

REV. GEORGE KOCHOLICKAL, SDB

FAMILY IN AFRICA – OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

A b s t r a c t. Reading through the post-synodal exhortation of Pope Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus*, I was positively struck by this statement of the Pope about the “soul of Africa”. This is what he wrote: “A precious treasure is to be found in the soul of Africa, where I [the pope] perceive a “spiritual ‘lung’ for the humanity that appears to be in a crisis of faith and hope,” on account of the extraordinary human and spiritual riches of its children...” (AM 13)¹. Certainly, that statement rang true in my ears. In this first part of the presentation, I wish to highlight some of the “extraordinary human and spiritual riches of her children,” with a special reference to the family. In the second part, I shall also mention a few challenges to Marriage and Family in contemporary Africa. A note of caution: While presenting those riches, however, I don’t intend to idealise those human and spiritual values, since – as long as the effects of original sin lasts in the world – even the best can be corrupted, and is often corrupted. Therefore, I shall also point to some of the deviations that have come up due to human selfishness and sinfulness. I am also aware that in a presentation like this, generalisations are unavoidable; hence I accept that all generalisations are subject to many exceptions. Besides, the traditional African values are currently being subjected to strong pressures from the outside, and this makes generalisations and talking of the traditional cultures and customs all the more difficult. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify and speak of a significant core of human and spiritual values that continue to reverberate in the African soul.

Key words: family in Africa, values in African’s family, marriage in Africa.

Rev. Dr. GEORGE KOCHOLICKAL, SDB, STL, STD, Dogmatic Theology; Head of Pastoral Department, TUC Kenya; address for correspondence: e-mail: koch.philothea@ gmail.com

¹ B e n e d i c t XVI, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation “Africae Munus”*, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2011. Now on abbreviated as AM.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FAMILY IN THE FORM
OF A RICH HUMAN-SPIRITUAL PATRIMONY

THE AFRICAN VISION OF LIFE

We are all familiar that African understanding of life and community embraced the past, present and the future. Thus the African family included all the three dimensions, namely the living, the dead and the not-yet-born². The relationship between living and dead can be seen as a continuous and mutual begetting and bearing. Consequently, the ancestors, the living and the children to be born were all valued and considered part of a whole. Family is not restricted to the parents and children; “it is the whole network of relationship”³.

Pope Benedict rightly lauds the great openness of heart and spirit in the African tradition to life as such. “In the African worldview,” he says, “life is perceived as something that embraces and includes ancestors, the living and those yet to be born, the whole of creation and all beings...,” and sees it as a good anthropological foundation “to appreciate the mystery of the Church, and this to value human life to the full” (AM 69)⁴.

Where the Church is primarily understood as the Family of God consisting of many natural families, connecting the past, the present and the future, such a vision of life is foundational. In the natural human family, people play different roles and functions, yet they all belong to the same family. There is a great sense of respect to one’s parents and elders because one’s life flowed through them. It would be unthinkable for a child to dishonour his/her elder or parent, because of the same life that flows in them. Again it would be anti-communal not to beget children for the same reason: life has to continue.

² Cf. Maurice Cardinal Otunga, *African Family Values*, “African Ecclesial Review” 23(1981), No 1/2, p. 33.

³ Ibid., p. 33-34.

⁴ According to most of the African cultural anthropologists, African world-view is one-dimensional, embracing only this world. When a person dies, he does not go to another world, whether below or above the earth. Rather, “he changes his physical mode of existence to a spiritual (ghostly) one.” That is, the ancestors stay around. Cf. J. N.K. Mugambi, *African Heritage and Contemporary Christianity*, Nairobi: Longman Kenya 1989, p. 51. This opinion and the communion of the living, dead and still to be born is a very commonly shared view among many Africanists. It is also evident that this concept has to be enriched with the Christian understanding of the “world to come” which is not identical to this world where we live.

