

Communication: A Tool for Marriage Stability

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1. Introduction: what is marriage?

Marriage is an intimate union of life in complementarity between a man and a woman which is constituted in the freely contracted and publicly expressed indissoluble bond of matrimony and it is open to the transmission of life¹.

The above definition has all the properties of natural marital relationship. It reflects also the Catholic Christian Marriage which is a permanent union of an adult man and an adult woman in order to form a stable human community known as the family. After the Creator – creature love relationship, the two most important love relationships are those between Husband and Wife and that of Parents and Children love relationships. These follow and flow from God who ordained these relationships after His own model. These two kinds of love relationships are natural and as such can be referred to “Nature Made Love Relationships”. Here however, our concern is on the husband and wife relationship and its required stability.

It is the philosopher Heraclitus who propounded that everything is in constant change and that nothing is permanent or stable. This prediction has become a truism of our time. In fact nothing seems to be stable to the men and women of this age. Today we have constant climate changes, fashions change, lives change, and individuals change like migrant birds in search of greener pastures and fair weather. This constant change has trickled into our family circle with all its repercussions. Today the family – a natural

stable society is experiencing upheavals of metamorphosis. Husbands and wives walk out of marital relationships and enter into another one without qualms of conscience. Others follow disordered styles of life while still in a legal relationship. Children today can decide which parent they want to live with.

In this year of the family declared by the Holy Father Pope Francis, it has become urgent and important to reflect on some of the issues that can help the human society to rediscover the stability of our human family as a community of persons where everyone is accepted as he or she is. This very paper presents on Communication as one of the tools to achieve marriage stability.

2. Stability in marriage relationship

The Marital or Conjugal relationship has stability as its essential characteristic by nature. This is because ordained by God, this relationship is sacrosanct and follows immediately and directly from God’s design. Marriage is of God’s design, which is a plan for a Covenant with his people, with us all, a plan for communion. This is succinctly expressed in the Scripture as follows: «God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them... Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh» (Gen 1,27; 2,24). The image of God is “the married couple”: the man and the woman; not only the man nor only the woman, but both of them together². This is the image of God. Love is the

basis of God's covenant with us which is represented in that covenant between man and woman. And this is very beautiful as expressed in the exclamation of Adam before Eve. Then the man said: «This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man» (Gen 2,23).

We are created in order to love as a reflection of God and his love. And in the marital union man and woman fulfil this vocation through their mutual reciprocity and their full and definitive communion of life.

When he was interrogated by the Pharisees on the question of marriage stability, Jesus himself, the last Word of God alluded to the “from the beginning” of this union in the original thought of the Creator when he said: «Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh”. So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder» (Mt 19,4-6). St. Paul too, the worthy and faithful Apostle of the Lord Jesus insisted on the unity of husband and wife in his first letter to the Corinthians (1Cor 7,2-3) when he said: «Each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband».

St. Paul's fundamental affirmation is that Christian marriage responds to the precise intention of the Creator (Gen 2,24, Eph 5,31). His doctrine on the Christian marriage reached a higher level when he compared the mystery of the love of man and wife to the mystery of the love of Christ for His Church. Thus he said: «As the Church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her» (Eph 5,24-25).

St. Paul's vision of marriage in the light of the mystery of the spousal union that exists between Jesus and Church in no doubts attests to the properties of the Christian marriage, which entail that this love as ordained by God is monogamous and exclusive, enduring (permanent) and committed. It is inseparable (indissoluble), fulfilling and endless until death do them part. It is only by the choice of one another, that the filial bond that united the man and the woman to their individual parents respectively could be loosened so that they can adhere to each other in an indissoluble manner. Thus the present

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bond as a result of preferring each other becomes more imperious than the blood bond that linked them to their father and mother. Otherwise, “why separate to separate?” The implications of this new unity abound. It implies that polygamy has no

place in this relationship. Polygamy was only tolerated in the old dispensation as a result of the hardness of heart of men. Otherwise, it still remains a form of legalized lust which contradicts the «from the beginning» in which «God made them male and female»³. When once the man and the woman decide to separate from the family history in order to begin their own family, they are no longer two but one body. Such union when once formed and as a necessary passage goes beyond the love of father and mother which within the range of human love is very strong and true, we are already in a union that can no longer be conditioned by anything external, neither can it admit any other interference that may render partial, insecure, superficial or conditional such spousal union. Again marital relation is ordained to be stable by nature for the fact that it is through the social institution of marriage as a union of stable and public convivence of man and woman that the family; that community which we can call the origin of every human species is founded. The family is the nucleus and the first cellular of every human society.

