Changing Africa

Reflections on family involvement in African Christian marriage

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Abstract

The paper describes the lived experiences of present-day African Christian couples in urban South Africa with the aim of understanding the effect family involvement has on their marriages. This article contributes to understanding the marital experiences of contemporary African Christians to understand their views on the involvement of the extended family, which is part of African culture. Understanding these viewpoints sheds light on cultural dynamics, especially how African culture is valued in a changing society which adds value to understanding the modern African. To nurture meaningful ministry engagement for the African context, research and awareness of African cultural nuances are invaluable. The understanding from this article can contribute to the contextualisation of pastoral care and counselling in Africa. This understanding may also contribute to reframing the colonial discourse through which mission work in Africa has long operated.

Keywords   African Christian Marriage; Pastoral Care; Mission Work; Colonial Discourse; African Culture; Communalism; *Ubuntu*; Urbanisation

1. Introduction

Pastoral care is easily associated with psychology and other social sciences and erroneously separated from mission work. Pastoral care is often practised and perceived as separate from the *Mission Dei* (the Mission of God). This article acknowledges that pastoral care is very much part of the *Missio Dei* and remains one of the areas of the mission work of the church. Buffel (2021:177) explains that *Missio Dei* understandings have traditionally excluded pastoral dimensions to avoid implying that everything the church does is 'mission'. Yet, the connection between missiology and practical theology is evident in how both disciplines are methodologically concerned with praxis, centred around contextual theology and theological reflection.

In the African context, the theory and practice of pastoral care in South Africa continue on Western motifs since pastoral care and counselling were imported

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by mission engagement. Mugambi (2002:518) points out that African culture was dismissed as 'pagan' and 'heathen' (cf. Vähäkangas 2004:55), resulting in African converts to Christianity being forced to adapt to Western ways of living in the name of evangelisation (cf. Bučko 2013:34). Msomi (1992:12) believes that there, therefore, remains a need to contextualise the theory and practice of pastoral care and counselling in South Africa, making it relevant to meet the unique needs of the African Christian and reflective of the philosophy of African culture (cf. Louw 1997:392). The first step towards this is understanding the lived experiences of African Christians. This article extends understanding and provides insight into how family involvement influences the marriage of modern African Christian couples. It also highlights how African culture is valued in a changing society, facilitating a better understanding of contemporary African Christian marriage. This understanding can contribute to the contextualisation of pastoral care and counselling in Africa and reframing the colonial discourse through which mission work in Africa has long operated.

2. Family involvement in African marriage

An African is always part of a community; therefore, marriage in the African context is perceived as a community affair. Mbiti (1969:133) explains that this is why African marriage is understood to be a social duty and not a mere personal decision (cf. Twene 2019:19). As Baloyi (2013a:169) explains, traditional Africans do not marry simply for personal fulfilment; they marry to sustain the family lineage and preserve the culture of the tribe through childbearing. Welch (1933:21) states that African marriage is controlled by a tribal culture which stands to satisfy society's demands and desires rather than those getting married. Baloyi (2013b:10) explains that this is why it is common in most African societies for a young man to independently choose a wife for himself. However, his choice must still be sanctioned by his parents (cf. Ekane 2013:3). In some rural African societies, the parents still decide marriage without their children's involvement. This is done under the premise that marriage is sacred because a new member is welcomed into the clan through it. Raphalalani and Musehane (2013:19) describe that this is why an individual cannot be left to choose his/her own marriage partner, but it remains the responsibility of the head of the family.

Communalism is an African cultural value that permeates every aspect of life in African society and is described by the word *ubuntu*. Tambulasi and Kayuni (2005:148) refer to *ubuntu* as a way of life that characterises the communal nature of African communities. Siqwana-Ndulo (1998:407) points out that this is the reason why the African family model is multigenerational, consisting of a wide circle of people including the patriarch, his wife or wives, their offspring together with