AFRICAN APPRECIATION
OF THE VALUE OF CHILDREN

For an African approaching marriage, having children through their union was more important than compatibility of their personalities. Children are a blessing. Hence all social attitudes favoured the birth of children. Lack of children is a type of curse, a great misfortune⁵. To have children is a responsibility that a person has to fulfil towards the ancestors and towards the present community. Children are viewed as prolongation of the self - and like early Judaism - a way of fulfilling the desire for immortality. I live through my children; to have no child is same as being dead. Reasonably, barrenness was considered an acceptable ground for divorce or taking another wife⁶.

Consequently, the whole idea of contraception which is being taught and spread widely in developing nations, such as those in Africa, is very much foreign to the traditional understanding of life and having children. It makes no sense in a traditional society where everyone is eagerly awaiting "new arrivals" in the form of children.

MARRIAGE AS A COMMUNITY EVENT

In an African marriage, the whole community of both man and woman are involved in the process of marriage. Some writers speak of successive stages and have identified about five stages: (i) the time of courtship; (ii) the introduction of the girl to the boy's parents; (iii) a return visit to the girl's parents by the boy's parents; (iv) the payment of dowry and feasting; and (v)

⁵ According to Laurenti Magesa, if an African is to have immortality, he must have children. "Whatever else a person has or not, without marriage and children, one in nothing. Indeed, such a person is seen to be damned, a lost soul." See: L. M a g e s a, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa 1998, p. 100. Bénézét Bujo states that "For many Africans, childlessness and celibacy are crimes against humanity." Cf. B. B u j o, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, Nairobi: St. Publication-Africa 1992, p. 34. It is evident that the Christian vision of celibacy, which is not anti-life, nor a "crime against humanity" (!) but supportive of life in its multi-dimensions is still be understood and accepted by many. It is unfortunate that some African Catholic theologians do not yet see the gift of celibacy for a society, and the complementarity of celibacy (virginity) and marriage. For a brief presentation of the mutual complementarity of marriage and celibacy see, P o p e J o h n P a u l I I, Encyclical Letter *Familiaris Consortio* (1981), Nairobi: Paulines Publication Africa 1982, n. 16.

⁶ B. K i s e m b o, L. M a g e s a, & A. S h o r t e r, *African Christian Marriage*, London: Geoffrey Chapman 1977, p. 74.

the wedding itself⁷. Marriage, being an alliance between the families and clans, almost all are involved in it. This strong social presence and involvement of all, assisted in the success of the marriage. In case of a marital crisis, the families could intervene to save the marriage, and it isn't easy to send the wife away because of some misunderstandings or quarrel.

This also had its own abuses. Some could make use of the occasion of preparing for the wedding, to secretly avenge, to payback for the old hurt feelings, by delaying, if not preventing, the marriage from ever taking place, or by making unrealistic demands on the couple. Besides, it can happen and does happen that when the social dimension of marriage is exaggerated, the other important aspect, the personal values in marriage (mutual love, personal choice, desire to be independent from their parents and elders) is often sidelined. Today a growing number of young educated Africans, insist much more on the personal values inherent in marriage.

The African tradition of "bride-wealth", that is, the payment of dowry by the man (or man's family) to the girl's family had its own advantages. It was also a social institution intended to cement and stabilise the relationship, in spite of some misuses⁸.

The extended family system was also a support in times of crisis. The relations, to some extent, were always prepared to accept the burdens of others and assist in whatever ways possible.

In the new net-work of relationships emerging from a marriage, the elderly too were readily integrated. As Pope Benedict states, in Africa, the elderly "are esteemed and perfectly integrated within their families" (AM 47). In fact the Pope asks that this be emulated by the Western societies (cf. AM 47). "Old age, despite the frailty which seems to accompany it, is a gift that should be lived each day in serene openness to God and neighbour. It is also a time of wisdom..." says the Pope (AM 47). Africa can confidently say that the respect of the elders and the responsibility towards them is still widely held⁹.

⁷ Cf. J. N j e n g a, *Marriage in Successive Stages*, AFER 28 (1986), p. 198-207.

