It is generally known that the teaching of Catholic Moral Theology before Vatican II focused especially on the aim of the marriage. It emphasized the three aims which St Augustine pointed out: *proles, fides, sacramentum*.\(^1\) Love seemed to be secondary because children were seen as the highest good of the sacred bond between wife and husband. From this viewpoint the Constitution *Gaudium et spes* of Vatican II sounds revolutionary when it states: “But marriage was not instituted solely for the procreation of children […]. Even in cases where despite the intense desire of the spouses there are no children, marriage still retains its character of being a whole manner and communion of life and preserves its value and indissolubility.”\(^2\) This has played an important role in further discussions on the understanding of sexuality when we take for instance the whole debate on the Encyclical *Humanae vitae* into consideration. In Africa, however, this fresh impetus of *Gaudium et spes* might not have been decisive on the new reflections initiated concerning the inculturation of marriage. The text which highly influenced the theological reflections was rather that of the Decree *Ad gentes*, no. 22, where the Council encourages young Churches to borrow from their cultural inheritance “to praise the Glory of the Creator, manifest the grace of the Saviour and contribute to the right ordering of christian life.”

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\(^2\) *Gaudium et spes*, no. 50.
In the following we shall try to demonstrate how Theology after Vatican II asked radically for a genuine African way of the sacrament of marriage different from the Western understanding of family and sexuality.

I. Anthropological foundation of marriage and family

African marriage cannot be correctly understood unless we pay attention to the African worldview which forms the basis of the *ubuntu* life. In this worldview the concept of family is not only very important but also very broad and cannot be reduced to that of the West which restrains the full depiction of the meaning accorded by this concept in African languages. How concretely, therefore, should the family be understood in the World of African?

1. Family in its three dimensions

The African family never consists only in father, mother and children. It rather includes three dimensions, namely the living, the dead and the not-yet-born. Besides, it embraces all the relatives and one can also become a family member by covenant and alliance, for instance by blood pact, the most known form of alliance.

The living cannot be seen independent from the two other partial but invisible communities. This means that the living, the dead and the not-yet-born are in a continuous interaction. The relationship between living and dead can be described as a continuous and mutual begetting and bearing. The dead members of the family rely on the living for their further growth in the life after. Following the African rationality the happiness of the deceased has
not only something to do with God but without the anamnestic action of the living their ubuntu cannot reach its fulfilment. Vice versa, the survival of the terrestrial partial community is possible only when the bond with the dead is not disrupted. Indeed, the living members contribute to the happiness of the deceased, but, in return, the latter provide them with all the necessary gifts for their daily life. Sickness, hunger, barreness and so on don’t occur in the community when the ancestors are not forgotten. Hence, it becomes clear that life in these partial communities of the living and the dead consists in an interaction. The individuals exist because of their mutual relationship to each other and this has to go beyond the grave. Furthermore, the two partial communities have to take into consideration the third dimension which consists of the not-yet-born. Even these are not passive towards the two other dimensions; they contribute to the begetting and bearing of the living and the dead. The living and the dead know that their existence is not guaranteed if they are deprived of descendants, but the not-yet-born, who are in their own world and are ready to join once the terrestrial community, give hope to both the visible and the invisible communities. Through the children to come, the hope of posterity, the living are assured that their existence is not void of sense, and the ancestors are convinced of their survival. In other words, the not-yet-born contribute to keeping alive all who are awaiting them, hence they are involved in this process of mutual begetting and bearing. From this point of view, the eschatological fulfilment of the tridimensional community essentially depends on the not-yet-born children.