other kin or non-kin who form part of the household. This explains why, in many African communities, cousins are addressed as brothers and sisters. In contrast, uncles and aunts are addressed as fathers and mothers (Nwafor 2016:4). Hastings (1973:30) and Twene (2019:4) point out that due to this communal approach, marriage in African society is a public event which does not take place at once but through a series of meetings, negotiations, and ceremonies. African marriage is also not a private affair commonly found in Western marriage; rather, it is an amalgamation of two sets of families and requires both families to establish a marriage and ensure that all cultural obligations are satisfied. One such obligation is the payment of the bride wealth or *ilobolo* in isiZulu (a Southern Bantu language of the Nguni branch and South Africa's most widely spoken official language). Mbiti (1969:140) explains it as a custom of presenting a gift to the bride's people, practised in some form all over Africa. According to Posel and Rudwick (2014:4), it is usually a gift or payment (traditionally cattle amongst Nguni tribes) made by the groom's family to the bride as a token of gratitude, appreciating their role in raising the bride (cf. Yarbrough 2018:652). According to Ansell (2001:699), bride wealth is highly esteemed in patrilineal African society because it is understood to signify the compensation for and transfer of the rights to the bride's reproductive and labour power as well as the transfer of the bride's offspring from one family to another. Baloyi (2013a:21) further points out how *ilobolo* is also understood to establish fellowship between the two families and formalises a marriage (cf. Mubangizi 2012:4).

Family involvement, however, does not end once the marriage is established. As de Haas (1984:313) points out, traditional African married life is lived out within a patrilocal family structure where a newlywed couple's residence is located at or centred around the residence of the husband's family or tribe. The family is actively involved throughout the lifespan of the marriage because African families have a commitment and responsibility towards the marriages in their clan. This is why African families are responsible for mediating when there are disputes in marriages, also to avoid embarrassment and exposing family issues, and why no marriage can be dissolved without the families' intervention and consent (Smith 2001:140, Baloyi 2014:28, Makwanise and Masuku 2016:3, Mohlatlole et al. 2017:256). This results in negative consequences when the couple's freedom is curtailed. Khathide (2011:117) points out that excessive family involvement becomes a tool of oppression and abuse when it overrides the couple's rights and undermines their decision-making authority. This can cause frustration and conflict in the couple's relationship. Khathide (2011:117) highlights the positive aspect of how it allows newly married couples to be initiated into marriage life, offering support and assistance in times of need. Another advantage is that divorce is not easily decided

upon. As Makwanise and Masuku (2016:3) explain, family members almost always mediate serious marital problems, and the decision to divorce must be consensual among family members. This, of course, can only function as an advantage in cases where the reasons for divorce are unjustified, but it can easily become a disadvantage where the families do not provide their consent even though the reasons for divorce are justified.

3. Changes in African society

According to Sibani (2018:63), African society is dynamic, experiencing cultural change because of invention, discovery, environment, diffusion, and acculturation. In addition, significant influences have been projected through the Christian missionary enterprise, colonialism, urbanisation, and modernity.

Siqwana-Ndulo (1998:407) posits that the Western marriage model is founded on the principles of individualism and independence, lived out in a nuclear family model and grounded by religious discourses. According to Ngundu (2011:43), Catholic and Protestant views of marriage became doctrines of Western Christianity which missionaries enforced upon Africans who became Christians. From Krige's point of view, Christianity, as taught by the missionaries, discouraged the involvement of the extended family in a marriage by requiring Christian marriage to be lived out in a neolocal setting (Krige 1981:151). Byaruhanga-Akiiki (1978:366) and Krige (1981:151) explain that Christian marriage was understood to be an arrangement based on the free choice of individuals and not an agreement between families. Newly married Christian couples were therefore required to build and occupy their own home instead of living in a patrilocal setting. This was based on the Reformed understanding of Genesis 2:24. Matthews (1996:22) explains that from a Reformed perspective, the concept of 'leaving and cleaving' described in this verse is not restricted to a geographic move that a new couple needs to make after marriage, but speaks to the man's complete dedication to his wife. It concerns putting his wife's needs and their needs as a unit above all others, even his parents (Matthews 1996:22). The oneness that should exist between the Christian couple implies exclusiveness, opposite to the polygamous union where total commitment is perceived to be interfered with. This understanding of marriage encouraged a nuclear family pattern and discouraged the involvement of extended family in the marriage (Krige 1981:151). Siqwana-Ndulo (1998:407) argues that the 'extended family' concept is foreign to the traditional African family structure. In Western society, the term 'family' refers to husband, wife, and children, referring to other family members outside this circle as 'extended family' (Siqwana-Ndulo 1998:407).