We have our origin from that womb called the family. The family is the human community per excellence and the place of stable habitat that cannot be substituted⁴. It is a community of love founded on marriage. This is a sociological fact⁵. Therefore, marriage; that specific union of man and woman in the communion of life and love which is at the root of every human family must be stable.

2.1 The binding conclusion of Jesus in Matthew 19,6

In Matthew 19,6 Jesus concluded on the question of divorce as follows: «What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder» (Mt 19,6).

This binding conclusion has imperative implications on the stability of marriage relationship:

- a) It is inconceivable the separation of what has become one body. It will be like cutting into two a living body and still pretend to continue to live and behave as a living being⁶.
- b) As the union is like a stamp, a package coming from the will of the Creator, it means that what man did can be undone by another man because the distance between man and man is zero, but what God united, man cannot separate. It is like saying that “it is not only the will of the Creator that the soul and the body of man form inseparably one individual, but that it is also the will of the same Creator that the union of man and woman constitute one body. They have liberty to unite or be single, but as soon as they choose the union of their persons, they put in “being” an interpersonal structure designed by the Creator as indissoluble. Thus neither by themselves that decided to compose the union, nor does any other human authority have the power to destroy such union that makes the spouses one body. No one and, no situation, for whatever reason can authorize or put in act divorce⁷.
- c) From the phrase “Let us create man in our

image and likeness”, God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them (Gen 1,26-27), man in the image and likeness of God is not only in his individual humanity, but also in the human union of the male and the female, cognizance that man and woman – two made one in love bond that makes them only one body participate in the Lord-God of whose image and likeness they are made, who is one unique God in three persons by the bond of love⁸.

d) It goes to stress in clear and incontestable terms that indissolubility is innate in marriage.

From the moment that marriage responds to the precise and immutable will of the Creator, it becomes a question that admits no human opinions. It is not even sufficient any verdicts by any human authority whatsoever to dissolve it where it has been genuinely contracted.

e) From the binding response of Jesus, we see also other significant aspects of marriage. Apart from the authority with which Jesus speaks as the one who says what he knows and knows what he says unlike the Scribes and the Pharisees (Mt 7,28-29), it is indicated also the predisposition of man and woman to know themselves, choose themselves and form a communion. Furthermore, the gift of their diversity in sex permits their complementarity in all ramifications. Thus neither in him is all complete nor in her, but together they make a complementarity and completeness that is never confused but rather integrated in a harmonic mood. And in fact their individual identity is made evident only in their unitive encounter⁹.

f) Divorce and separation challenge the unity and stability (indissolubility) of marriage. They challenge the complementarity and communion of spouses. And finally, they challenge the will of God the Creator.

From the above indications, we cull the facts that in this love, mutuality of respect and understanding, mutuality of care for the other

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which also is essentially the care of the self, constitute a continuous marital school of learning for togetherness. In this love, self-care equates to the care of the other. On the other hand, other neglect equals self-neglect and other's pain equals self pain. The both (two) that form one are in it together at all times and circumstances. Here we have to note the conviviality of the Christian Church and African tradition. Both believe in the permanence and durability of this union. They both also hold that conjugal love properly understood and consequently lived out could be the most joyful and most fulfilling life experientially imaginable.

2.2 Instabilities in marriage relationships

Today all over the world, many marriages are facing great problems of instability. The causes of instability in marriage could be as a result of sins against marriage in itself or against the human sexuality in general. These problems range from marital infidelity or cheating which include: premarital and extra-marital relationships, adultery, fornication, concubinage, prostitution, polygamy, pornographies, sex addiction, sexual deviations: homosexuality, lesbianism, masturbation masochism, sadism, to distrust, disrespect, lack of love, unforgiving spirit, deep-rooted bitterness, intolerance, disobedience, abuses, insults, aggressiveness, callousness, and insensitivity. Others include: selfishness, thoughtlessness, jealousy, envy, coldness, bad style of life like drunkenness, chain smoking, etc. Each and every one of these problems is strong enough to lead to divorce or separation in marriage relationship. This is because these as well as all other sins against marriage can basically frustrate the full meaning of marital relationship and separate its integrated values. Given the seriousness of these issues, many today think that life-long fidelity is too challenging. Others feel that the struggle to live together may be beautiful, enchanting, but it is difficult, even impossible. The result is that so many people are afraid of making definitive decisions.