To understand correctly the African marriage and family, it is imperative to keep in mind this religious and anthropological conception.
2. Marriage and sexuality as a communitarian action

From the very beginning it has to be emphasized that marriage, from the African point of view, is a bond between a man and a woman which involves the whole family from both sides of the spouses in the above illustrated sense. Another form of marriage is unthinkable since one should not lose sight of the concept of bipolarity that Engelbert Mveng developed in his writings. According to this thesis, the life of a muntu, the human being, consists in monad, dyad, triad, and these three per consequence make him a crowd or plurality. It is in the rite of initiation that the muntu discovers the lack of the ubuntu-fullness which comes into being through the relationship between monad and dyad, and this is valid for both genders. The human being is at the beginning only a monad, but through the encounter with the dyad, which is different in gender, he/she becomes the manbeing or womanbeing and is capable of enrichment through triad and, lastly, by myriad (crowd, plurality).

To sum up: The person-being is to be accomplished by mutual relationship with a different gender. In the monad phase a muntu is only a “project” of becoming person and this project can be achieved and come about through the encounter with another sex. Without respecting this process of monad and dyad there cannot be the triad, and no community of myriad (crowd) will start.

The community on the other hand is of necessity for the development of monad, dyad and triad because a full humanity, the ubuntu, is conditioned by the interaction between all the members of the extended community and not only by the couple or the partnership between wife and husband with their children. This explains the African conviction that the

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whole community of both sides – of the man and of the woman – should be involved in the process of marriage. The two individuals, the future spouses, are the principal interested parties, but they alone cannot make the marriage which is intrinsically a communitarian act since it binds two families not by contract, but rather by alliance. Put differently, the African understanding of marriage is different from that of the West because it sees the bond between wife and husband as a covenant in which the families of both parties play a decisive and indispensable role. Just because of this covenental character marriage cannot be concluded punctually, but it implies a process with many stages. At every stage both the family of the man and of the woman are present.

One of these stages is the sexual intercourse which is a very necessary step towards the validity of the ongoing marriage. As one can easily imagine, this point is the most criticised and condemned point by the Christian, especially, Catholic Church. We touch herewith the problem of the inculturation of the sacrament of marriage in Africa. Indeed, the pastoral experience of many bishops and priests before, during and after Vatican II showed clearly that a marriage concluded as indicated by the classic western theology and Church law does not last in African milieu, as it does not take into account the way of thinking in other cultures in the world. Concretely, what is missing in the Sub-Saharan African context is the dynamism which should accompany marriage. This supposes that the Church should neither focus on a punctual (exact?) “yes” to the climax of the sacrament of marriage nor exclude the traditional communitarian character of the whole procedure. As already observed, it is a long way that finally leads to the definitive conclusion of what marriage is in African understanding. Hence, bishop John Njenga is right in speaking of marriage in successive stages.\(^5\) He brings to the fore a five-stage model that can be found among several ethnic groups. According to this model, there are 1) the time of courtship; 2) the introduction of the

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girl to the boys parents; 3) a reciprocal visit to the girl’s parents by the boy’s parents; 4) the payment of the dowry followed by feasting; 5) the wedding (customary, civil or Christian).

The third step opens the door for both, the boy and the girl, to live together, although the whole process is not yet closed. The Church, however, considers this as concubinage. This question has been discussed not only by theologians, but even by some bishops. At the Bishops Synod on marriage and Christian family, Bishop André Kaseba of Zaire (DRC) defended the position that the stage where the future spouses can already have the sexual relationship is not to be condemned as immoral, because it belongs essentially to the process which leads to the definitive consent and is an inseparable part of the whole. The lack of one single step would mean the invalidity of all stages. Therefore it is unacceptable to speak of premarital intercourse, that should be forbidden, within the marriage process. This thesis of Bishop Kaseba has been agreed to and continued by Cardinal Joseph-Albert Malula who is of the opinion that marriage is a creation reality and God did not dictate to the human being in detail a concrete way to follow in getting married. According to Malula, marriage is not to be interpreted independently of various cultures in the world. That is to say that Jesus Christ did not determine exactly which elements belong to indissolubility or at which moment the marriage can be seen as such. Consequently, the principle of “ratum et consummatum” should be revised, for it originated in/from another culture and sounds strange to Africans. Cardinal Malula therefore appeals to theologians to go deeper in this discussion in order to work out a theology which can interpret correctly the revelation in African context.