According to Bulhan (2015:242), Western culture has also influenced African culture through colonialism and capitalism, accompanied by racism, cultural dom-

ination, and European self-aggrandisement. To ensure long-lasting dominance, the colonialists eroded the African's social bonding, indigenous beliefs, values, and knowledge, replacing them with Western beliefs, values, and knowledge. Furthermore, urban residences symbolise and enforce the nuclear household structure. Davies (2005:313) argues that the private ownership of property characteristic of urban neighbourhoods is a mechanism for cultivating an individualistic and materialistic philosophy. Traditional African society, however, has a stewardship view of property. This is why, as Van der Walt (1988:9) points out, traditional rural areas hardly have any fences and why traditional Africans will not refer to their property as 'my land', but instead will refer to it as 'our land'. Together with urban migration, increasing education has contributed to the emergence of a model of marriage that privileges individual choice and interpersonal emotions (Smith 2001:147). Mohlabane et al., (2019:164) explain that education brings exposure to contemporary ideas about family and gender roles, forcing people to broaden their horizons and ultimately leading to them considering traditional customs as outdated (cf. Onwurah 1982:250). This emerging model of marriage symbolised and enforced by urban residences with their nuclear household structure accentuates the personal relationship between man and wife characterised by love, intimacy, commitment, and romance (Smith 2001:129, Ekane 2013:4, Pauli and Dijk 2016:259).

Modern social values have also had an influence on African society and African marriage. The values of modernism emphasise human mastery driven by freedom and independence. The rise of the women's rights movement has affected attitudes toward marriage and the roles and status of women in the family. Through the expansion of education and women's participation in the labour force, households have shifted away from a reliance on male wages and the perception of men as sole providers of the family. This destabilises the patriarchal hierarchy where the wife is subordinated to her husband, who occupies the position of the head and sole provider of the household. Whereas the wife's primary role was to satisfy her husband sexually, to cook for him, and to bear him children, as Sathiparsad et al. (2008:6) point out, her role now also includes contributing financially to the sustenance of the household. This inevitably changes her status. According to Mathis (2011:831), women participating in the labour force can also be linked to a decline in marriage rates. Surveys and statistics suggest that the 'scheduling of marriage' is changing. Attitudinal data from the South African Social Attitudes Survey reveals that almost 70% of Black South African women of all ages agree that a person should get an education and a job before getting married (Human Sciences Research Council 2012). Marriage being postponed until one is educated and employed is reflected by the growing increase in age at first marriage amongst South Africans. The latest statistics put the median age at first marriage

for civil marriages registered in South Africa at 35 years for men and 32 years for women (Statistics South Africa 2023:4).

Born in the modern era of personal autonomy, Millennial Africans tend to place a high value on their independence and freedom. Stein (2013:1) states that Millennials are commonly identified as the 'Me, Me, Me Generation' on account of their sense of entitlement and resistance to give up their independence and freedom. This explains why Millennial Africans prefer an egalitarian, individualistic model of marriage over the traditional patriarchal, communal model. Contemporary Africans prefer to select their marriage partners themselves on the basis of being in love with them and without the involvement of their families. Onwurah (1982:53) observes that the traditional function of marriage as creating a relationship between two families is compromised because marriage amongst modern Africans has become a matter of 'personal choice'.

4. The Research Project

The aim of this study was to understand the experiences and views of modern African Christian couples towards family involvement in their marriage and the consequences of that on their marriage. The theoretical framework for this study was based on Hastings' (1973) theories about African marriage. Hastings (1973:27) defines African marriage as "a permanent union of a man and a woman for the purpose of the procreation and rearing of children, mutual companionship, and assistance." He describes three aspects that characterise marriage in a traditional African society: (i) the involvement of the family in the establishment of a marriage, particularly "the arranging of when and whom young persons are to marry"; (ii) the payment of *ilobolo* as a means of "compensating the other kindred for the 'loss' of their female member as a result of her being given into marriage"; and (iii) the institutional provision against childlessness through polygamy "since marriage is related so closely to the continuance of society" (1973:28).

4.1 Methodology

In this qualitative study, a practical theological methodology was used of Osmer's (2008) descriptive-empirical task, which asks the question, "What is going on?"; and the interpretive task focusing on the question, "Why is this going on?" The sample comprised six heterosexual couples from Evangelical, Charismatic, or Pentecostal Christian traditions. All the participants were African Black South Africans between the ages of 24 and 35. The couples varied between recently married couples and those who had been married for up to seven years. The selection criteria were based on the availability of participants who were active church members of a Christian church, whose marriage was recent enough for them to have a clear

recollection of their marriage process, and who were Millennials living in urban areas. Semi-structured interviews were conducted that enquired about how the immediate families were involved in the marriage process and the advantages and disadvantages of their involvement. The questions further inquired about the family's involvement in the participant's decision to marry and their marriage choice. The participants were also asked what they believed the role of the family in a marriage was and the effect their families' involvement had on their marriage.