The question is, is it possible today to love “forever”? Another question that follows immediately is; what do we mean by “love”? Is it only a feeling, a psychophysical state? Certainly, if it is only this, then we cannot build on anything solid. Love instead is a relationship, it is a decision and thus a reality that grows, and needs to be built up like a home together, and not alone. And in any process of building, it needs to be given time to foster and to grow. And this is not done with sentiments, which come and go, but on the rock of true love, the love that comes from God. The family is born from this plan of love: as a place of affection, of help, of hope, and of support. As the love of God is stable and forever, so too should we want the love on which the family is based to be stable and forever.

3. Communication as a tool to marital stability

The Holy Father Pope Francis believes that it is always possible to keep alive and stable the bond of marriage, which has its foundation in God and thus overcome the «culture of the provisory»¹⁰. The Pope has proffered some means as reliable roadmaps for all married couples to maintain stability in marriage. In his many writings and public audiences he has dealt with issues of the spirituality of daily life that couples must have to take on. He encourages married couples to pray with and for each other. According to him; “When the family prays, the bond is preserved”. And he exhorts couples to always seek peace: «do not let a day when you have argued end without making peace»¹¹.

The theme of this work is on communication. It strives to present Communication as one of the salient tools by which peace and stability could be achieved in marriage relationships. Here we shall deal with verbal, corporeal/emotional forms of communication. When we communicate with one another, we use two types of language. In one we use syntax or grammar through a particular tongue or speech. This we call verbal communication. We also communicate in another way unconsciously: talking and bringing into

scene (though without knowing) some fundamental categories of our life. These include; our relationship (as a father, a mother, a child, a brother) the human body in all its totality, birth and death. This is the Corporeal/emotional communication.

On the first level – verbal communication, we shall discuss the essential role of dialogue in the life of the couples in order to ensure marital stability. And on the second level, we shall discuss the corporeal (sexual) language of spouses.

3.1 Verbal communication - the act of dialogue

It used to be said in the past that: “if you want peace prepare for war”. Today this saying is replaced with: “if you want peace prepare for dialogue”. Thus it is retained that the act of dialoguing would replace the wars and conflicts in nations and states, in the communities and family ties and especially in marital relationships. As a caveat, the act of dialogue should not be confused with words like: “discussion” or “conversation”, even though some dictionaries may take them as synonyms. Dialogue is to be considered completely on a different perspective. It is a channel of communication.

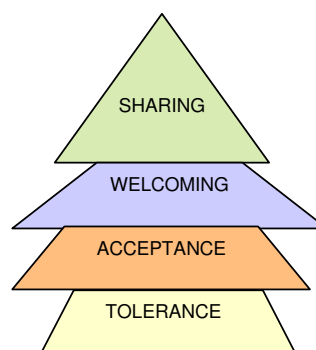
Dialogue is a relationship of people who could be different in all ramifications or as parallel lines like the cords of a guitar. Yet dialogue is a privileged instrument for communication. It is advantageous instrument for sharing, understanding and growth in a reciprocal relationship of peace. It means a reciprocal revelation through a gratuitous and altruistic comprehension and self giving. The key to know whether you are in an act of dialogue or in a simple discussion depends on how long it takes the partners to join these parallel lines of relationship to a unity, and how long it takes them to use the different and parallel cords of guitar (as we already mentioned) to produce a harmonious music. To be a dialogue the secret is to always look for the (good) quality of your (spouse) interlocutor. A good dialogue aims at reconciliation. In this case, the secret is to appreciate your spouse instead of engaging in faults

finding. Dialoguing is not faults or defects finding. It is not pointing accusing fingers or judging the (spouse) other. The secret of dialogue is to learn to use qualities to eliminate defects. As soon as one succeeds in not pointing accusing fingers, as soon as one succeeds in turning those accusing fingers toward oneself, one finds out that many problems will be resolved. Dialogue is a healing program and not the renewal of old wounds and wrongs. After all, obstacles, difficulties, misunderstandings, conflicts, betrayal, sabotage, disappointments etc., form parts of the human life ordeals in the world. They help us to learn from our mistakes and never to allow them repeat again in our time and in the generations to come who will learn from our history. In fact, these obstacles, difficulties, lacunas, conflicts as we mentioned above would and should be overcome with **Dialogue**.

There are two essential conditions for conducting a correct and reconciliatory dialogue.

1. Humility: humility lived authentically is very important.
2. The profound desire and determination to make oneself available to be met and to meet the other in communication and sharing of truth. It entails availability to be reached in the profundity of oneself. It aims at meeting each other where he/she is.

