

**Research Article***Copyright © All rights are reserved by Yordan K Zhekov*

# From Vice to Virtue in Marital Relationships

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Crisis and challenges are very much part of marital relationships and the popularity of divorce shows that these find less effective solutions within the current support available. There is an aspect of marital crisis which has been underexplored and its solution underdeveloped. This is the moral site of the couple's relationship encapsulating the resolution of vices and the development of virtues. This article maintains that vices are very much part of the marital crisis and their resolution is found in the empowerment of conscience. The latter leads to diminishing of vices and the development of virtues. Healthy spirituality is clarified as the power for rejuvenating conscience leading to the development of virtuous character. A new modality, Conscience Therapy, for talking support is proposed for the effective management of marriage crisis.

**Introduction**

Marital relationships being a complex phenomenon present various challenges to the couple. The difficulties are with different nature and intensity. The latter when not being resolved may lead to abuse and eventually breakdown of the relationship. When the marital relationship is legally bounding, the law is involved to establish its end by divorce. The divorce statistics in England and Wales for 2019 show that there were 8.9 divorces for 1000 couples of opposite sex. There is an increase of 18.4% since 2018 [1]. The divorce rate for Europe highlights increases as well from 0.8 per 1 000 persons in 1965 to 2 in 2017. The figures may receive various interpretations, but they clearly show that the breakdown of marital relationships continues to increase. Couple counselling provides solution for marital crisis but is this support relevant enough. There are various approaches to the talking support offered to couples, but can they capture all the crippled dynamics of the relationship. It is the intention of this article to enlighten

another aspect of the marital union which may have been neglected in the complexity of current contexts. This is the aspect of virtue in marital relationships. The virtue is to be clarified in light of the challenges linked to vice. The process of vice to virtues is established though the empowerment of conscience by healthy spirituality. A new modality, Conscience Therapy, will be proposed as the support framework for this transformation to be achieved.

**Defining marital relationship**

Marital relationship is difficult to define in the contemporary society where marriage itself has become quite a complex phenomenon. Socially marriage is defined as an institution of legally binding union between man and women with a contractual nature guided by the state laws. The relationship is to be shaped by the mutual lifelong commitment of the partners. Marriage is also expressed as a ritual which ceremonial initiation highlights the responsibilities of the spouses to the union. Marriage as a process

refers to the actual relationship of the couple defined through communication, gender roles and satisfaction [2]. The Christian perspective on marriage stresses its covenant nature which reflects the relationship between God and Israel as well as Christ and the church [3]. When talking about covenant it is important to clarify that its nature underlines the permanency of the relationship. This is a fundamental teaching among all main Christian traditions. Divorce, on the other hand, is a very controversial subject with different schools of thought within Christianity [3]. The present discussion is focussed on the preservation of marital relationship in light of the occurring challenges and as such develops from the premise of its lasting nature.

Marital relationship is shaped by the expectations of the spouses and the development of various social and cultural attitudes. The latter influence the relationship through different legal changes, gender roles predispositions and liberal sexual expressions. The couple desirable outcomes from the relationship are also high for partnership which provides support, intimacy, mutual companionship and personal development. Furthermore, the breakdown of the marital relationship leads to devastating results with serious impact on the physical and mental health of the partners [4]. Hence more understanding of the marital crisis and specialised support is needed.

### **The vice in marital relationship**

The discussion of vice in the context of marital relationship is related to the understanding that personal moral character is significant for the sustainability of positive marital relationship. Vices may be viewed as moral failure of character and their tradition is well researched and clarified spiritually [5&6]. Seven core vices emerge as the roots for moral failures, namely, pride, anger, greed, lust, sloth, envy, and gluttony [5,7]. Their definitions are related to the crisis in marital relationships.

Pride is linked with the belief of personal superiority related to cognitions, emotions and behaviours over the other with the intention to dominate and control [8]. When pride is a characteristic of a spouse' character the partner suffers from continuous suppression and imposed control. Anger becomes a vice when is not managed and generates retribution towards the assumed source of injustice leading to violence [6]. Marital relationship suffers domestic violence and anger appears in the core of this abusive treatment of the partner. Greed is the obsessive pursue of material resources for the satisfaction of an egoistic desire for pleasure [6]. The crisis in the marital relationship appears in the form of economic abuse when due to this vice mutual resources are directed mainly according to the desires of one of the partners. Lust is the pursue of sexual gratification by any means involving thoughts, emotions and behaviours with complete disregard of the other [5&6]. This vice in the marital relationship is displayed as the infidelity of one of the partners. Sloth is the complete disregard of one's responsibilities and inconsideration of the needs of the other [5&6]. Marital relationship suffers from this vice when one of the spouses is irresponsible and disrespectful to the needs of the other. Envy is the desire to have other's worth linked with possession

and status in order to dominate them and see the obliteration of this worth [5]. This vice leads to continuous rivalry due to comparison in the martial relationship and is linked to jealousy, a fear due to over-possessiveness. Finally, gluttony is the complete disregard of one's responsibilities based on the obsessive desires for consumption [6]. Failure to marital duties and the abuse of the mutual resources impact the relationship significantly when one of the partners displays this vice. The devastating impact of vices on the marital relationship requires resolution which is to be provided by a complete transformation from vice to virtue. This can be achieved through the spiritual empowerment of conscience.