5. Discussion

Findings through thematic analysis revealed that the families of African Christian couples were very involved in the marriage process but had limited involvement after the wedding. Participants appreciated the support and assistance they received from their families during the marriage process, but they were not comfortable with their families assuming control and exercising authority over them and viewed their families' role as an advisory role after the marriage. Although young Africans appreciate certain communal values, they are seen to prefer modern marriage patterns characterised by a nuclear family structure rather than traditional African marriage patterns characterised by collectivism and interdependence.

5.1 Preference for independent decision-making

The participants indicated that their families played a significant role in their marriage by facilitating the process of *ilobolo* and planning and assisting in the wedding. As a result, the families had control over decisions being made during the marriage process, which was viewed negatively. The families' involvement restricted couples from taking initiative and making decisions independently, and couples had to consult collectively. The reason for this can be attributed to the hierarchical nature of traditional African households where family members are graded by seniority. No decision can be made without the consent and participation of the family's senior members (Bascom 1942:37). One female respondent stated, "As children, you can't just call a meeting to say whatever you want; you have to do it in a certain way." While another female respondent pointed out that "some of the things that we had to do were things that they actually wanted us to do and not things that we wanted." These statements are evidence of how the participants' independence is limited within the traditional family model.

The participants' discomfort with having no control over the decision-making points to a preference for a modern individualistic family system, allowing more room for decisions to be made independently. For example, a male respondent described his parent's involvement in the wedding planning, "They did it like any other parental thing, like putting me in school, but this was supposed to be different; I feel I should have had input." This indicates a lack of autonomy in the traditional African family system.

Participants did, however, insist on making some decisions independently, like when and whom to marry. In narrating her disagreement with her father over her choice, one female respondent said, "I married him anyway." In traditional society, parents had a say in who their children married, even going as far as choosing a marriage partner for their child without the children's involvement. It appears parental authority is diminishing because it is futile for parents to refuse the choices of their children as these children insist on their choices, even when they go against their parent's advice. Marriage in contemporary Africa is evidently becoming more of a matter of personal choice and less of an arrangement between families where elders have a dominant say (cf. Onwurah 1982:53).

Africans marrying for personal fulfilment implies that African marriage has moved away from its purpose of sustaining the family lineage by being solely aimed at procreation (Smith 2001:131). One female respondent proves this when she explains that even though her father, who is a "traditional man", was expecting grandchildren early into the marriage on the basis that "you don't get married without reason to have a child", she was not giving into the pressure because she and her husband had decided on their own when it will be the right time to have children. This modern model of marriage that privileges individual choice and interpersonal emotions can be understood to be not only a result of Westernization, but also a result of increasing education and urban migration which results in exposure to contemporary ideas about family (cf. Smith 2001:147, Mohlabane et al. 2019:164).

As expected, the participants making decisions independently from the opinions of their families were met with resistance by the families. A female respondent explains that when her husband decided not to perform certain cultural marriage rites, "they were very unhappy; at some stage, they threatened not to come to the wedding." Traditional Africans are known to prioritise maintaining social balance and living in harmony at all costs. Traditional African society is hierarchal and limits an individual to a specific place in the social hierarchy; thus, traditional Africans avoid voicing their opinions when they are contrary to those of authoritative figures – particularly since this can be viewed as disrespect and disloyalty (cf. Haselau et al. 2015:177). It is apparent that contemporary Africans do not hold such social values since they are open to challenging parental authority and cultural prescriptions in exercising freedom and independence. The values of modernism, with its emphasis on human mastery driven by freedom and independence, triumph over traditional values in contemporary African society.