⁸ Cf. A. S h o r t e r, *African Culture: An Overview*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications 1998, p. 91. He recognises the abuses in bride wealth, especially when converted to money: "When bride wealth is converted into money, there are abuses [...]. It is an increasing burden to young people wanting to marry, leading to unstable, non-customary unions. The abuse of bride wealth undermines marriage, instead of stabilising it [...]." He also sees that "the abuse of bride wealth cannot be easily solved by abolition or limitation." (Ibid.)

⁹ Late Cardinal Maurice Otunga spoke of "The love and solidarity among families related to marriage which is exercised especially in favour of old persons, widows and orphans [...]"

WOMEN IN TRADITIONAL SOCIETIES

In the traditional African societies, though the man was the head of the family, women were more industrious than men. They managed the households, the farms, the domestic animals, and then took care of the children. This has certainly accelerated the equalization of the sexes in our times. It is also noted that African women in the modern working situations, many times outdo men, are strong and mature, and some of them are of formidable character – just think of the late Wangari Mathaai¹⁰! She is no exception.

Pope Benedict acknowledges that “women in Africa make a great contribution to the family, to society and to the Church by their many talents and unique gifts.” Quoting John Paul II the Pope says that “woman is the one in whom the order of love in the created world of persons takes first root” (AM 55; MD 29).

WHAT ABOUT THE UNDERSTANDING OF SEX?

Currently, the African countries are being bombarded with very foreign ideas of sex, marriage and family. Sex is banalised, is commercialised, sexual acts are emptied of any moral consequence.

This wasn't so with the African societies, and to a great extent it is not yet so, though the pressure is very much felt in the urban centres. In the traditional societies, matters of sex is a “taboo”, meaning is outside of ordinary open conversation and act. Issues of sex were taught during the initiation ceremonies or by the grandmothers (to girls) and were never matters of open discussion. Even a husband and wife, in their intimate relationships, are reserved before their children. Any public expression of any type of sexual familiarity was repugnant to the African sense.

Behind these behaviours, there is a healthy sense of human sexuality and its real purpose – not for pleasure but for life¹¹. Consequently all forms of paedophilia and homosexuality were rejected because it was the “opposite of bearing/begetting the child”. It was a case of misuse of sexuality and to be re-

in his address to the Synod Fathers in the 1980 Synod on the Family. See: M a u r i c e C a r d i n a l O t u n g a, *African Family Values*, “African Ecclesial Review” 23(1981), No 1/2, p. 34.

¹⁰ Wangari Maathai a Kenyan woman (1940-2011) was awarded the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize for her contribution to sustainable development, democracy and peace.

¹¹ Cf. B. B u j o, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, p. 33-34.

jected. That is the fundamental reason why some African governments and the majority of the Africans are still resisting the attempt by certain Western powers and donor agencies to impose the right to homosexuality in the society¹².

Concluding this reflection on the “opportunities”, we can say with the Pope that in Africa “there are thus many reasons for hope and gratitude. For example, despite the great pandemics which decimate its population – such as malaria, AIDS, tuberculosis and others – ... Africa maintains its *joie de vivre*, celebrating God’s gift of life by welcoming children for the increase of the family circle and the human community.” There are many “grounds for hope in Africa’s rich intellectual, cultural and religious heritage. Africa wishes to preserve this, to deepen it and to share it with the world. By doing so, it will make an important and positive contribution” (AM 9).

CHALLENGES TO MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Families in Africa are also facing many challenges¹³. Will the human and spiritual soul of Africa survive these challenges? Pope Benedict says: “Africa is experiencing a culture shock” (AM 11), an “anthropological crisis” (AM 11). In this “Africa will have to discover and promote a concept of the person and his or her relationship with reality that is the fruit of a profound spiritual renewal” (AM 11).

Let us first look at the challenges or some of the pressures that undermine the traditional values and then try to expand on how Africa can discover and promote a concept of the person that is truly African and Christian.

¹² This is one of the current news items in many of local news papers, especially in the light of the legislations passed against homosexual behaviour by African countries such as Uganda and Nigeria. In fact Uganda is being “punished” by some countries by redirecting their promised aid to more “willing” partners.