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6 Cf. ibid. 201.
The theology our Cardinal is pleading for has already started and is being discussed very controversially. Although some theologians refuse to agree with those who are in favor of accepting the customary marriage by stage as a whole, many others support the idea of integrating the same marriage in the Christian conception. The Church should be involved in the marriage process from the very beginning or at least be present in one of the stages considered as a decisive step, although the final conclusion has not yet taken place.\(^9\)

Radically argued, one could say that the true problem for the Church to accept the customary marriage as a successive stage in the Christian marriage is the question of sexual intercourse before the final ceremony which is the crowning of all the steps. As known in the Catholic Church, the sexual intercourse is the act which seals the consummation of marriage and makes it indissoluble. In the history, however, it is known that there was a long discussion about “concubitus” and “consensus”. At the end, it was agreed to say that the essence of marriage is not in the sexual act (\textit{concubitus}) but in the consent (\textit{consensus}):

\textit{“nuptias consensus non concubitus facit”}.\(^{10}\)

The Catholic Church until the present day accepts this theory mainly defended by Petrus Lombardus, she however added the thesis of Gratianus saying that the \textit{copula} is the fulfilment of the sacrament of marriage showing clearly the union between Christ and his Church. It is at this point that African marriage has some critical questions. If it is true that the consent makes the essence of the marriage, the African understanding is in accordance with the teaching of the Church. However, it goes beyond, for the consent involves a holistic dimension. Not only a single punctual moment is of importance, but the definitive consent embraces the consents at all the steps constituting the marriage. The \textit{copula} itself is one of these steps and can be, according to this rationality,


integrated into the process before the final stage. Actually, the *consummatio* is not a physical reality, but it is rooted in the *ubuntu*, expressed by the will of both the spouses and their communities.\(^{11}\) Finally, the *minister of the sacrament of marriage* is not the married couple alone but the whole tridimensional community.

II. Consequences for the traditional African understanding of Sexuality

We have insisted on the communitarian dimension of marriage in Sub-Saharan Africa. This conception shapes also the understanding of sexuality in its various aspects. In the following we shall give a panorama of the problem and in a second step highlight this by a concrete example related to the problem of paedophilia and homosexuality.

1. Sexuality and its anamnestic dimension

Sexuality is not an individualistic matter but involves, as in the case of marriage, the whole three-dimensional community of the living, the dead and the not-yet-born. Actually, the final goal of sexuality is eschatological, for it directly leads to the survival of the tripartite community. At this point the most important aspect to be considered is that related to the ancestors. Sexuality is not simply an act of self realization but, ultimately, a remembrance of the forbears who have entrusted the sexual act to the descendants in order to keep alive their memory. Hence, sexual activity in the marriage between man and woman is a *poiesis* nobody should avoid without endangering the *memoria* of the forbears and the existence of the three-fold community as a whole. The reason is that the goal of sexuality in marriage is procreation and, thereby, the assurance of the future of the human being. Furthermore,

\(^{11}\) On the whole cf. B. Bujo, Plea for Change of Models 117-120.
sexuality is not only an obligation or a duty to fulfill, it is also, and much more, a gift of God and of the forbears so that one must learn a correct and respectful attitude towards it. The reason for this attitude is that sexuality is the channel of life. Such a rich conception can be explicitly found for instance among the Dogon of Mali.12 As Louis-Vincent Thomas reports, this conception seems to be confirmed by the *diola* of Senegal when one of them states that among the things which are of importance for a man who is happy and pleasing to God the body of a woman should not be overlooked because it is the highest organ which is transforming the male seed into a new life.13

Given that sexuality embodies such a high value, the African communities pay a special attention to the education of children in this area. Children and especially young people have to learn to take sexuality seriously and to look at it in relationship to life, void of any kind of egoistic interest. One could say, according to the African rationality, that every sexual act which is destined to raise life and to take care of it is morally good and justified. However, this act should not be carried out without the cooperation of the community in its three dimensions. With respect to this, various ethnic communities have established precise rules to regulate the sexual life of their children and young people. The initiation is the time where the youth learn a life long discipline not only in sexuality but in everything in order to become a true *muntu* able to give the *ubuntu* to others.