5.2 Preference for a private wedding

Young Africans are not inclined to the traditional understanding of marriage as a public event since participants were not in favour of big weddings due to the financial implica-

tions big weddings carry with them, "I wanted something small with fewer people, and I wanted to spend as little as possible" one female respondent shared. However, participants with such desires could not see such wishes fulfilled because they had to submit to their families' preferences for a big wedding. This finding aligns with the study conducted by de Haas (1984) that revealed that educated Africans prefer a small wedding because of the expenses incurred with a big wedding, but such preferences are not considered because they must comply with their family's expectations of big celebrations (de Haas 1984:307). Family members tend to insist on the big celebrations despite the financial implications because they make financial contributions towards the celebrations. One male respondent explained, "my parents did everything. I only bought my clothes." The families' financial contribution leads to them controlling decisions concerning the wedding. Such financial contributions come from a good place – the understanding is that marriage is a community affair, as well as the communal practice of pooling resources together in order to assist others because individuals have a social commitment to share what they have with others (cf. Van der Walt 1988:9). However, this is the negative effect of an otherwise good practice.

5.3 Preference for a nuclear family structure

Even though participants appreciated the advisory and supportive role their families played, it was evident that participants preferred to live their day-to-day lives independently from their families. Statements like "we're just living our life separately from any decision they might influence" (female respondent) demonstrate this. This kind of independence is firstly a value of Western models of marriage and family life. This independence can also be understood as an influence of the participants' Christian faith. The conservative Christian perception that marriage is a covenant between two people dictates that there be some detachment from one's family in order to form an attachment to the person with whom the covenant is made (Khathide 2011:115). Christian marriage is therefore lived out in a neolocal setting (where a couple's residence is located apart from the families of either spouse) based on the strict understanding of Genesis 2:24 that once married; couples need to separate from their parents in order to live in complete unity as a couple, forming a new family (Mugambi 2002:257). 'Leaving' in the context of Genesis 2:24 is deeper than physically separating from one's parents. The kind of separation implied here involves the severance of one's dependence on one's parents (Jerome 2016:529). It signifies being free from the control of one's parents. The Hebrew verb 'azab' with its connotations means 'to leave, abandon, forsake' (Jerome 2016:529). Jerome (2016:529) further elaborates, "Genesis 2:24 belongs to a specialized use of 'azab' whereby in a legal sense it refers to the end of a relationship of solidarity between members of a community or group, with various legal consequences attaching to

it." Baloyi (2013a:50) clarifies that 'leaving' does not imply forsaking one's parents and is not a licence to abandon responsibilities towards one's parents; rather, it only means being closer to one's spouse than to any other person. It is an emphasis on how priorities change once one is married. The Hebrew verb 'dabaq' means "to stick to", "to cleave", and "join together" (Jerome 2016:530). This concept emphasises how separation from an intense relationship between a person and his parents is necessary to achieve an inseparable union.

The participants were aligned with this understanding because they indicated that they understood the biblical concept of 'leaving and cleaving' based on Genesis 2:24 to mean becoming independent from one's family. This understanding of marriage is also strikingly different from the traditional African understanding that a new marriage is a continuation of the family (rather than the formation of a new family). This neolocal setting also obviously discourages the involvement of family in the marriage. Participants also understood the concept of 'leaving and cleaving' to mean that the marital relationship takes priority over the parental relationship since it ultimately means that "my husband is more committed to me than he is to his parents", as one female respondent pointed out. The husband's complete dedication to his wife, putting her needs and their needs as a unit above all others, even his parents (Matthews 1996:223), is a different perspective from the traditional African family system, which prioritises the patriarch or matriarch and the family's needs above anyone else's, including self (Van der Walt 1998:9).

This paints the picture that young Africans are not only caught up between traditional beliefs and modern ways of living, as previously stated, but contemporary Africans are also caught between traditional and Christian beliefs. Christianity appears to oppose the interdependence advocated by African culture and promotes independence instead. This supposed opposition between African and Christian views of marriage is a consequence of Christian missionaries presenting a gospel infused with Western principles of individualism. Hence the Protestant Reformation promoted the view of salvation as a personal matter which occurs strictly between a person and God (Cohen and Hill 2007:710). As a result of this focus on a personal relationship with God, the missionaries could not familiarise themselves with the African religion and worldview grounded in community association and social relationships. This is why it is necessary to contextualise Christianity so that Africans can experience "Christ in their own context instead of being enslaved in a Christianity that is not their own" (Msomi 1992:12).