¹³ For a collection of essays on different aspects of family ties and the ways the families adapt to the changing circumstances brought on by Colonial and post-colonial conditions, see: T. S. W e i s n e r, C. B r a d l e y, & P.L. K i l b r i d e, *African Families and the Crisis of Social Change*, London: Bergin & Garvey (1997).

POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CHANGES
AND ECONOMIC FACTORS

The first of the challenges to the family come from the political and social changes, which have upset the traditional family patterns. It is not uncommon these days to see a husband working in the town and the wife staying at home, or both husband and wife living with their children in a rented single room in a shanty town. Similar situations and the absence of the support from the extended family give rise to unfaithfulness, quarrels and separations.

The modern society also has brought in many *working* mothers, separating the child from the mother. The connections between the extended family members are crumbling day by day. With that the tradition of coming to the assistance of the members of the extended family, especially in times of crisis such as sickness or death is threatened to disappear.

The situation of poverty is affecting many young families adversely. Failure to get a job, that would adequately provide for the family, including the education of the children, is a problem for many husbands. This failure in being the provider of the family leads many men to depression and consequently to social vices such as alcoholism and sexual infidelity. The same leads many young mothers and girls into the social vice of prostitution. With the breakdown of the traditional support systems from the extended families very many families are collapsing; and some are opting for single-parent families as they think that it is more convenient or more suitable to pursue one's own career.

THE CONTRACEPTIVE MENTALITY.

Something which was very alien to the traditional societies is spreading very fast in the modern cities and towns, that is, the easy availability of contraceptives, and with that a contraceptive mentality¹⁴. Under pressure from outside, most African governments have adopted some-form of population control policy. This is spearheaded with the false argument that in order

¹⁴ Pope John Paul II identified the "contraceptive mentality" as one of the shadows for the family today in his Encyclical letter *Familiaris Consortio* (1981), No 6. As he rightly saw, the unchecked use of contraceptives by couple creates a mid-set which ultimately strikes the two goods of marriage (communion and life) at its heart.

to maximize economic growth, one must minimize population growth. This theory and argument, originating in the 1960's, have been proved wrong in many countries. Demographic growth is no threat to economy, provided the people are educated and skilled in different fields and willing to work. In fact it is an advantage. Unfortunately, many developing nations find it difficult to resist this neo-colonialism since all economic aid to third world countries is now being tied to aggressive population programs.

Feministic thinkers and writers have also contributed to the enthusiasm for contraceptives. They believe that contraceptives are a wonderful intervention and are necessary especially for women, since they couldn't get a well-paid job and find their fulfilment unless they were having fewer babies; and the only way they could have fewer babies is by having good contraceptives.

Studies have shown that after the arrival of contraceptives on the scene, there is much more adultery than there was before. Adultery is absolutely devastating to marriages. Also, with the ready availability of condoms and contraceptives, many African cities are faced with sexual permissiveness and the connected vices of social violence and general dishonesty. Abortion is also readily available and more and more are "silencing" their conscience in this issue of abortion. Indeed, contraceptives have launched people on a life-style and silencing of conscience that promotes sex outside of marriage – promotes sex in which babies and communion are not welcomed.

The 20th century posed three enormous challenges, not only to the Church, but to all of civilization. First, there were the totalitarian states seeking to crush all social institutions, including marriage, family and the church. Then there was the sexual revolution and its attendant social changes, which undermined marriage, family and the church. Then thirdly, there was in the entire intellectual environment, in which the possibility of knowing the truth at all, especially moral truth, was radically questioned, giving into a culture of relativism.

Africa is not immune to these pressures. The effects of that are being felt strongly in contemporary Africa. Yet, the fact that Africa for most cherishes much of the traditional human and spiritual values, it can show a way forward and show the way to those misled.

