one.

Thus before the eighteenth century, marriage was clearly a religious affair in all countries of Europe. However the turning point in Europe came through the eruption of the French Revolution, towards the end of the eighteenth century. As a consequence of the Revolution, Church and state became widely separated. This separation affected the marriage institution a great deal. The French Revolution made it compulsory to conclude a valid marriage in no other way than by a ceremony before a secular officer usually the mayor of the city or village. From France the requirement of compulsory civil marriage spread to other countries of Europe - like Belgium, Luxembourg, Switzerland, and also Germany. In the countries of the Orthodox Eastern Church, Russia made it compulsory for a civil ceremony in all marriages. However, at present a compulsory religious ceremony ~~seems~~ to exist in Greece, in Israel at

least for the Jews and in the Vatican city.

It is worth noting that the countries that require a civil ceremony have of course not prohibited the performance of religious ceremonies. However the religious ceremony is of no effect as far as the secular law is concerned, and in order to ensure the effectiveness of the state's command of a civil ceremony, it is regularly provided that the religious ceremony, may not be performed until after the civil one.

This growing separation between the Church and the state in this modern period, gives rise to many problems and conflicts between Church's teachings and doctrines and the state's policies. No longer had the state to yield to what the Church teaches, and thus as a result Christians who are members of these two institutions, had to conform, or compromise with both these orders. This is very much true of the state laws about marriage and especially divorce, which may come <sup>in</sup> to conflict with Church laws, and this can pose problems. Divorce from the bonds of marriage, thereby enabling a remarriage, was not generally obtainable from the time that Christianity became the established religion until the eighteenth century, when the Enlightenment revived Roman legal ideas, and the French Revolution attempted to put some of them into practice. From the eighteenth century on, many states began to provide a formula by which divorce might be obtained in a small number of cases; in the nineteenth and the present centuries, this was extended to a

larger and poorer public.

h Such ~~changes~~<sup>n</sup> created problems, because the Roman Catholic canon law still stands forbidding divorce. The Canon law is based on two main principles:

1. that there could be no divorce from the bonds of marriage, permitting remarriage, but only a separation from board and bed.

2. that no divorce could be had at the will of the parties, but only by the sentence of an ecclesiastical court. Thus marriages or unions declared null by civil authorities, are not accepted as invalid by the Church.

The Church would also not marry a divorced person. Such conflicts between Church and civil jurisdiction on this matter leave the people perplexed and unsure of where to stand.

There is an even more acute and serious conflict between the Roman Catholic Church in particular with the state on the question of birth control. At present, due to many problems and discomforts arising out of the population explosion, many governments encourage the use of certain family planning measures involving types of contraceptives which are forbidden or discouraged by some Church authorities. The Roman Catholic in particular has opposed the use of contraception, giving its official approval only to the so-called rhythm method of abstinence during periods of assumed female fertility. The Church has condemned the practice of artificial birth control as contrary to the natural law because it is a

frustration of the primary end of the sexual act, which is procreation, and therefore is unnatural, contrary to right reason conduct unbecoming rational beings, and so morally wrong. In the Protestant circle, many ministers and laymen may be opposed to contraception, but there is no common doctrine on contraception within any of the Protestant denominations corresponding to that within the Roman Catholic Church.

Since the eighteenth century, there was clearly seen a change of attitude in the Church as regards the question of sex and marriage. As in the previous centuries we have noted a very negative attitude in the Church as regards the question of sex and marriage. As in the previous centuries we have noted a very negative attitude to the venereal element in sex - an attitude dominated by apathy, suspicion and hostility. Marriage also was looked upon as a lower ideal. However the modern period brings about many changes and new discoveries, which very much affected the Church's thinking and attitudes towards sex and marriage.

Firstly we take note of the discoveries of medical science, and the many developments in human biology and genetics, which have transformed our understanding of the human body and its functioning. The field of medicine made us realize the natural functioning of the various parts of the human body - including of course the sexual organs. Thus the Church comes to see sex as a natural process which man cannot escape from. It is an aspect of man which is

deeply rooted in his humanity. In this way, the Church tended to look at sex more positively, as not by nature a sin, but rather as a natural gift of God to man. Thus, therefore, there grows an increasing appreciation of sexual intercourse within the context of marriage, in the Church's present theology of sex and marriage.

Modern developments also in the field of psychology and sociology had much significance for our understanding of sexual relationships - an integral part of the marriage institution. As according to Bailey:

Freud's establishment of a connection between neurosis and sexual repression, the disclosure of a 'sexual' determinant underlying human attitudes and conduct, the elucidation of the sexual and relational factors which govern the child's emotional development, have all proved to be of the greatest consequence for an understanding of man - woman in themselves and in their relationships (1959:244)

Developments also in philosophy and theology, bring an awareness to the Church, of the need to reexamine its teachings and ideas about marriage. Martin Buber in his 'I - Thou' expounded his philosophy of personal relation, and offered an interpretation of human confrontation which has among many other things, profoundly illuminated our understanding of the metaphysical aspects of sexual love and marriage. People now have gradually come to see marriage, as more than simply an ecclesiastical institution, a sacrament, or merely a social institution intended for procreation. In fact they have come to see marriage as a distinctive personal union, to which

certain blessings are annexed and which social or religious need and customs invest with appropriate institutional form.

For the first time serious theological consideration is being given to the nature and significance of the specific love which draws man and woman together and unites them as one flesh. Love now becomes extremely important and crucial in man - woman union in marriage. Sex no longer can be explained simply as a reproductive device, for it is seen to have a very important relational and personal value - which is entirely independent of its generative purposes.

The attitude of society in this period toward, sexual and marriage questions has itself undergone significant changes - much of these can be attributed to the many discoveries in science and also to the many improvements in the people's general conditions of living. Radio, cinema, television, sex magazines and books, brothels or even legalised prostitution had exposed many people to the ugly side of sex - commercial exploitation of sex, as well as the cheapening of its values. Sex before marriages is quite ~~accepted~~ <sup>sh</sup> accepted by many people in the west as quite normal and right. Divorce becomes very easy and quite common, and sex becomes very much the slave of a sentimental, pseudo-romantic notion of love. This revolution in sex ideas has very much affected the world - even here in the Pacific.

The Pacific Islands are practically all laid wide open to



western conquest - of new ideas and new attitudes towards sex and marriage. Perhaps the old values that the Church attaches to these matters are gradually swept aside as people become more addicted to new ideas and values. Such a situation creates a big issue for the Church to think about. It provides an important challenge for the Church - a challenge which inevitably demands a reconsideration and a reformulation of its traditional concepts and ideas about sex and marriage.