The understanding of sexuality from the life and anamnestic perspective throws light on other problems like *paedophilia* and *homosexuality* in Africa.

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13 Cf. ibid. 203.
2. The judgement concerning the paedophilia

When we emphasized the connection between sexuality and life, it should be added that this understanding is not to be related exclusively to the biological life, for in many African traditions sexuality in its bipolarity of man and woman can be practised without intending for offsprings. In fact, what is then essential is that, it shoud not lose sight of the communitarian dimension. Hence, sexuality in marriage can be expressed for instance at the occasion of great events in a clan’s life such as the celebration of the wedding of a child, on the occasion of a funeral or of the first teeth of a new born, and so on. All these acts, however, are limited to the adults. The children are not mature and cannot be involved in these practices. Maturity is something that has to gradually come about and for the Africans it reaches its summit through the rite of initiation. In other words: The actuation of sexuality is acceptable only after young people have gone through the rite of initiation which enables them to participate fully in the life of adults. Of course, the child is not void of sexuality, yet it needs to be organised, developed, oriented and cultivated before it can become responsible and properly desirous. In this connection Buakasa Tulu Kia Mpansu speaking of some ethnic groups points out that for instance a young girl before the initiation belongs to the invisible world and is wife of the genius-spirits. She ceases to be it and is supposed to be mature, enabled to become wife of a man only after the initiation.¹⁴ More clearly expressed: According to this African rationality, to misuse a child as a sexual object is a destruction of life, because the adult who is keen only on his sexual desire does not promote the growth of ubuntu, he/she rather is a murderer to an immature child.¹⁵ It is however worthy to be

¹⁵ Cf. ibid. 135.
stressed that, even after the initiation as the attainment of sexual maturity, the right place for sexuality remains the marriage.\textsuperscript{16}

When nowadays it is spoken everywhere of child abuse, in Africa we should call to mind our traditions, though they sometimes are expressed as taboos or transmitted through tales and myths. Their goal is always to teach the community and to lead to the ethical norms for the growth of \textit{ubuntu}.\textsuperscript{17} The child is the future of the ancestors and of the living as well. This future, as already emphasized, goes through sexuality connected with the mystery of life which is unthinkable without any relation to the invisible world of the ancestors and genius-spirits.\textsuperscript{18} Therefore, the paedophilia is the opposite of bearing/begetting the child as a gift of the invisible word including God, given that according to the African rationality only a witch can practise child abuse because he or she is by his or her very nature the enemy of life. This misuse of sexuality does not concern only paedophilia but also the problem of homosexuality which seems to contradict the fundamental African conception of human being as we shall show in the following paragraph.

3. What about the homosexuality?

It has already been pointed out how the African anthropology is based on monad, dyad, triad and plurality. The personality reaches its fullness only in the discovering of another gender, which is the encounter between monad and dyad. Stated in a different way, it means that the man as monad discovers his man-being through the woman and vice versa.


The latter becomes conscious of her female being through the man. Both, man and woman, discover that they are complementary and that there is a “masculinity” in the woman and a “femininity” in the man. Only in discovering and accepting this double dimension can the achievement of self-realization as muntu be possible, because it means a going from “project” onto ubuntu. This process of becoming a full muntu opens the door to the community, as already observed: The bipolarity monad-dyad or man-woman generates the tripolarity monad-dyad-tryad or man-woman-child which leads to “myriad” or community. It is thus in the difference of gender that the tripartite community of the living, dead and not-yet-born comes about. A sexual relationship man-man or woman-woman from the perspective of this conception seems to be not only “an egoistic isolationism which dares not take the step to full human existence; it also leads to sexist discrimination against part of the human race and shows an unwillingness to accept the enrichment that comes from heterogenity.”¹⁹ We can go on to say that homosexuality understood in this way is not to be seen in the light of the traditional western natural law, but the ethical judgement on it is based on the community understanding. The one who limits himself or herself to practise the sexual action within the same gender (monad-monad) is compromising the whole tripartite community and destroying the eschatological destiny of it. In doing so he or she cannot realize him/herself, because a muntu cannot reach the ubuntu unless there is a contributive action to increase the life-force of the integral whole of community.