Some people still speak of polygamy, with its specific desire of having many children, as African and a challenge to Christian marriage and fami-

ly¹⁵. My position is that polygamy is not specifically African, and should be first approached from a sociological perspective. Many cultures were polygamous for a long time, including the Jewish culture. But, in most with the passing of time, polygamy disappeared as it happened in Israel by the time of Jesus. The same will happen here in Africa too – all indications show that, as the percentage of people in polygamous relations is constantly reducing. Although there are still defenders of traditional polygamy, especially among men, the majority – especially women – seem to readily understand the monogamous marriage as essential in upholding the dignity of the woman. Among the educated and those living in the cities polygamy as a pastoral problem is being replaced by the problem of divorce and remarriage. When in the traditional Africa women supported polygamy, it was in the rural contexts, because of the much work she had to do, caring for the house, the crops, the children and so on. A second wife could easily assist her in her work, if her husband were to have one. That scenario is fast fading away, even in the rural environment.

There are some authors who also argue that the present crisis in marriage and family was caused by Christian missionary activities among people without taking into consideration the traditional and institutional practices¹⁶. While there may be some truth in this, it is quite absurd to make that claim, if we look at what the Catholic Church has done and is still trying to do to safeguard what is authentically human, while remaining firm on the Lord's teaching on the indissolubility and exclusivity of marriage bonds.

¹⁵ Auli Vähäkangas speaks of polygamy as a challenge and a “burning issue” for Christian marriage. He writes a decade ago, “Official polygamy seems not to be that great challenge to Christian marriage as the unofficial polygamy.” What he intends by unofficial polygamy is keeping concubines and mistresses while officially married to one. The most common reasons, according to him, are the taboo connected with having sexual relationship with a woman who had her menopause, and the desire for children. See: A. V ä h ä k a n g a s, *The Crisis of Christian Marriage*, in A. K y o m o, & G. S e l v a m (Eds), *Marriage and Family in African Christianity*, Nairobi: Acton Publishers 2004, p. 35-37. It is very evident that such reasons are being challenged by the advance of education and the increase of working-class women and men.

¹⁶ Laurenti Magesa citing his previous study on the Bakwaya of Musoma, Tanzania, argues that institutional changes introduced through Christian missionary activities among that people contributed greatly to the present crisis in marriage and family in that area. See: L. M a g e s, *Reconstructing the African Family*, in K y o m o & S e l v a m (Eds.), *Marriage and Family in African Christianity*, p. 5-28. However this is not an opinion that is widely shared by many pastoral agents who worked in similar areas.

CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED
BY THE QUESTIONNAIRE (KCCB)

There will be an Extraordinary Synod of Bishops in Rome in October 2014, to see how best to respond to the pastoral challenges of the family in the context of evangelization. As part of the preparation for the Synod, the preparatory Commission sent out a questionnaire to all the Episcopal Conferences and individual Bishops. Some Conferences decided to involve the laity to respond to the 39 questions that were in the questionnaire.

I had a chance to view the answers prepared by the Kenyan Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB)¹⁷. Here are some of the responses which I thought are relevant to our topic today: On the question, “In those cases where the Church’s Teachings [on marriage and family] is known, is it accepted fully or are there difficulties in putting it into practice?” the answer is “No.” Then it says that “the rejection is mainly in practice rather than in words.” Some reasons are identified: (a) Some spouses are irresponsible and avoid commitment; (b) Some children are negatively influenced and so become irresponsible; (c) Alcoholism, drug and substance abuse; (d) Converts who are inadequately catechized; (d) Failure of Natural Family Planning methods due to alcoholism among husbands and wives, infidelity, lack of trust.

The Answer of KCCB identifies the areas where the teachings are mostly ignored. They are: (i) Fidelity in marriage (Many insist on their rights to choose what makes them happy, even if it involves extra marital affairs); (ii) Monogamous marriage challenged by deeply rooted traditions; (iii) Church’s teaching on abortion, use of contraceptives, countered by the influence of the media; (iv) Church’s canonical requirements on mixed marriages.

On the topic “Marriage According to Natural Law”, one of the questions is: “How is the theory and practice of natural law in the union between man and woman challenged in light of the formation of a family?” Here the answer speaks of the challenges that have risen from new theories (philosophies), science and the Constitution of Kenya. There are also challenges raised by those who chose for single families (the phenomenon seen especially among the educated), the understanding of marriage as a mere contract rather than a covenant or spiritual union; and adopting a life-style of concubinage.

