

‘Cohabitation: A Christian Response to *Ménage* in Seychelles’

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the history of Seychelles, the question of cohabitation or ‘common law’ marriage between men and women has been of concern to both the state and the church. The practice of cohabitation has been increasing over the years to the point that at present some three-quarters of the children of Seychelles are born out of wedlock. This signifies that these children are the offspring of single or cohabiting parents. Since the family is regarded the fibre of society, the state is naturally concerned about the sociological and economic implications that cohabitation has been having on the Seychelles society. The church, which accounts for over ninety per cent of the population, on her side has been disappointed and gravely concerned regarding its pastoral ministry that Christian marriage has never replaced the phenomenon of cohabitation, which, on the other hand, became progressively intractable.

The incidence of cohabitation is historical, with its roots in slavery. It will be seen how slavery in the Seychelles context brought about the birth of the cosmopolitan Seychellois nation and the Creole language as its lingua franca. Slavery at the same time has left its wounds in the heart and soul of the nation, which accounts for the recommendations proposed in the pastoral response in the closing part of this study.

From the first settlement to the present day, there have been both national and international factors, including the effects of cohabitation as a global practice latterly, that have reinforced and perpetrated the phenomenon of cohabitation in Seychelles. The reason why both the state and the church have failed in eradicating the phenomenon will be addressed. The widespread belief on the part of several writers on Seychelles and its society that educational and economic developments would lead more couples to marriage will be proved wrong. The research for this thesis has discovered how complex the whole issue of cohabitation is.

It became necessary to undertake an analytical study of the history and theology of marriage in comparison with the entrenched incidence of cohabitation. Christian marriage, biblically rooted and upheld by Christ, remains the church’s norm. It is also a sacrament which is highly regarded and upheld by all Christian denominations in Seychelles and to which most couples aspire.

A new pastoral approach as a new response to cohabitation is the *raison d’être* of this thesis. The new response is based on the gospel concept of love, forgiveness, healing and reconciliation. Results from the new approach so far are encouraging.