Dialogue is a risk. You have to wish it, will it and accept to take the risk in trust that the other will welcome you. It requires blind trust and blind confidence that is devoted. Dialogue for peace and reconciliation is a decision. And for it to be successful, it follows a growth scale of: Tolerance, Acceptance, Welcoming and Sharing.



In welcoming the other, I must first and foremost know and accept myself as I am with my capacities so as to welcome and accept the other in her/his capacities. The truth of who I am and what I can or cannot do will help me to fix up myself and the other in the right positions thereby avoiding envying each other. Envy and jealousy are possible to avoid if I recognize truly my capacities and that of my spouse and deal with them accordingly. Spouses must have to know that they are gifts to each other based on their diversity of capabilities.

Listening is another key to a correct dialogue: that means the readiness and availability to listen to the other. Without a listening, it is really impossible to dialogue. It must be a real and active listening with interest and not just preparing and formulating arguments to counteract what the other is saying.

There are three most important phrases very essential in marital dialogue (communication) enunciated by Pope Francis. They are the three magic words that always need to be said at homes: **1. May I, 2. Thank you, and 3. Sorry.**

1) *May I*: so as not to be intrusive in the life of your spouse. May I, but how does it seem to you? May I, please allow me.

2) *Thank you*: to thank one's spouse; thank you for what you did for me, thank you for this. That beauty of giving thanks!

3) And since we all make mistakes, that other magic word which is a bit hard to say but which needs to be said is *sorry*.

Dialogue could also be put in written form, sometimes in form of love letter by the spouses. And the other is also bound to reply also in writing. This is very much recommended when the use of verbal dialogue is not possible or may be explosive or has the tendencies of being misunderstood. Yet the rule of meeting the spouse where he/she is still holds here without insinuations or entering into arguments in order to win. In fact the good thing about dialogue is that it does not aim at winning. In dialogue there is no winner and there is no loser.

3.2 Corporeal/emotional forms of communication

Marriage has a language of communication which helps in maintaining its stability. This is called the Language of Spousal Love and/or Corporeal language. This language like the mother tongue is learnt in the family. Just as our faces, arms, hands, voices have languages, so it is with all parts of the body. For instance, the eye has its own language. In general, a person who looks at you directly in the eye is assumed to be forthright and truthful. On the other hand, a person who averts his eyes may not want you to know what he's thinking. Is your spouse making direct eye contact or avoiding your gaze?

You can glean similar information by observing the way your spouse's body reacts when you ask him a question. Is his body position relaxed and open, or tense and withdrawn? In general, a person who maintains a relaxed, open bearing when you ask a direct question tends to be forthright and truthful. On the other hand, a person whose body suddenly becomes rigid may be concealing something. The way your spouse *touched* you would also tell you something about his/her mood. Your facial expressions and tone of voice would have conveyed the *emotional* part of your message.

Furthermore, spouses communicate through the body and particularly through sexual corporeal language. This language, although expressed corporeally, it has divine origin, since the human body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit: - «Therefore honour God in your body» (1Cor 6,20). In this language, the love of spouses is ready to say: *I am all for you. I am all to you. I am all in you. I am all with you.* The sexual corporeal language says exactly this. The sexual language of the body has a guarantee of truth and trust only if it is found in a person really integrated. Marital love is not built on the senses or instincts. It has to be built on reason from the centre of the human personality. As a language, it is also learned in the family. Where children see this language in their parents and learn it correctly, they will practice it themselves when they honourably enter into their own mar-

riage and will in turn transmit it to their own children¹³.

The language of the spousal love is a tool. And as such could also be put into good or bad use. It can be perfected by faithfulness and/or disordered by sin because of infidelity. If the spousal corporeal language is in action but the intention and the mind of the spouses do not express this gesture, they have empty gesture of love – a false love and a false historical kiss that signifies betrayal and not love¹⁴ (cfr. the kiss of Judas to Jesus).

In the Gospel according to Matthew, we read: «Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I shall kiss is the man; seize him”. And he came up to Jesus at once and said, “Hail, Master!” And he kissed him» (Mt 26,48-49).

And in Luke, Jesus refuted the use of this act of love for betrayal when he said: «Jesus said to him, “Judas, would you betray the Son of man with a kiss?”» (Lk 22,47-48).

Spousal language of the body has something personal, intimate, precious, profound on the person loved. Where the spousal language of the body is only of the instinct and the genitivity without a foundation, it heads to a disaster. Language in deed can deceive or lie, but the fault is not that of the language but of the one who abuses the use of language.