### **From Vice to Virtue in Marital Relationship**

Conscience is the internal moral agent integrating thoughts, emotions and attitudes to provide guidance for behaviours according to the moral framework and against behaviours which violate this framework. Conscience is directly linked with the development of virtuous character [9]. Conscience is also responsible for diminishing vice. However, conscience may become deadened when intentionally being suppressed or ignored. The solution for deadened conscience is healthy spirituality [10]. The latter may be defined as personal core beliefs about the world, purpose in life and the relation to the transcendent formulated by faith in God. Christian narrative formulates the understanding of God as loving, caring, gracious and supportive providing the way for personal close relationship through faith in Jesus. Christ's life, death and resurrection establish the acceptance, forgiveness and regeneration of the person for abundant life. Hence healthy spirituality is the framework for relationship with God based on faith, repentance and love. Practicing this spirituality provides the empowerment of conscience leading to development of moral character, eradication of vice and cultivation of virtue [10].

I am developing a framework for the empowerment of conscience through an innovative evidence-based modality, Conscience Therapy. This novel counselling and psychotherapeutic method attempts to identify the state of conscience, the personal interest in spirituality and provide explorative ways to facilitate the empowerment of conscience. I have completed and published two research-based books on the role conscience in recovery from alcohol [10] and drug addictions [11]. The studies show clear evidence of the importance of conscience in recovery and its rejuvenation through healthy spirituality for the development of virtuous character and maintenance of wellbeing. Conscience therapy is method which diversity and effectiveness will contribute significantly to the management of marital crisis and as such benefit couple counselling and psychotherapy.

### **The Virtue in Marital Relationship**

Positive Psychology deals with the studies of virtues and character strengths. These are well classified and defined determining their important role in person's life and wellbeing [12-13]. All virtues and character strengths contribute to the resolution of vices but for the purposes of this article I will select those virtues which provide clear solution for the seven vices and contribute to effective management of marital relationship.

The solution for pride is the development of humility underlined by truthfulness [8] in relation to oneself, others and God [7]. Marital relationship will benefit significantly by practicing humility towards one's spouse. Anger might be resolved through the development of virtues such as love, forgiveness, tolerance [6], humility and gentleness divinely resourced [5]. All these virtues will shape marital relationship providing a peaceful and supportive environment for wellbeing of both spouses. The solution for greed is the virtue of generous compassionate giving from one's own to help others based on spiritual motivation [5&6]. Generosity in marriage may be expressed towards one's partner in all areas of life. Lust may be resolved through the fulfilment of one's sexual needs grounded on genuine love and respect to the other, shaped through the virtues of temperance and justice [6] and guided through the spiritual commitment to chastity (DeYoung, 2009). The solution for sloth may be found in the virtue of transcendence which defines life with purpose and leads to the experience of joy from one's fulfilment of social and spiritual responsibilities and with gratitude for life [6]. Mutual commitment to marital responsibilities and duties will provide the effective management of the relationship. Envy may be resolved through the development of content with oneself and life through a spiritual commitment to God's sovereignty and will [6]. Personal content in the marital relationship will increase trust and commitment. Finally, gluttony may be resolved through practicing the virtue of temperance for developing physical, cognitive, spiritual and social wellbeing and approval [6]. Temperance will provide the constructive use of marital resources and the mutual support of the partners according to their needs.

## Conclusion

Crisis and challenges are very much part of marital relationships and the popularity of divorce shows that these find inadequate resolutions within the current support available. The latter is provided by various modalities in the form of talking therapies. It is my conviction that there is an aspect of marital crisis which has been underexplored and its solution underdeveloped. This is the moral site of marital relationships encapsulating the resolution of vices and the development of virtues. This article maintains that vices are very much part of the marital crisis and they require solution. The solution is found in the empowerment of conscience. The latter is the internal moral agent responsible for the management of personal moral framework and as such leads to diminishing of vices and the development of virtues. Healthy spirituality understood as

the relationship with God by faith in Jesus is clarified as the power for rejuvenating deadened conscience and its empowerment for the development of virtuous character. A new modality, Conscience Therapy, for talking support is proposed.

This innovative method is to facilitate a process of understanding conscience, explore spiritual strivings, encourage conscience empowerment and the development of virtuous character. This novel modality is to be used in couple therapies for the effective management of marriage crisis.

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