¹⁷ Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Answers to the Questionnaire to the Synod of Bishops (29th January 2014)*, Nairobi: Catholic Secretariat (2014). [Unpublished material].

On the question of “What experiences have emerged in recent decades regarding marriage preparation?” the following answers are given: Those who prepare couples for marriage are at times not versed with what to offer; Young people intending to marry think that it is not necessary as they believe only in what they know; Some parents do not show interest in the decision made by their children, their future and well being; Not all parishes have pre-marriage preparation offered by experienced couples; Guidance initially provided by parents, uncles, aunts no longer exists; Courtship period is not adequate and sometimes it is absent; There are cases where marriage instructions are not adequately given and at times none is given; In some cases all the work is entrusted on catechists; Parents on some occasions fail to give consent leading to defiance by the life partners to be; The young in a number of cases ignore the advice from the seniors regarding good cultural values which they see as outdated.

There is a question on family prayer, which is as follows: “How successful have you been in proposing a manner of praying within the family which can withstand life’s complexities and today’s culture?” The answer given is: In today’s culture, praying in the family is not the norm, due to complexities of modern life. This is mainly caused by the negative effects of media where family members spend long hours watching various programmes including soap operas, pornographic videos and others so that they are too tired and distracted to concentrate on prayer. Other complexities are that parents are not available in good time as they come home late from work when the other family members are either asleep or busy elsewhere making it impossible to converge centrally for family prayer.

A related challenge is that some Christian groups invest heavily on live broadcasting of purported religious programmes which at times are at variance with Catholic doctrines. Some Catholics consider watching them as a substitute for prayer and meditation.

Families have constantly been asked to find enough time every day to pray together and men in particular have been asked to take charge. Majority of men rarely take charge when it comes to prayers. Majority of modern Christian families are not good role models in prayer. They are unable to witness.

In the area of Pastoral Care of Certain Difficult Marital Situations, there is a question on cohabitation. It is as follows: “Is cohabitation *ad experimentum* a pastoral reality in your particular Church? Can you approximate a percentage?”

The answer of KCCB is: “Yes. Most young people today find themselves in this situation because of lack of parental guidance and proper faith formation. They are mostly driven by materialistic things instead of true love that leads to proper sacramental marriage.” On approximating percentage it says, “Given the number of people who receive Holy Communion or how fresh weddings are conducted in a Parish/Diocese, it could be 75%”

On the question, “What is your experience on this subject in the practice of the Sacrament of Penance and participation at the Eucharist?” the answer is as follows: “Majority of the youth and even married couples use artificial Family Planning methods. They do not see it as sinful and therefore do not go for the Sacrament of Penance and continually receive the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. Their conscience is lax or dead regarding the teaching on artificial family planning.”

All these emerging issues validate Pope Benedict’s remarks that Africa is currently experiencing a cultural shock and anthropological crisis. To overcome this crisis, it needs to hold to its human and spiritual riches, especially those which we highlighted and dialogue with the contemporary society.

CONCLUSION:
PROMOTING THE CONCEPT
OF THE PERSON AND COMMUNITY

African societies, though under pressure, have preserved to a great extent its human and spiritual values, thus being a strong reminder of those very values some others have lost in the process of cultural, sexual and social revolutions. The late Cardinal and Servant of God Maurice Otunga stated emphatically: “If we uphold and develop [African] traditions vindicated by the teaching of Christ, then we lay a solid foundation for the future generation and the development of our people”¹⁸.

Christian tradition has consistently taught that the human person is an integral unity of body and soul, and is called to relationship. In opting to love another person and loving him or her concretely, we discover our true self, and in the end we discover God Himself. Instead, when we begin to treat our bodies as though they were machines, we would no longer have

¹⁸ Maurice Cardinal Otunga, *African Family Values*, p. 35.

respect for the human person as an integral unity of body and soul, leading to all forms of abuses.