As a result of abuse of the language of spousal love, it is imperative for couples to practice the virtue of chastity in marriage. This entails that the spousal love is exclusive, monogamous, and indissoluble. The spousal love unlike the friendly love is geared towards one and only one person, that is, one's spouse and no more. It is heterosexual (by a man and a woman). It is benevolent. It involves all one is and has. It is naturally geared towards procreation. Marital love must reflect the genuine hymn of love of St. Paul: «Love is patient, forgiving, understanding, affectionate, gentle, not envious, not proud/arrogant, and not egoistic.... Looks for the good of the other. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love covers all and has no limits or end» (1Cor 13,1-13).

Conclusion

The Holy Father Pope Francis acknowledges that every married couple faces difficulties and argues. It is true that there are so many difficulties in married life: when there is insufficient work or money, when the children have problems so much to contend with. And many times the husband and wife become a little fractious and argue between themselves. They argue: this is how it is, there is always arguing in marriage – «sometimes the plates even fly»¹⁵. Yet we must not become saddened by this, this is the human condition. The secret is that love is stronger than the moment when there is arguing, and therefore spouses are always advised: do not let a day when you have argued end without making peace. Always! And to make peace it isn't necessary to call the United Nations to come to the house and make peace. A little gesture is sufficient, a caress, and then let it be! Until tomorrow! And tomorrow begins again. And this is life, carrying on, carrying on with courage and the desire to live together. And this is truly great. It is beautiful! Married life is such a beautiful thing and we must treasure it always, treasure the children. With the three magic words imbedded in the various forms of dialogue, which is the epitome of communication, with the prayer of the husband for the wife and vice versa, by always making peace before the day comes to an end, marriage will go forward in stability. Thus, a strong and reliable home of mutual trust/relationship, fidelity and caring would be established. And happiness will flow like a river forever.

Summary

The Holy Father Pope Francis believes that it is always possible to keep alive and stable the bond of marriage which has its foundation in God and thus overcome the “culture of the provisory” that has besieged it. He enunciated the three magic words that will enhance this possibility. In corroboration, this paper presents communication between husband and wife as one salient tool by which

peace and stability could be achieved in marriage relationships. This communication could be verbal and/or corporeal/emotional forms. Many spouses have problems in relationships due to lack of how to communicate the magic words between them. It is either they do not communicate with each other or they do not know how to do so. Communication as a tool is learnt mostly in the family. Depending on how one learnt it, it could be put into good or bad use. It can be perfected by faithfulness and/or disordered by sin because of infidelity. Where spouses learn it well and practice it, they not only transmit it to their children but also a stable and reliable home of mutual trust/relationship, fidelity and caring would be established. And happiness will flow like a river forever.

NOTE

¹ THE HOLY SEE, *Charter of the Rights of the Family*, October 22, 1983.

² A.C. IBE, *Track on the Human Sexuality: Unpublished note on Special Moral Theology*, Seat of Wisdom Owerri, Imo State 2013.

³ R. GONZALEZ, *Teologia Morale: la visione cristiana dell'amore, della sessualità e della famiglia*, unpublished note, Regina Apostolorum, Roma 2006.

⁴ G. MIRANDA, *La famiglia come vocazione*, Regina Apostolorum, Rome accessed 2009.

⁵ A.C. IBE, *The Family: A Philosophical and socio-cultural analysis*, unpublished note in philosophical Ethics. Owerri 2012.

⁶ P. ADNES, *El Matrimonio*, Herder, Barcelona 1980, 25-66.

⁷ R. GONZALEZ, *Teologia Morale*, op. cit.; A.C. IBE, *Track on the Human Sexuality*, op. cit.

⁸ JOHN PAUL II, *Man and Woman be created them*. Catechesis X, no. 3, 63.

⁹ JOHN PAUL II, *Man and Woman be created them*. Catechesis X, 62.

¹⁰ POPE FRANCIS, *The fear of "forever"*. Address of Pope Francis to Engaged Couples Preparing for Marriage, Saint Peter's Square. Friday, 14 February 2014.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² A.C. IBE, *Dialogue: A Channel of Communication for Marital Stability. An unpublished note for Marriage Course*, Parrocchia di San Giovanni Battista Cesano, Roma 2009.

¹³ *Lumen Gentium*, n. 49.

¹⁴ R. GONZALEZ, *Teologia Morale*, op. cit.

¹⁵ POPE FRANCIS, *Marriage, the Icon of God's Love*. General Audience, St. Peter's Square, Wednesday, April 2, 2014.