All this does in no way mean that there is no cases of homosexuality in traditional Africa. We only emphasize the fact that the cases of homosexuality that might have occurred in the tradition were neither accepted nor institutionalized. Considered from the perspective of bipolar-tripolar and communitarian dimension of the sexual act, the foundation of

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heterosexuality and the rejection of homosexuality in the tradition were not a matter of natural law. The highest norm was and is still the protection and promotion of life in its holistic dimension, and consequently heterosexuality alone can be seen as an acceptable way.

CONCLUSION

Our extremely rapid overview on African marriage does not intend to discuss the very complex problem of sexuality and family in detail. As shown all along in the whole text above the most important problem related to marriage in Sub-Saharan Africa is not the question of love as this occurs in the western world. All focuses rather on the family understood as a tripartite community. Until Vatican II many studies had been written on marriage but they mostly dealt with seemingly negative aspects like polygamy, levirate or widows inheritance and so on. It is the merit of the Second Vatican Council to have opened the door for all cultures to raise their voices within the Church in order to enrich christianity. If the Westerners can claim this openness of the Council for a better understanding of love and marriage, for the Africans it is rather the liberty granted to introduce a new way of dealing with the values of their ancestors. Paul VI will encourage in this way by calling the Africans to be their own missionaries, because they can and must develop an African christianity considering the values embodied in their culture.\textsuperscript{20} The encouragement of Paul VI continuing the teaching of Vatican II goes back to the whole Church tradition that seemed no more to be remembered, although it was sometimes recalled. However, the Church after the encounter of the Jewish and Greek cultures did nowhere become truly familiar with another local culture. Many theologians, not only in the recent time but already in the patristic

\textsuperscript{20} Cf. Pope Paul VI, Discours aux évêques africains in Kampala 1969. See also id., Africae terrarum (1967).
period and in the middle age, were conscious of the necessity of integrating culture into their interpretation of the Gospel. It may be surprising; but a thinker like Thomas Aquinas pleaded for the use of such a method in the proclamation of the Good News of Christ. He says that the transmission of faith can require to include the truth found in any science or any wisdom outside the Scripture.\textsuperscript{21} This has been confirmed and called to mind by the Decree \textit{Ad gentes}, n. 22. It is therefore legitimate to claim and to repeat that African christianity can become genuinely African, as Paul VI asked for, only if the Church of the Black Continent continues to consider its culture as a valid instrument for the Gospel which does not remain superficial but addresses the whole \textit{muntu} in his or her \textit{ubuntu}.

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\textsuperscript{21} See the commentary of Thomas Aquinas in Super Gal., c. 3, lect. 6, n.154: “ad conferendum de his quae sunt fidei, possumus uti quacumque veritate cuiuscumque scientiae. Deut. XXI, 11 : \textit{Si videris in numero captivorum mulierem pulchram, et adamaveris eam, voluerisque habere in uxorem, introduces eam in domum tuam, id est, si sapientia et scientia saecularis placuerit tibi, introduces eam intra terminos tuuos, quae radet caesariem, etc., id est resecabit omnes sensus erroneos. Et inde est quod Apostolus in multis locis in epistolis suis utitur auctoritatibus Gentilium sicut illud I Cor. XV, 33 : \textit{Corrumpunt bonos mores, etc., et illud Tit. I, 11 : Cretenses mala bestiae, etc.} »