5.4 Appreciation for the role family plays in Marriage

Despite the participants' evident favour for modern values, they showed that they valued and appreciated the advisory role their parents played in their

marriage. Young Africans foster the understanding that the parent-child relationship is timeless, believing that "you don't stop being your parent's kid just because you're married", as stated by a female respondent. They, therefore, acknowledge that they are part of the larger family unit. Statements like "we don't know everything. So, whenever we get stuck, it's nice to be able to go to them and ask for their advice" (female respondent) reflect the participant's need for their senior family members and their dependence on them in times of need. The supporting network provided through the family that the new family has in times of need has already been identified by previous studies as an advantage of the families' involvement in the marriage. It is one of the persistent traditional values that survived the change in family life patterns brought about by modernisation (de Haas 1984:310, Khathide 2011:117, Baloyi 2014:28). In a way, this finding contradicts the previous findings where participants were seen to prefer the individualistic characteristics of Western society. This points to how participants may be conflicted between traditional communal and modern society values, and that young African Christians need assistance processing this conflict of values.

The participants also indicated that their families' involvement positively affected the marital relationships as long as their involvement was minimal and restricted to only providing advice and support. For example, one female respondent expressed, "I feel that their involvement, their advice, and all the conversations we've had have positively affected our marriage and have just made things easier for us." Such an advisory role is perceived to still allow participants the freedom to make their own decisions since "the nice thing about giving someone advice is that they can take the advice or not take it" (female respondent). This finding agrees with Baloyi's (2014) conclusion that the family's role in a marriage should be limited to providing advice and not dictating to the married couple (Baloyi 2014:29).

6. Missio Dei, pastoral care and African marriages

Missio Dei is a multidimensional concept beyond 'sending the church to do mission to all nations' and pastoral care is part of the church's missionary activities. To meaningfully engage African Christian couples through pastoral care, this article offers insight useful in reframing the colonial discourse through which mission work in Africa has long operated. The findings suggest that young African Christians are caught between the values of traditional communal society and the values of modern society. African Christians are also caught between traditional and Christian beliefs. The findings of the research study assist in progressing away from outdated missionary understandings of marriage and attempt to unpack African cultural understandings in a meaningful way.

From this rudimentary study, it seems that contemporary African couples prefer a modern family model characterised by independence over the traditional family model characterised by interdependence. The under-appreciation of the individual in the traditional African family setting can be interpreted as the main reason behind the participants' preference for a nuclear family structure. The nuclear family structure values and prioritises the individual, while the traditional multigenerational family structure ranks the collective over the individual. This is because African society defines humanity (*ubuntu*) in terms of a person's ability to sustain peaceful relationships with other people (Metz 2007:334). Here, personhood is rooted in community and is not self-defined. However, this under-appreciation of the individual fuels the preference for modern ways of living amongst African Millennials because they are a generation that values their independence and freedom. As much as participants understand their place in the social unit, they place a high value on their independence and freedom, resulting in them challenging traditionally defined roles of authority. Therefore, they prefer a model marriage characterised by privacy, freedom, and autonomy instead of the traditional African marriage model, which is rigidly fixed on principles of duty and collectivism.

This study reveals how young Africans get caught up between traditional beliefs and modern ways of living (cf. Knoetze 2017:18). It also points to how young Africans are not simply forsaking traditional practices in support of modern practices; instead, they are integrating traditional and Western family modes, making the contemporary African family neither purely traditional nor purely modern (de Haas 1984:309, Meekers 1992:63, Smith 2001:132). Modern Africans still value communalism not only by appreciating and benefiting from the supportive role their families play in their marriage but also by seeking counsel and assistance from their church community. African Christians use their church community to fill the gap that urbanisation has created because, traditionally, these functions were fulfilled by relatives that formed part of the patrilocal homestead. Nonetheless, it is evident that community involvement in marriage remains crucial for the marriages of contemporary Africans.

This awareness creates a need for the implementation of models of pastoral care and counselling that incorporate the communal values of African society, such as the Christian communal pastoral care model described by Msomi (1992) and the systemic model described by Louw (1997). The following can be incorporated into the African church's practice of pastoral care and counselling with married couples:

    i.   accommodating the advisory role played by the family in premarital counselling by not limiting premarital counselling to just the two people getting married;

ii.   ensuring that the church marriage counselling programme accommodates the family's commitment and responsibility towards the marriage by giving room to the family to mediate when couples have disputes; and,

iii. making use of group therapy by establishing groups for married couples within the church that will focus on addressing challenges faced by couples through discussions.

Such measures will ensure that the pastoral care and counselling offered to African Christian couples incorporate the positive aspects of family involvement.

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