African culture and traditions, to a great extent, witnesses to such God-given natural values and laws. It emphasises on the precious value of life, importance of having children, of the need for family and the extended family, of love and sharing.

Indeed, human beings learn many particular lessons in the family, though they may look too small and insignificant. But their importance cannot be overlooked. The family is where we first see the building of a bridge between males and females, between younger and older, and between diverse personalities. In the close-range relationships between family members, we learn to model male or female traits and gifts. We learn the meaning of compromise, sacrifices and sharing. We learn what it means to be a God-fearing person, what it means to be morally upright. Within the extended family, culture and values are transmitted, and the practical skills necessary for living independently are acquired.

In the family, we learn the relationship between adult love and the blessing of children. No matter how often this happens in history, every one who experiences it marvels at it.

The family is where we get our first and most important glimpse of the character and quality of God's love. First with the spouse – maybe the first person we have truly understood to be as important as ourselves, and indispensable to our happiness – and then in our children, understood similarly. The secular world understands this part of our teaching perhaps the least. Rather, increasingly marriage is labelled by courts and legislatures as a purely human institution, alterable at will by the State. There is resistance, maybe disbelief, in understanding the link between physical union, procreation, and the very meaning of our lives as destined for permanent union with God. Catholic teaching brings it all together. It clarifies the meaning of spousal union and of procreation. It elucidates the contents of the family as the school of love and a garden of life.

Marriage, parenthood and the gift of children remain among the greatest blessings God has given us. Human beings in history will always glimpse God's face in such love. The unique constellation of total union, commitment, fidelity, and openness to new life that is marriage, an extended family to support and care will continue to offer the safest haven for the children God entrusts us with.

Like our Mother Mary, our human exemplar, we must heed God's words, "Do not be afraid" as we recommit ourselves to humanity's authentic causes in family and marriage, in motherhood and fatherhood.

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RODZINA AFRYKAŃSKA – SZANSE I WYZWANIA

S t r e s z c z e n i e

W trakcie lektury posynodalnej adhortacji papieża Benedykta XVI pt. *Africae Munus* (AM) odkryłam bardzo pozytywnie stwierdzenie papieża o „duszy Afryki”. Oto co napisał papież: „W duszy Afryki obecny jest cenny skarb, dostrzegam tam bowiem «płuco duchowe ludzkości, która zdaje się przeżywać kryzys wiary i nadziei» dzięki niezwykłym bogactwom ludzkim

i duchowym jej dzieci...” (AM 13). Odkryłam ten fragment tekstu papieża jako niewątpliwie prawdziwy. W pierwszej części mojego wystąpienia chciałam podkreślić kilka z tych „niezwykłych bogactw ludzkich i duchowych jej dzieci”, a w sposób szczególny odnieść się do rodziny. W drugiej części wskazuję także na wyzwania, przed którymi staje instytucja małżeństwa i rodziny we współczesnej Afryce.

Gdy mówię o bogactwach, nie jest moją intencją idealizowanie wartości ludzkich czy duchowych z tym związanych, tak długo bowiem, jak skutki grzechu pierworodnego trwają w świecie, tak nawet to, co w nim najlepszego, zawiera w sobie element zepsucia. Dlatego też wspomnę o kilku aspektach zepsucia, jakie wywołały ludzka chciwość i grzeszność. Mam także świadomość, iż w artykule nie da się uniknąć uogólnień, zatem zakładam na wstępie, że istnieje wiele wyjątków od uogólnień, o których wspominam. Co więcej, tradycyjny system wartości Afryki poddawany jest współcześnie licznym naciskom zewnętrznym, co tym bardziej utrudnia formułowanie uogólnień dotyczących tradycyjnych kultur i zwyczajów z tym związanych. Mimo to możliwe jest określenie i dyskusja na temat istotnej wspólnej grupy wartości ludzkich i duchowych, jakie wciąż wywierają wpływ na duszę Afryki.

Słowa kluczowe: rodzina w Afryce, wartości w rodzinie afrykańskiej, małżeństwo w Afryce.